



ASSOCIATION *of*  
FISH & WILDLIFE  
AGENCIES

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**WILDLIFE RESOURCE POLICY COMMITTEE**

**Chair: Pete Hildreth (IA)**

**Vice-Chair: Stewart Liley (NM)**

**Thursday, March 13, 2025 – 3:15 PM to 5:15 PM**  
**Louisville, KY**

- 3:15 PM      Call to Order – *Pete Hildreth, Chair, IA*
- Introductions
  - Agenda Review
  - Approval of WRPC Annual 2024 Minutes
    - Minutes were approved unanimously
    - ~25 state, federal and NGO partners were in attendance
- 3:25 PM      Partner Updates:
- USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services – Jessica Fantinato, Deputy Administrator
    - Please see Appendix for report
  - USFWS Science Applications – *Pending*
    - NA
- 4:00 PM      BearWise Program Update and Discussion – *Bryant White, AFWA*
- Please see Appendix for report
- 4:15 PM      Human/Wildlife Conflicts Working Group Update – *Brian Wakeling, MT*
- Best Practices for Managing Human/Wildlife Conflicts with Coyotes in Urban Settings
    - This document was available in hard copy and copies distributed
    - It can be downloaded here: [Human–Wildlife Interactions Monographs | Berryman Institute | Utah State University](#)
  - Best Management Practices for Managing Beaver Conflicts in North America

- A motion was made to approve the monograph on managing conflicts with beavers. Motion carried (Brad Howard (NC), Pete Hildreth (IA) ; follow up indicates the document has been submitted and accepted for publication with an expected release in March 2026.

4:30 PM      Government Affairs Update – AFWA

- *Please see Appendix for Report*

4:45 PM      Roundtable – All

- Deer Conflict Management
  - Several states noted that conflicts with deer are increasing
  - One major issue is that private landowners who experience conflicts sometimes do not allow hunting (or it is too limited to have an effect) or have neighbors that do not allow hunting making herd management difficult
- Crop Insurance Assessments
- Black Vulture Depredation

**Committee Charge:**

***To discuss and develop recommendations on Association positions related to federal laws, regulations and policies concerning habitat conservation, wildlife resources and related funding for such programs as well as wildlife management practices including those concerned with problem or nuisance wildlife, and emerging issues (e.g., commercial trade). The committee also stays abreast of threatened and endangered species wildlife issues, state legislation pertaining to wildlife management and wildlife diversity funding initiatives.***

Wildlife Resource Policy Committee

North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference 2025

# Appendix

- **Report: USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services Program**
- **Report: AFWA BearWise Working Group**
- **Report: AFWA Human Wildlife Conflict Working Group**
- **AFWA Government Affairs Update**

**90<sup>th</sup> North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, Wildlife Management  
Institute: March 10-14, 2025, Louisville, KY**

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)  
Wildlife Services (WS)  
Human-Wildlife Conflicts Working Group Meeting Report

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**New Administration's Known Positions**

- USDA Secretary - Brooke Rollins (confirmed on Feb 14, 2025)
- USDA Deputy Secretary nominee – Stephen Vaden
- Marketing Regulatory Programs (MRP) Under Secretary nominee - Dudley Hoskins

***Goals for USDA include:***

- Modernizing programs, including SNAP.
- Supporting farmers, increase market access for U.S. farm products.
- Improving food security, driving economic growth in rural communities.
- [Combat avian influenza \(HPAI\)](#) – announced a \$1 billion-dollar comprehensive strategy to curb HPAI, protect the U.S. poultry industry, and lower egg prices. This is in addition to funding already being provided to indemnify growers for depopulated flocks. This five-pronged strategy includes an additional \$500 million for biosecurity measures, \$400 million in financial relief for affected farmers, and \$100 million for vaccine research, action to reduce regulatory burdens, and exploring temporary import options.
- Optimize USDA workforce – USDA is pursuing an aggressive plan to optimize its workforce by eliminating positions that are no longer necessary, bringing its workforce back to the office, and relocating employees out of the National Capital Region into our nation's heartland to allow our rural communities to flourish.

**WS Personnel Updates**

WS has undergone several changes in high-level leadership positions at the national, regional, and state levels during FY24.

- Jessica Fantinato is the Deputy Administrator after Janet Bucknall retired in Dec 2024.
- Carson Hawley is the new Associate Deputy Administrator.
- Brett Dunlap and John Forbes are now Assistant Regional Directors for WS' Eastern Region.
- WS has new State Directors in TN/KY (Blaine Hyle) and in CO (Emily Blizzard).

**National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee (NWSAC)**

- In early 2023, Secretary Vilsack selected NWSAC members to represent program stakeholders including academia, airport safety, farming and livestock producers, and state wildlife agencies, among other interest groups.
- The NWSAC serves as an open forum for diverse interests to have a voice in WS policies, guidance, and strategic planning. Committee members are appointed for a 2-year term and can serve up to three consecutive two-year terms.
- The NWSAC selected members, John Michael Tomeček (Academia, TX) as their chair, and Sherry Wilson Russell (State/County Government and Associations, MO) as their vice chair.

