

Federal Aid Coordinators Working Group Report

To the

Trust Fund Committee, 09/12/2017

I. Communication

The communication strategy for relaying high level information from WSFR to the States as described in the WMI TRACS review document has been used effectively for updates to the DOI 100K Grant Award Review, WSFR Standard Performance Reporting Questions, and Real Property Acquisition Policy. The Federal Aid Coordinators Working Group (FACWG) strongly supports the continued use of this communication strategy for all WSFR-related policy level communications.

The FACWG has continued to facilitate the flow of information between various groups by:

1. Holding regular FACWG conference calls – at least quarterly or more frequently as dictated by matters of importance to Federal Aid Coordinators.
2. Dissemination of FACWG reports and meeting minutes to the regions and state agency counterparts.
3. Continuing liaison roles to include special WSFR working groups:
 - a. 5-year Report Editorial Team- Sheila Cameron (Regions 1, 7 & 8);
 - b. TRACS WG- Mike Sawyers (Region 5); and
 - c. CFR Revision Schedule WG- Doyle Brown (Region 3).

FACWG Concern/Request:

1. While the communication strategy has been successful in several instances, inconsistencies have been found in certain cases (e.g. Information posted on the Federal Aid Wiki, posting of Notice of Funding Opportunities, apportionment notifications, etc.) Applying the communication strategy outlined in the WMI TRACS review to all high level information aspects of the WSFR Program will improve the exchange of information that has direct impacts on the WSFR Partnership.

2017/2018 FACWG Action Items: The FACWG will continue to facilitate the communication of important matters to their respective state coordinator counterparts and through continued participation in other working groups.

II. TRACS

The TRACS Enhancement continues to dominate conversations among the FACWG and Federal Aid Coordinators across the country. As the performance reporting platform for WSFR-funded grant activities, TRACS will drastically impact the administration of the WSFR Program in all States.

TRACS Schedule Changes: At the April 2017 JTF meeting, the TRACS WG requested, and was approved for, an extension to complete the final revisions to the TRACS Enhancement Matrix. The matrix will serve as the backbone for how projects will be built in the TRACS Enhancement. The revised timeline anticipates final approval of the TRACS Enhancement Matrix by the JTF at their November Meeting. Upon approval, all elements of the TRACS Enhancement will be delivered to the TRACS development team. Development will proceed over the next 12 months, after which, the TRACS Enhancement will be rolled out to the States. Adjustments to the TRACS schedule will likely impact the timing of the National Federal Aid Coordinators Meeting (*See Item VI below for additional information*).

Comment Periods: Since the March, 2017 report to the TFC, the following TRACS related comments have been solicited:

- TRACS Enhancement Matrix (*June, 2017*): Over 100 comments were received from State Federal Aid Coordinators and delivered to the TRACS WG for consideration.
- TRACS Draft MOU (*June, 2017*): Comments from State Federal Aid Coordinators were requested by Tom Busiahn to review the second version of the TRACS MOU between WSFR and AFWA in anticipation of the JTF conference call in August. Nearly 20 comments were submitted via the FACWG.
- Standard Performance Reporting Questions (*August, 2017*): Comments are due to FACWG regional representatives by COB September 26th, 2017.

Subgroups: Given the complex nature of the development of a nationwide performance reporting system, the TRACS WG frequently forms temporary subgroups to address particularly complex elements. Since the March, 2017 report to the TFC, the FACWG liaison participated in the Standard Performance Reporting Questions and the TRACS Matrix subgroups.

FACWG Concern/Request: The FACWG has several concerns and recommendations regarding the TRACS enhancement:

1. In the recently updated draft MOU between WSFR and AFWA, a handoff date for States to assume responsibility for data entry is not listed. In the previous draft, a placeholder for a hard date was included in the MOU. The FACWG is supportive of keeping the handoff date flexible to ensure that the TRACS Enhancement is fully functional and States have ample opportunity to be trained on the new TRACS interface. There was discussion of this recommendation at a JTF call in early August and this request seems to be moving forward.
2. The FACWG recognizes that the purpose of TRACS is a WSFR-funded grant performance reporting platform. There is not, and should not be, any element of the grant submission or approval process tied to TRACS. States should be given the

flexibility to enter grant information as agreed upon by the state and their regional office.

