**Meeting Date: *Wednesday, May 19, 2021***

**Meeting Location:** Microsoft TEAMS

**Meeting Attendees:**

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| **AFWA Representatives** | **WSFR Representatives** | **Guests** |
| Jim Douglas (NE) Co-Chair | Paul Rauch (WSFR HQ) Co-Chair | Brenda Bowers (AK) – Chair - FACWG |
| Bryan Burhans (PA) - ABSENT | Cliff Schleusner (IR6, IR8) | Stasey Whichel (FL) – Vice Chair - FACWG |
| Lisa Holt (AK) | Clint Riley (IR5, IR7) | Scott Knight – WSFR HQ |
| Mark Tisa (MA) | Kathy Hollar (HQ) | Christy Vigfusson – WSFR HQ |
| J. D. Strong (OK) - ABSENT | Lisa Van Alstyne (HQ) | Tammy Brooks (TX) |
| Ryan Brown (VA) | Bob Curry (HQ) | Mike Sawyers (MA) |
| Brad Loveless (KS) | Greg Siekaniec (IR11) | Dan Hogan – WSFR HQ |
| Lane Kisonak (Counsel) | Larry Mellinger (Counsel) | Tim Smith – WSFR HQ |
|  |  | Diana Swan-Pinion – JTF Liaison/WSFR HQ |
|  |  | Ryan Oster – WSFR HQ |
|  |  | Paul Van Ryzin – WSFR HQ |

**Opening Remarks --** Jim Douglas informed the JTF that Mark Tisa will be the new JTF Cochair upon his retirement October 1st (prior to the Fall Meeting), and Paul Rauch informed the JTF that the new RD member taking the place of Greg Siekaniec after his retirement will be Leo Miranda from Legacy Region 4.

**Topic: Issue ID Protocol – Paul Rauch/Diana Swan-Pinion**

* **Received 14 issues from 8 States**

*Desired Outcome*: *JTF review and discussion on the 2021 Issue ID submissions. Action Item: JTF determines if any issues identified through the Issue ID Protocol should be addressed further at the Fall 2021 JTF meeting, and any next steps for those items.*

**Key Takeaways:** The JTF agreed with the WSFR/FACWG recommendation to select the barter transactions and multi-state collaboration process (CCI) issues for JTF engagement. The CCI issue was discussed in full, including the JTF’s role, during the presentation on the CCI topic. On the third issue, raising awareness on subaccounts, the JTF recognized that they would benefit from further awareness on requirements and uses of subaccounts, particularly in regard to their interaction with safety margins.

The JTF agreed with the recommendations that the JTF would not engage on all other issues except one, on the State’s audit process. WSFR discussed impacts from the Improvement Act and OMB on the audits, as well as how WSFR has worked to improve auditor’s knowledge of WSFR programs. The JTF will delay taking up this issue immediately to allow additional time for further scoping of the issue, including working with the States to identify specific details. Regarding two other issues, Grant Solutions and TRACS, the JTF also recognized that the FACWG had submitted a list of concerns on these issues and would be involved in addressing and responding to those concerns.

**Action Item(s):**

1) Barter Transactions – WSFR will conduct more scoping (i.e., determine extent of findings in the States; identify characteristics of barters vs. incentives, etc.) prior to JTF engagement. The Co-Chairs will then assign members to a small team within the next few weeks that will address this issue.

2) Multi-State Collaboration (CCI) – See CCI Topic.

3) Audit Process – WSFR will prepare for the JTF returning to this issue at their Fall meeting, to present a comprehensive overview of what had changed in the last 5 years, discuss if there are items WSFR can consider further and work on, and report on the information gathered from the States related to costs, staff time in assisting and responding to auditors, length of audits, etc.

4) Subaccounts and Safety Margins – WSFR will provide information on subaccount structure and requirements with the read-ahead materials sent out prior to the Fall Meeting, and make the Safety Margin training video available to JTF members by also including it with those materials.

2. Present subaccount structure and requirements at Summer JTF call

5) Issue Responses – WSFR will prepare letters to all States who submitted an issue explaining if/how their issue was addressed by the JTF and/or WSFR.