- NWSAC members convened twice, in October 2023 and in October 2024, to review prior committee recommendations and to develop new recommendations based on current priorities and values.
- Following the first meeting, NWSAC Chair Tomeček shared the final committee developed recommendations with the Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) and the APHIS Administrator, for provision to the Secretary, in November 2023.
- Following the second meeting, NWSAC members finalized and put forth 21 recommendations for USDA's consideration pertaining to several key WS program and operational functions. Recommendations were vetted and approved through APHIS and MRP leadership and WS formally submitted the recommendations to USDA in late November 2024. USDA approved them shortly thereafter in December 2024. WS posted the recommendations to [its public-facing website](#).
- WS would like to extend our thanks to Ron Reagan (AFWA Executive Director) for his membership on this NWSAC.

### **Livestock Protection Update**

- WS assists farmers and ranchers in 50 states and 3 territories to reduce the impact of predators on their animals, protecting 9.4 million head of cattle, 5.2 million head of sheep, and 57 million head of other livestock in 322,000 direct control actions.
- In FY24, WS provided more than 21,000 technical assistance activities that enabled 5,488 livestock producers to implement improved husbandry and methods such as use of guard animals, exclusion, fencing, and predator dispersal. These activities included 53 predator management workshops attended by more than 1,600 individuals from 15 states.
- In collaboration with state wildlife agencies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and tribes, WS addresses livestock depredation and protects human health and safety related to wolves and grizzly bears.
  - WS manages conflicts with gray wolves or Mexican gray wolves in 11 states.
  - WS conducted operations with grizzly bears in 3 states, dispersing 30, capturing-relocating 11, and lethally removing 6 in FY24.
  - Congressional funding of \$4.5 million in FY24 supported protecting livestock from large carnivore predation in 12 states using nonlethal strategies such as range riding, fladry installation, and electric fence construction. WS filled 35 full-time positions and supported 7 part-time position to implement these strategies. Nonlethal projects also received support from more than 50 other WS staff. WS' National Wildlife Research Center evaluated the effectiveness of activities to reduce depredation.
- WS flew 82 aircraft for 16,096 flight hours over a total of 1.02 million miles of flight operations to conduct livestock protection via predator removal, removal of invasive feral swine and brown tree snakes, aerial delivery of vaccine baits (rabies), emergency response, and other missions.

### **Black Vulture Update**

- In response to increased livestock loss and vulture predation, WS provides both direct control and technical assistance to those experiencing vulture damage. The top 5 resources threatened by black vultures (as per requests received by WS) are beef cattle calves, aviation-related human safety, adult beef cattle, lambs, and adult sheep.

- In FY24, black vulture nationwide removal numbers dropped slightly to 10,715 birds removed (compared to 13,665 removed in FY23) and dispersal numbers increased to 68,268 birds harassed and dispersed to protect resources (compared to 57,087 dispersed in FY23).
- In response to producer complaints about the USFWS depredation permitting process, USFWS and WS designed a pilot program that expedited the permitting process for livestock producers in participating states.
  - Those states (14) are: AL, TN, KY, AR, TX, MS, OK, MO, OH, IN, IL, MD, FL, and VA.
- WS programs from 19 states collaborate with NWRC staff, including financially supporting a devoted wildlife biologist position, on a five-year research program assessing gaps in understanding black vulture life history and ecology, ways to improve upon existing take models, as well as test current and develop new management methods. States prioritized seven research areas and research will occur as allows (highest to lowest priority):
  - Conducting field evaluations to determine efficiency of emerging vulture management tools.
  - Improving demographic estimators for black vulture for modifying allowable take models.
  - Developing movement models for vultures and vulture response to field management actions.
  - Leveraging WS operational activities to determine optimized methodology for roost dispersal.
  - Evaluating use of patagial tags and mark-resight data for estimating abundance and comparing mark-resight abundance estimates with those used to develop current allowable take models.
  - Evaluating damage and assessing risk of black vulture damage using existing data and social science-based surveys: private property and utility focused.
  - Replicating the Southern Indiana livestock vulture study to include a state within the historical range of black vulture.

### **Aquaculture Update**

- WS continues supporting the aquaculture industry and stakeholders by:
  - Helping producers receive and renew Migratory Bird Depredation Permits
  - Providing technical assistance, integrated damage management (harassment/removal), and surveillance
  - Outreach, research, and collaboration with federal regulatory agencies.
- WS is assisting USFWS and state wildlife agencies with double-crested cormorant surveys. These surveys provide the basis for population estimates for setting cormorant take limits for depredation permits. WS conducts aerial roost counts of cormorants every two weeks from October - April in aquaculture producing areas of Mississippi. These counts are used to support a regional dispersal program to reduce bird depredation by moving birds away from aquaculture.
- In FY24, WS issued 196 Form 37s recommending permits for individual producers with the top five states including Mississippi (49), Arkansas (26), Ohio (19), Florida (11), and Alabama (7).
  - In FY24 WS dispersed more than 168,000 double-crested cormorants and removed of 2,416 cormorants at aquaculture facilities, and other farmed fish protection from avian

depredation in 16 states. The industry is worth \$1.5 billion nationally (per National Marine Fisheries Service).