2017/2018 FACWG Action Items: Mike Sawyers will continue to serve as liaison between the TRACS WG and FACWG. He will attend the TRACS Wireframes Workshop (October, 2017) and TRACS Working Group Meeting (January, 2018). As part of this continuing role, he may participate in subgroups focused on finalizing the TRACS Enhancement framework as necessary and continue to solicit input via the FACWG from State Federal Aid Coordinators.

III. State Needs Document

At the August 2016 TFC Meeting, the FACWG was asked to update the State's Priority Needs Document which was originally developed in 2013. The purpose of this document is to identify the States' core needs for effective administration of the WSFR Program by the USFWS. There are two core needs identified by the FACWG:

1. Support from WSFR when addressing diversion issues; and
2. Continued support of the WSFR Partnership, as further defined in the attached document.

The FACWG submitted a revised State Needs Document to the Trust Funds Committee in March, 2017 for formal review and acceptance.

FACWG Request: The FACWG is still seeking formal acceptance of the State Needs Document.

IV. 5yr report

The Editorial Team has been working to compile the results of a survey sent to states and to identify which indicators should be included in the initial report. Due to some delays in communication and approval of the final indicators, the first report will not be issued in 2017 as originally planned. At this time, work is still progressing with indicators that were identified as high priority from the states and for which data already exists. However, other indicators for which data may exist within the states or a subsample of states are still being discussed and approved by the JTF and others. FACWG member, Sheila Cameron (Regions 1, 7 & 8), remains an active participant in this team.

FACWG Concerns/Request: The FACWG believes it is important to stress that some information in the 5-year report may appear incomplete as not all states use the WSFR funding in the same ways or they may not gather the requested information. Just because a given state does not include certain information for the 5-year report, does not mean that the state is not engaged in these activities. This potential discrepancy may result in incomplete or misleading information for the 5-year report unless the data is adequately explained.

2017/2018 FACWG Action Items: Remain active on the team and solicit input from the FACWG or states as appropriate.

V. CFR Review Scheduling

From April - August 2016 a team consisting of WSFR and State members worked on developing a schedule that will allow us to move forward with a phased approach to rulemaking. These phases are designed to allow reviewers to address topics over four rounds of rulemakings that are spread out over an extended period of time. The proposed schedule was delayed due to the importance of vetting the approach.

To date, a review has not been initiated except for internal reviews on the new CFR.

FACWG Concern/Request:

As delays have occurred with the new administration and the agreed upon timelines have come and gone, the FACWG remains concerned with multiple comment period or reviews occurring at the same time in the future. State agencies typically have only a few (or one) individuals responsible for these reviews and overlapping priorities lead to less thorough reviews and the potential of items of concern slipping through the cracks.

2017/2018 FACWG Action Items: Continue to remain engaged and encourage our representative states to remain vigilant in watching for these notices – and to comment when appropriate.

VI. National Federal Aid Coordinators Meeting

The application for a Multistate Conservation Grant for the National Federal Aid Coordinators meeting was approved. However, due to the TRACS review recently completed by WMI and results of the Meeting of the Parties, the TRACS enhancement rollout timeline has been delayed (to 2018). Because training on the TRACS enhancement is an important component of this Meeting, the FACWG believes the proposed date of the National Meeting be delayed until the TRACS Enhancement is fully functional. This will allow for the rollout of the new TRACS enhancements and allow for training to take place in conjunction with this meeting.

2017/2018 FACWG Action Items: Coordination will continue with WMI and relevant parties to initiate meeting planning and draft an agenda based on the timeline of future TRACS developments.

VII. Action Items

The FACWG requests that the Trust Funds Committee consider and approve the following item as proposed in this report:

- Approve the revision to the State Needs Document as presented in March, 2017- or provide the FACWG with suggestions and edits.

VIII. Other Matters

Beginning October 1, 2017, Mike Sawyers – Region 5 – will serve as the Chair of the FACWG. Doyle Brown – Region 3 – will be the vice-chair during the upcoming year and will subsequently serve as Chair beginning October 1, 2018.

Mike's contact information can be found below:

Mike Sawyers

Federal Aid Coordinator

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581

508-389-6387

Michael.sawyers@state.ma.us

Several of the representatives on the FACWG will be rotating off at the end of September, 2018, and will have shadows for those positions in the upcoming year.

The FACWG wishes to thank Sheila Cameron for her leadership during the past year as Chair of the FACWG.