**Topic: WSFR Accountability Initiative – Scott Knight**

* **Overmatch**
* **In-Kind Match**
* **Performance Reporting**
* **NOFOs**

*Desired Outcome*: *The JTF has awareness and understanding of the WSFR Accountability Initiative priorities.*

**Key Takeaways:**

Overmatch – WSFR’s memorandum to State directors reinforced the documentation requirements for overmatch on WSFR grants; Scott stressed the importance of overmatch being documented on the Federal Financial Report (SF-425) in order for it to be used as an offset to disallowed costs during an audit.

In-Kind Match – There will be more accountability for audit findings when costs are questioned because the State does not have adequate documentation, which may result in those costs being designated as disallowed. In response, WSFR provided two job aids to use for managing volunteer in-kind match.

Performance Reporting – Performance reporting is an area of concern primarily due to the transition to TRACS, but WSFR will not be issuing guidance on standards for performance reports. WSFR Regional Offices and States will work to ensure the initial round of TRACS performance reporting is adequate; WSFR will assess the need for standardization after some time has passed post-TRACS implementation.

Notice of Funding Opportunity – WSFR sent a memorandum to State Directors reminding them of the importance of the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) in the award management process. NOFOs contain the most up-to-date information that States must be aware of and comply with as part of their recipient responsibilities.

**Action Item(s):** NONE

**Topic: Emerging Service Policy Issue – Scott Knight**

*Desired Outcome: Inform members on an emerging policy issue associated with carbon credits.*

**Key Takeaways:** The issue discussed was the use of carbon credits as part of an award or as associated with real property with a WSFR-funding nexus. Scott stated this *will* be a future issue for the JTF; WSFR will develop and share additional information with the JTF for a proactive approach. Larry and others shared that while many contracts and uses for carbon credits may appear similar, the specific details of each contract and scenario (proposed use of funds, Federal nexus, encumbrances, etc.) will be important to consider as they apply to each situation.

**Action Item(s):** WSFR will provide the JTF with additional information, prior to the Fall Meeting.

**Topic: Implementing the Modernizing the PR Fund for Tomorrow’s Needs Act Guidance Team Update – Kathy Hollar**

*Desired Outcome: JTF review and discussion of the Modernizing the PR Fund for Tomorrow’s Needs Act draft implementation guidance.*

**Key Takeaways:** The JTF approved the draft guidance, as presented by the JTF-assigned Team. Jim Douglas stated the record should reflect the JTF’s considerable thanks to the Team for their effort and the guidance recommendations they produced.

**Action Item:**The Co-chairs confirmed that by consensus the JTF are recommending moving the Modernizing PR Act guidance recommendations forward to the WSFR AD, for Policy action, finalization and publication, and dissemination through the JTF-approved Communications Protocol.

**Topic: State Legislative Initiatives/Impacts to PR/DJ Funding – Paul Rauch/Larry Mellinger**

*Desired Outcome: Inform members on proposed state legislation that could have impacts to State eligibility for PR/DJ funding.*

**Key Takeaways:** The JTF is aware that some State legislatures have proposed bills that would be in conflict with a State’s assent legislation as required under the Wildlife Restoration Act. The JTF recommends that history and summaries of these proposed State legislations should be compiled, to include any fixes that were implemented and exactly who should be contacted for assistance, in order to allow States to have conversations early when facing their own scenarios.

**Action Item(s):** The JTF recommends AFWA take the lead. Lane will develop the history/summary document of proposed legislations to date, for AFWA to disseminate to the States.

**Topic: NBCI Audit Response: Collaborative Conservation Initiatives (CCIs) – Scott Knight**

*Desired Outcome*: *Understanding of approach with OMB; Discussion on anticipated process for approval of CCIs.*

**Key Takeaways:** Scott informed the JTF that WSFR is moving forward with a request to the OMB to grant the Service an exception to 2 CFR 200 in support of establishing Collaborative Conservation Initiatives (CCI) as a new management tool, as part of the corrective action status to the OIG’s Management Advisory to the Service. The exception would allow States to issue subawards to third-party entities that have approved CCI plans and allow the Service to determine cost allocability at the plan level instead of the subaward level. The Service will work with DOI to make the formal request for the exception and setup the basic CCI framework. If OMB approves the exception, WSFR will then start the scoping process with the JTF and the States to determine the plan components, as well as, the review, approval, and management processes. After completing the development and commenting phases on the plan and processes, the Service will issue Service-wide guidance.