- Further examples of coordination with partners on cormorant issues include:
  - WS is a member of the AFWA Bird Fish Conflict Working Group that brings together experts from federal and state agencies with management authority over birds and fish to address and respond to conflicts associated with various species.
  - WS participates on the USFWS “Population Monitoring Team”, which developed survey methods and coordinated with states on cormorant surveys.
  - WS is a member of the Cross Flyway Team comprised of USFWS Migratory Bird Division and State Agency Flyway representatives to address cormorant surveys and depredation issues.
  - WS met with producers, researchers, and USDA Risk Management Agency staff to discuss means of providing indemnity to producers for various sources of loss including bird depredation.
- The WS NWRC conducts research to find science-based solutions to bird depredation. WS, NWRC’s MS field Station has ongoing research projects focusing on:
  - Disease transmission from birds to catfish
  - Disease transmission from birds to shellfish
  - Depredation impacts to inland shrimp aquaculture in AL and FL
  - Deterrent methods on shellfish aquaculture
  - Depredation impacts of fish-eating birds on catfish aquaculture in MS and AL
  - Depredation impacts of blackbirds on baitfish aquaculture in AR
  - Depredation impacts of fish-eating birds on redfish, hybrid striped bass, catfish and shrimp aquaculture in TX

## **Feral Swine Management Update**

### ***Feral Swine Operations***

- The National Feral Swine Program (NFSP) conducts operations in 32 states and three territories to control existing and emerging populations of feral swine that threaten agriculture, other property, native ecosystems, and human and animal health.
- Agriculture continues to comprise the majority (48%) of resources protected, followed by property (27%).
- Since the NFSP’s inception, WS has eliminated feral swine in twelve states (declared eliminated in CO, ID, MD, MN, ME, NJ, NY, IA, and VT and monitoring continues to confirm elimination in IN, WA and WI).
- In states where feral swine elimination has occurred, NFSP provides funding to maintain collaborations and monitoring activities; if new populations are detected, additional resources are provided to eliminate new incursions.

### ***Feral Swine Surveillance***

- NFSP also conducts targeted surveillance for diseases of highest concern.
- The risk-based surveillance system prioritizes collection of disease samples in areas at highest risk of foreign animal disease entry and areas with high numbers of domestic pigs.
- National surveillance includes serosurveillance for Influenza A and H5 antibody, African swine fever (ASF), classical swine fever, swine brucellosis, and pseudorabies.
- Targeted surveillance for African Swine Fever virus infection (PCR) as well as antibody (ELISA) occurs in the U.S. Protection Zone (USVI and PR) and in 12 states (AL, AZ, CA,

FL, GA, LA, MS, NM, OK, SC, TN, and TX) in counties where the risk of ASF is the highest.

- In August 2024, targeted surveillance for HPAI in feral swine began in three states (CA, TX, and NC) representing the three wild bird flyways in counties where previous HPAI detections in wild or domestic animals occurred, or where previous sampling found H5 antibody in feral swine.

#### ***Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program (Farm Bill)***

- After a short cessation of activities in pilot project areas following conclusion of the 2018 Farm Bill, an extension of funding was provided in 2024 (\$15M split between Natural Resources Conservation Service {NRCS} and WS) and work in pilot project areas was resumed.
- WS continued feral swine management activities in 33 pilot projects in 12 states (AL, AR, FL, GA, LA, MS, NC, SC, HI, MO, OK, and TX; one project in Texas was not continued during the extension because feral swine were already eliminated in this project area.
- Congress continues work to establish a Feral Swine Eradication Program in the next Farm Bill.

#### ***Research***

- *Feral Swine Genetic Archive*: Presently 52,000 unique samples; 25,000 genotyped to date. Especially valuable tool in identifying source populations and tracking illegal movement of swine. Over the past year, support from the Feral Swine Genetic Archive has been requested by law enforcement agencies in Michigan and Mississippi to help enforce prohibitions on the possession and/or transport of feral swine.
- *Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)*: Program collaborations continue to look at possible roles feral swine serve in the dispersal of CWD. Current findings suggest wild pigs take up CWD prions. Additional research will explore if feral swine can move prions by depositing them onto the landscape in their feces.

#### ***Feral Swine Toxicant Research***

- As previously reported, WS did not move forward to register HOGGONE 2 to the EPA because our field trials revealed unacceptable levels of nontarget take of passerine birds that consumed HOGGONE 2 toxic bait that was spilled by feral swine as they consumed the bait. This was decided in the best interests of WS and its stakeholders.
- WS remains committed to pursuing a feral swine toxicant that meets regulatory requirements and will be an effective management tool for feral swine.
- To meet the needs of the APHIS WS Program and our stakeholders, a feral swine toxicant must meet the following requirements for operational field use:
  - Rapid-acting product with high lethality for feral swine
  - Low risks for non-target species
  - Ease of use for applicators
  - Good shelf stability
  - Cost effective
  - Manufactured in the U.S. with  $\geq 75\%$  U.S.-sourced materials to meet Buy American Act requirements



## **National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) Updates**

***The WS Wildlife Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (WDDL)*** was established in 2022; the WDDL currently consists of well-appointed laboratories located at NWRC in Fort Collins, CO. The WDDL fills an important gap and function in wildlife disease diagnostics, in that it will prioritize wildlife samples over those from other sources and it will provide timeliness and responsiveness as an internal APHIS and WS facility. WDDL became a National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) affiliate in February 2025, and will support WS Operational Programs, WS National Programs, NWRC Researchers, and external stakeholders by providing microbial diagnostic services focused on samples derived from wildlife and the environment. The formation and expansion of the WDDL is part of a larger APHIS priority to develop laboratory expertise and capacity within the Agency. The WDDL is expected to interact closely with other APHIS laboratories, and the NAHLN, to facilitate the collection, analysis, and sharing of information.

***The WS NWRC Wildlife Disease Research Project (WDRP)*** conducts research and development related to avian influenza viruses, emerging pathogens and other disease agents. Recent examples of the WDRP work with emerging pathogens include rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus 2 and SARS coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). WDRP members work in unique and state-of-the-art animal facilities at the NWRC campus for biosafety level 2 (BSL-2) pathogens and in high containment laboratories at Colorado State University (CSU) when working on BSL-3 pathogens.

***The WS Bio-Archive Storage (BAS) facility*** was completed in July 2024, at NWRC in Ft. Collins, CO. The 7300 ft<sup>2</sup> building is a specialty warehouse designed to house ultra-cold (-80° C) freezers for the long-term storage of biological samples. The BAS will house the sample archives for three WS National Programs: NRMP, NFSP, and NWDP. The ability to maintain an archive of biological samples from these extensive surveillance efforts will create an important resource, available for use by other federal, state, and tribal partners to aid with the storage of disease-specific samples and increase overall research opportunities.

## **Brief Wildlife Disease Updates (additional details included in the Wildlife Disease Working Group Report)**

### ***Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) Update***

Detections of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in cattle in March 2024 raised additional questions about the circulating virus. To help answer those questions, the WS National Wildlife Disease Program (NWDP) broadened its surveillance program to include spring sampling of any avian species, concurrent with the outbreak in cattle. WS Wildlife Disease Biologists and WS personnel in 45 states/territories collected 5,282 samples from 145 bird species from April 1 – June 30. HPAI was detected in only two of those samples, but not the B3.13 strain circulating in cattle. The low detections of avian influenza viruses built confidence that the foundational surveillance of ducks is on target, and the absence of B3.13 indicates that the cattle strain is likely not circulating in wild bird populations.

- *Wild Birds*
  - WS is targeting surveillance in all four flyways, and 49 states. WS is collecting opportunistic samples in Hawaii and the Caribbean territories of Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands.

- WS updates HPAI detection data weekly on the APHIS website, found here: [Detections of HPAI in Wild Birds](#)
- *Mammals*
  - Partner agencies, state wildlife agencies, and wildlife rehab facilities collect and submit samples to the National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) or NAHLN laboratories (who then forward non-negative samples to NVSL for confirmation), who share the findings with APHIS for awareness and reporting to the [World Organisation of Animal Health](#) (WOAH), if necessary.
  - APHIS coordinates with the Department of Interior and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to record, analyze, and monitor sample collections. APHIS reports finding on its “[Detections of HPAI in Mammals](#)” website with permission from outside entities.
- *Wildlife Biosecurity Assessments (WBA)*
  - During 2023 and 2024 WS implemented a wildlife biosecurity pilot project (WBA) conducting WBAs on commercial poultry premises in four upper Midwest states (IA, MN, SD, ND). Goals of the WBA project include:
    - Increased biosecurity at commercial poultry operations related to wildlife.
    - Reduced probability of transmission of HPAI (and other diseases) from wildlife to commercial poultry populations.
    - Reduced number of commercial production facilities testing positive for HPAI.
    - Reduced national costs and impacts to the U.S. poultry industry.
    - Improved food security and stabilization of the national food chain across the United States.
    - Maintain consumer confidence in food supply chain.
    - Net savings to Americans by reducing expenditures on disease outbreak response.
  - As a result of the overwhelming success of the wildlife biosecurity assessment pilot project, USDA Secretary Rollins recently [announced](#) that the WBA project will be expanded to be administered in all 50 states over the next 3 years.

### ***African Swine Fever (ASF) Prep & Response***

- WS continues to collaborate with Veterinary Services (VS) in the ASF technical working group and implementing the ASF Preparedness and Response Plan.
- This includes conducting operational activities, outreach, and foreign animal disease surveillance of free-roaming and feral swine in the United States Caribbean territories (U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico) and in the Continental United States, lowering the risk of ASF introduction to susceptible swine populations in the United States and territories.
- The *Squeal on Pigs!* outreach and reporting campaign is a collaborative campaign facilitated by the Transboundary Feral Swine Working Group to allow for citizen science reporting of feral pig sightings in states with few or no known feral swine populations. The campaign provides a multi-agency public reporting tool, an outreach and education toolkit, branding guidance, and facilitates rapid response and removal of new feral swine populations.
- In 2024 WS updated the *Squeal on Pigs!* application to include reporting of morbidity/mortality that may indicate ASF infection or other foreign animal disease infections. An online training hosted September 5, 2024, introduced the app to federal and state partners, including the morbidity/mortality reporting.

### ***Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Update***

- WS state operation programs work cooperatively with state wildlife and agriculture health programs (~20 states) on CWD surveillance, targeted cervid removals, and assistance at hunter check points. In ~14 States, during unrelated deer removal projects, WS biologists continue collecting and submitting CWD samples to state diagnostic labs supporting CWD surveillance.
- At the WS NWRC, the CWD Research project continues to be led by Dr. Jennifer Malmberg and her staff of scientists.