A question was asked about what WSFR would do if OMB does not approve the exception. WSFR would resume its original plan of addressing CCIs through rulemaking, but this scenario does contain a reduction in risk for initiatives, as regulations also require OMB approval.

**Action Item(s):** When the timing is right, the JTF Co-Chairs will stand up a small team that will address the components, and submission/review process, of the CCI plans.

**AFWA State Wildlife Action Plan & Landscape Conservation Working Group – Paul Rauch and Kathy Hollar**

*Desired Outcome: Inform or update members on the AFWA President’s SWAP Working Group and its charge related to 8 Essential Elements.*

**Key Takeaways:** The Working Group is reviewing and considering changes to the 8 elements for potentially enhancing landscape-scale conservation efforts. These efforts could apply to the existing State Wildlife Grant program or potentially through RAWA, if it passes. Our response will depend on whether the Working Group proposes recommendations or requirements and whether RAWA passes. If the Working Group proposes changes to SWAP Required Elements through SWG program that are endorsed at the AFWA September conference, and approved by FWS, WSFR would then publish a proposed Federal Register Notice, conduct a public comment period, and publish a final Federal Register notice. If RAWA passes, our approach will depend on the specific provisions contained in the final bill.

**Action Item(s):** NONE

**WSFR’s Recovering America’s Wildlife Act (RAWA) Readiness – Paul Rauch**

*Desired Outcome: Inform members of WSFR’s activities to prepare for passage of RAWA legislation.*

**Key Takeaways:** Paul discussed and shared with the JTF a draft document, *RAWA Readiness Strategy*, that WSFR developed to begin preparations in anticipation of RAWA passing and needing to be implemented in FY22. Although AFWA’s Executive Director and President have seen the document, a close hold is requested so as to not preempt any discussions on RAWA with the States that AFWA may be planning, although please review the role spelled out for the JTF. The strategy includes a JTF Policy SME Team for RAWA, as well as AFWA and the Service establishing a joint RAWA Coordination Team to facilitate collaboration and make specific recommendations on implementation of several key focus areas.

**Action Item(s):** Provide any feedback to Paul on the JTF’s role in the RAWA Readiness strategy.

**Topic: Updating 50 CFR 80 – Kathy Hollar and Lisa Van Alstyne**

*Desired Outcome: Input and agreement on approach to updating the rule.*

**Key Takeaways:** The JTF members were presented with a summary of the needs and areas to be addressed for updating 50 CFR 80, and requested to support a SME Team to assist in pre-rulemaking activities. The JTF approved the proposed approach, as presented.

**Action Item(s):** WSFR will send a draft Team Charge to the JTF; the JTF will review the draft Team Charge and provide comments; the JTF State representatives and FACWG will recommend State SME Team members that possess the qualifications in the Team Charge; and the JTF Co-chairs will finalize the Team members. Once the Team is established, work will proceed as outlined in the Team Charge.

**Topic: TRACS Update – Tim Smith and Dan Hogan**

*Desired Outcome: Update and inform members on TRACS rollout and next steps*

**Key Takeaways:** Along with the presentation, a write-up summarizing the latest information on the TRACS rollout and anticipated next steps was provided to the JTF. A new JTF member/designee on the TRACS Working Group will need to be identified, due to Mike Sawyers taking a position with WSFR’s Training Branch.

**Action Item(s):** Jim Douglas will contact Mark Tisa regarding a replacement for the JTF member of the TRACS Working Group.

**Wrap up, Review of Action Items, and Decision Points** – A decision on whether the Fall JTF Meeting will be a virtual or in-person meeting will be made at a future date. If an in-person meeting is decided upon it may need to include sufficient time for processing a contract for meeting space and lodging. WSFR JTF support will facilitate a Doodle poll to select dates.