### **2024 Wild Cervid CWD Funding**

#### ***FY 2024 Cooperative Agreement Overview***

- On October 3, 2024, APHIS announced approximately \$12 million for states, tribes, universities, and research institutes to further develop and implement CWD management and response activities in wild and farmed cervids across three separate funding opportunities.

#### ***Wild Cervid CWD Management and Response Activities Opportunity***

- APHIS provided 29 awards totaling \$5,500,000.
  - state wildlife agencies – 17 proposals totaling approximately \$3,076,511
    - States: AR, CA (2), FL, IN, KY, LA, NV, NJ, ND, OR (2), UT, VA, WA, WI, WY
  - state departments of agriculture – 1 proposal for \$184,745
    - This was for the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) – Animal Diagnostic Laboratory to increase CWD ELISA diagnostic capacity for wild cervid testing.
  - universities – 10 proposals totaling approximately \$2,140,204
  - tribal government – 1 proposal for \$98,539
- APHIS received 55 proposals requesting \$10,637,387 in APHIS funding.
  - state wildlife agencies – 23 proposals received requesting \$4,083,296
  - state department of agriculture – 1 proposal received requesting \$184,745
  - universities – 29 proposals received requesting \$6,116,181
  - research institute – 1 proposal received requesting \$154,626
  - tribal government – 1 proposal received requesting \$98,539

#### ***USDA APHIS Tribal Nations Wild Cervid CWD Opportunity***

- APHIS provided 9 awards totaling \$500,000.
  - 9 federally recognized tribal governments were awarded funding to manage CWD on tribal lands.
- APHIS received 12 proposals requesting \$720,372 in APHIS funding.

#### ***Farmed Cervid CWD Management and Response Activities Opportunity***

- APHIS provided 30 awards totaling \$6,045,215.
  - 17 state departments of agriculture received funding.
    - Includes funds for indemnity.
  - 5 universities received funding.

#### ***FY25 CWD Funding Opportunities***

- It is unclear at this time what CWD funding opportunities will look like in FY25.

### **Risk Assessments (RA) Update**

- WS appreciates AFWA’s ongoing assistance with our RAs.
- WS has been preparing RAs on many of the methods it uses, which analyze the impacts of wildlife damage management methods on people and the environment.
- AFWA selects peer reviewers to review. All assessments (including drafts) are available to the public on the APHIS-WS-NEPA webpage.
- Bryant White (Program Manager of Trapping Policy, Furbearer Research, and Human-Wildlife Conflicts) is our primary POC for Risk Assessments.
- WS has completed 30 RAs.
- The Laser and Alpha-chloralose RAs are undergoing internal review and will be finalized for submission to AFWA by March 7, 2025.
- The UAV RA is in the early phases of drafting.

**Table 1. WS Risk Assessment Status:**

<b>RISK ASSESSMENT</b>	<b>STATUS</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>	<b>Status 02/20/2025</b>
Introduction	Complete		
Cage Traps	Complete		
Cable Devices	Complete		
Foothold Traps	Complete		
Aircraft	Complete		
Firearms	Complete		
Sodium Cyanide	Complete		
Carbon Monoxide	Complete		
Aluminum Phosphide	Complete		
Zinc Phosphide	Complete		
GonaCon	Complete		
Lead	Complete		
Nets	Complete		
Quick-kill Traps	Complete		
Dogs	Complete		
Egg Addling	Complete		
DRC-1339	Complete		
Hand Capture	Complete		
Strychnine	Complete		
Sodium Fluoroacetate	Complete		
Explosives/Pyrotechnics	Complete		
Exclusion	Complete		
Carcass Disposal	Complete		
Registered Chemical Repellents	Complete		
Avitrol	Complete		Completed June 2023
Chlorophacinone	Complete		Completed June 2023
I&E Drugs	Complete		Completed January 2024

Minimum Risk Pesticides	Split out from chemical repellents-Complete		Completed July 2024
Diphacinone	Complete		Completed May 2024
Non-Chemical Deterrents	Complete	Submitted March 2024	Out for Peer Review March 2024 Received comments Oct 2024, finalized December 2024
Brodifacoum	Complete	Submitted March 2024	WSMT/NWRC identified as Priority 1 for next batch (07/27/2023). Out for Peer Review March 2024. Received comments January 2025, Finalized February 2025.
Bromadiolone	Not started		Not needed at this time.
Bromethalin	Out for Peer Review	Submitted September 2024	WSMT/NWRC identified as Priority 3 for next batch (07/27/2023). Draft submitted for peer review September 2024. Waiting on comments.
Vaccinia*	Not started-on hold	On hold	No change to status.
Acetaminophen	Not started		We decided to put a hold on this one since the use is limited and covered in EAs.
Sodium Nitrite	Updating w/ new info.		Waiting on Registration decision.
Lasers	Under internal review	Expected peer review-March 2025	WSMT/NWRC identified as Priority 2 for next batch (07/27/2023). Submission for peer review delayed due to WS directive finalization. Expected peer review March 2025.
Miscellaneous WDM Methods	Not started	Expected peer review-FY24	
Alpha Chloralose	Under internal review	Expected peer review-March 2025	Draft completed in December 2024, under internal review with I&E committee members and state programs that use AC.
Drones		Expected peer review-September 2025	

\*OSS-NEPA staff has decided to put this on hold until use pattern changes or additional uses arise.

# BearWise® Program Quarterly Report

## October - December 2024

Prepared for AFWA and Member State Wildlife Agencies

Submitted by LaVonne Ewing and Linda Masterson of Image Resource

[support@bearwise.org](mailto:support@bearwise.org)



## OUTREACH MATERIALS

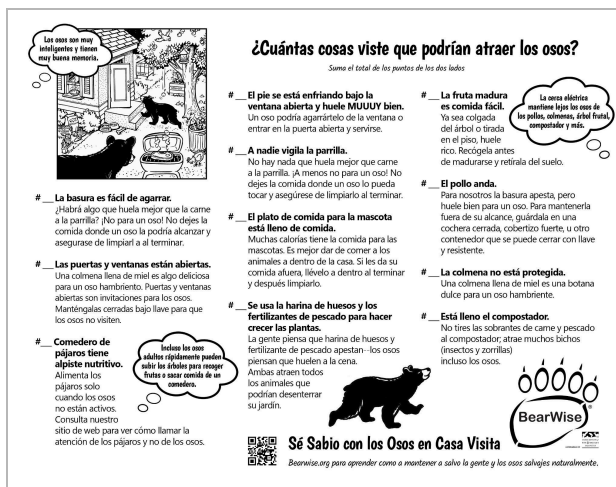
- **NEW: Spanish version of our Coloring Page / Placemat** posted in our store and announced to subscribers.
- **2025 Project - Encounters bulletin:** Started researching and writing content; working with Rich (WA) and Nate (MO).

## WEBSITE & CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

- **"BearWise in the News"** remains very busy as bears are in hyperphagia most of the fourth quarter. We also handled several articles in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Debby and Hurricanes Helene and Milton, which produced widespread impacts to wildlife throughout the Southeast. Linda typically forwards press articles to state rep for info/follow up when needed; reviews 15 to 20 articles per week.
- Started researching best ways to optimize our website to meet ADA accessibility regulations.
- **Updated / revised several articles** in our Article Bank. Our popular [Article Bank](#) includes dozens of articles in these categories: *Be BearWise at Home*; *Be BearWise Outdoors*; *The Bear Facts*.
- **Ongoing: Website Management, Search Engine Optimization**  
*Hosting expires Oct 25, 2025*  
*3 domains expire Aug 15, 2028*



*"Yay! This is great. Thank you so much!!"*  
Christy Bubenheim, Colorado Parks & Wildlife



## MARKETING / BRAND PROTECTION

- **National Park Service Black Bear Working Group** has invited BW to meet with the group in Q1-2025 (thanks to Bill Stiver, formerly Chief of Wildlife for Great Smoky Mountains National Park). Discussed objectives, opportunity, reviewed with Working Group, set up potential dates.
- **Upcoming Conferences/Workshops:** Eastern Black Bear Workshop (April 7-11 in Lake Placid, New York) and 7th Int'l Human-Bear Conflicts Workshop (October 5-9 in Kalispell, Montana) with opportunities for presentations, meetings, booth and sponsorship.
- **Waiting to hear from Idaho NGO Teton Valley Bear Wise** regarding their violation of our registered trademark (Bear Wise cannot be used as two words).
- **Email campaigns** of monthly articles and new educational materials sent to our subscribers. [VIEW ARCHIVE of E-NEWS](#) Emails included: "How Pancakes Killed a Bear in Tennessee," "Special Alerts for Drivers in Bear Country," and "Will Bears Find a Good Winter Den at Your Place."
- **Ongoing Work:**
  - Review BearWise name, logo and messaging in states' educational materials.
  - Work with Cities, NGOs, Businesses and Organizations who want direction / approval for properly promoting BearWise.
  - Answer Questions / Defend Content / Provide Materials: We handle many inquiries each month and consult with state or regional rep if questions require special handling.

## MEDIA SUPPORT, OTHER REQUESTS

**Media Hub:** Linda will do background/information interviews and serve as the coordinator/hub for connecting media to appropriate state/regional/national BearWise spokespeople. State interviews are always referred first to the state BW rep, who can ask for someone outside the state to handle instead.

- Connecticut Public Radio asked us to talk about bears on their "Where We Live" show; connected them with Jason Hawley (CT) and Dave Telesco (FL).
- NC resident asked us to publicize his DIY bear-resistant container using bungee cords; Working Group did not feel it was an effective long-term solution (he, of course, disagreed).
- Gave CherryRoad Media permission to reprint BearWise articles; looped in Jonathan Russell (NY) who connected them with a local bear biologist in the Finger Lakes region.
- Received an inquiry from a researcher in Japan who wanted to know about BearWise and to meet with someone when she visits California in January; passed along to Rich (WA), Victoria and Ryan (CA), and explained what we do and don't do.
- Declined request from *Grizzly Confidential* book publisher to jointly promote; too grizzly-bear focused and too much language not in keeping with our guidelines.
- Reviewed a new book on Cherokee National Forest (TN) that Dan Gibbs and Linda Masterson contributed to and approved black bear information/BearWise content. Declined publisher request to sell in the BearWise store; too much about forest history, not enough about bears.

*BearWise does not comment on state-specific issues or policies, but we can act as a buffer and provide a regional or national spokesperson when the state can't or doesn't want to engage with the media but wants the correct information to get out there.*



## SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook (6.5k followers) and Instagram (1.6k followers) continue to bring BearWise to the public through weekly educational posts and cross-posting from member states. Social media oversight is provided by Linda Masterson and member state biologists as needed.

### What Performed Well in Q4 on Social Media Channels:

- Over 128 likes and 229 shares for our Facebook post (November 15) on bear den locations with the hook, "bears don't have collarbones" so they can fit through surprisingly small openings.
- On November 3, we shared a Facebook post about the time change and the importance of driving BearWise: over 208 likes and 732 shares!
- Our fall/Halloween post on October 27 featuring a photo of a bear enjoying a pumpkin saw over 137 likes and 21 shares on Instagram.

**Social insights:** There is an uptick in engagement and "likes" with the community-based posts, such as creating BearWise communities and sharing BearWise resources in neighborhoods. Posts with lesser-known bear facts also perform well and our followers share words of thanks for the education.

## MEMBER SUPPORT & ACCOUNT SERVICE

- **BearWise All-Rep Meeting, November 6** included PowerPoint presentations by all regional reps on various ways they put BearWise to work; Linda discussed how materials are developed and how states can effectively work with the Image Resource team. [View Video](#) on our YouTube channel.
- **Special Request by New Jersey:** modify "bear spray" info on NJ's BearWise fact sheets (bear spray currently illegal to use in New Jersey). Worked with researcher Dave Smith to review bear spray efficacy with black bears. Provided NJ with bear spray research and crafted language that allowed bear spray info to remain with a disclaimer. Revised materials being posted on NJ's website.
- **Custom outreach materials (3 icons) for TWRA.**
- **2025 Planning:** surveyed Working Group for priorities, reviewed at monthly meeting, identified low-hanging fruit that allows us to maximize materials and info already developed.
- **Ongoing Member Support:**
  - Send periodic email updates to BearWise state reps so they can make the most of their membership. Connect with new BearWise reps, answer questions from all reps about our education materials, provide BearWise talk points, support for interviews, presentations, etc.
  - Create state BearWise logos and other digital assets for members, including state-branded fact sheets, infographics, logos, etc.
  - Provide quotes and/or invoices for BearWise outreach materials. Register Image Resource as a vendor with state agencies. Process state agency orders (create custom artwork, send proofs, place orders with multiple vendors for BearWise products).
  - Prepare quarterly summaries. Report regularly to the Chair. Participate in monthly Working Group virtual meetings to solicit input and review projects and opportunities. Periodic meetings with subcommittees.





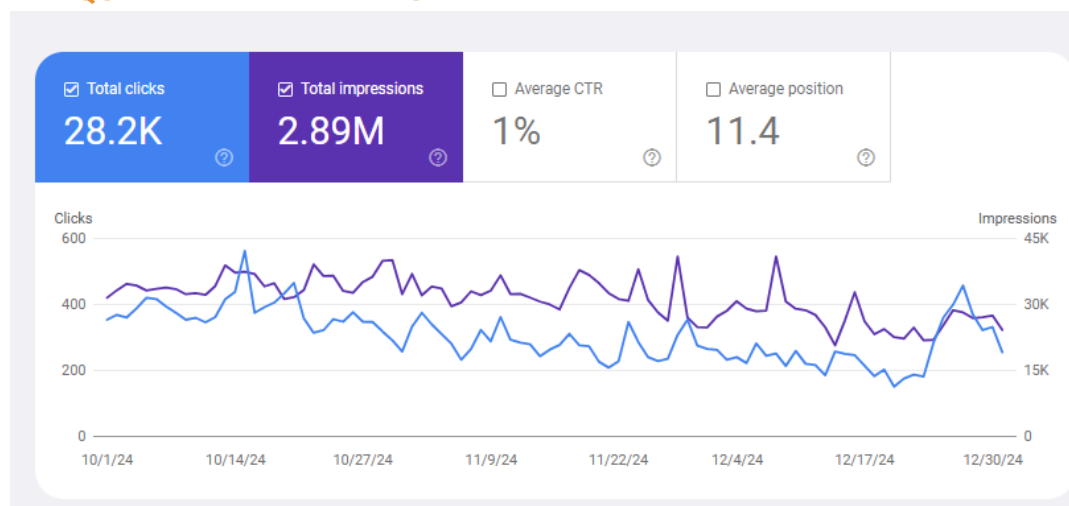
## BEARWISE STORE REVENUE

### Earned Royalties (January - December 2024)

10% of Sales to Member States*	\$ 15,393.27
10% of Book Sales	268.93
20% of General Sales (less inventory)	2,366.42
85% of Licensing/Donations	1,436.93
<b>Earned Royalties</b>	<b>\$ 19,465.55</b>

*Royalties help pay for extra projects, out-of-pocket expenses, store inventory, sponsorships, workshops and travel.*

## 4TH QUARTER WEB TRAFFIC



**Search traffic** at end of year typically slows down;  
4th quarter 2024 shows 2.89M total impressions, and 28.2K clicks.

*Total impressions is how many times a user saw a link to your site in search results.*

*Total clicks is how many times a user clicked through to your site.*

### OTHER STATS:

**53K new users during the 4th quarter**

**Average session duration: about 1 minute**

#### Top pages:

1. HOME page
2. Bear Encounters - How to behave if you see a bear
3. The Cocaine Bear: What really happened in 1985
4. All about black bears.
5. Bear spray

**Popular Search Terms:** cocaine bear true story, how to use bear spray, how do bears hibernate

**REPORT OF THE HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT WORKING GROUP TO THE  
WILDLIFE RESOURCE POLICY COMMITTEE  
March 13, 2025**

Brian Wakeling  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

The Human Wildlife Conflict Working Group (HWCWG) met on Monday, March 10, 2025. About 35 people attended the meeting. Topics of discussion included:

- USDA APHIS Wildlife Services, like most federal agencies in the United States, was unable to attend and did not provide a briefing for the meeting.
- Bill Moritz with the Wildlife Management Institute provided a briefing on progress on testing bear resistant features, including doors and windows for houses.
- Dr. Julie Young provided a briefing from the Berryman Institute at Utah State University. She is now the director at Berryman and Dr. Nicki Frey is the editor of Human Wildlife Interactions journal. Human Wildlife Interactions is the journal that has served as an outlet for the peer-reviewed products developed by the Human Wildlife Conflict Working Group. Following the departure of the former director and editor, there was a backlog of papers for publication, but they are currently almost up to date.
  - The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies worked with Berryman to produce an update to the book entitled "Managing Cougars in North America." That book is in the printing queue currently and is anticipated to be out in 2025.
- Current products in development by the Human Wildlife Conflict Working Group include:
  - "Urban coyotes as a source of conflict with humans: an evaluation of common management practices" has been printed and will be distributed to member states and provinces shortly. This was originally approved by the Wildlife Resource Policy Committee in March 2023 and was subsequently submitted and underwent further peer review prior to publication. This will be available for download from Human Wildlife Interactions website for no charge beginning on May 1, 2025.
  - The previous two monographs on bear conflicts and deer conflicts have been downloaded over 3,200 times across multiple countries and continents. The deer paper has been downloaded 1,923 times and the bear paper has been downloaded 1,281 times as of March 1, 2025.
  - The Human Wildlife Conflict Working Group has formed a task force and developed an outline to begin work on evaluating practices to limit conflicts with wolves. These projects take time to develop, but clearly yield useful products.
  - The Human Wildlife Conflict Working Group is asking the Wildlife Resource Policy Committee for their approval of the manuscript on beaver conflict. As a reminder, this report was shared with the committee in September 2024 with a request for any review comments. We accepted comments through December 2024, and we incorporated reviews and provided a new draft via email to working group and committee members in February 2025. The Human Wildlife Conflict Working Group approved the draft for submission at our meeting on Monday. We need the committee's approval prior to submission. AFWA has given the Wildlife Resource Policy Committee to provide final approval of these documents so long

as they are not prescriptive in nature. The intent is to provide a balanced review of the methods available for managing beaver conflicts, but avoid advocating for one method over another.

- The HWCWG received an update submitted by Kate Malpeli with USGS. Kate had approached HWCWG to identify issues of priority and review of products associated with those wildlife conflicts that may be influenced by climate change. The first paper has been published entitled "A systematic review of the effects of climate variability and change on black and brown bear ecology and interactions with humans" in Biological Conservation (Kurth et al. 2024). Bryant White and I met with Kate and USGS team members virtually during fall 2024 to discuss future interests from the working group. The products from USGS are not working group products, and the working group simply provides ideas for investigation and review comments.
- The HWCWG concluded the meeting with a roundtable discussion of current issues. Conflicts seem to arise as a result of many species that were once quite rare yet are now very common and respond to anthropogenic attractants. There seems to be growing interest in addressing a best management practices regarding Canada geese.

The HWCWG continues to enjoy good attendance and positive feedback. We have good representation across all regional associations in attendance at each meeting.



## ASSOCIATION *of* FISH & WILDLIFE AGENCIES

### **Government Affairs Updates**

January – February 2025

#### **LEGISLATIVE UPDATES**

##### **Federal Budget and FY26 Appropriations**

Despite House and Senate appropriations leaders reporting that they are nearing an agreement on a top line FY25 budget number, it is nearly impossible to see a path for 12 appropriations bills to be drafted and approved before the current Continuing Resolution (CR) for funding the federal government expires on March 14, making a short-term or 1-year CR all but certain.

Therefore, House Republicans are finalizing the text of a “Clean” CR that would extend current government funding through September. House Speaker Johnson (R-LA) said the House will vote on a stopgap measure to keep the federal government funded as early as March 11. However, Democrats indicate they haven’t been consulted and prefer an alternative approach - a shorter-term CR to buy time for a deal on full-fledged appropriations bills with detailed, updated funding and policy prescriptions, and earmarks. If the CR manages to pass the House, the measure still needs to pass the Senate. Without a deal, we are looking at a federal government shutdown starting March 15.

Without clarity on the FY25 budget, it is still time to kick off the annual FY26 budget process, and while we do not yet have an initial offering from the President – which we don’t expect until April - the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies has released instructions for FY26 testimony ([available here](#)) with a deadline of **April 4**. Members have continued to emphasize the importance of their individual appropriations request portals for programmatic funding.

##### **Farm Bill Status and Fly-In**

The week of February 17, a handful of state agency directors and state agency program experts traveled to D.C. to discuss AFWA’s Farm Bill priorities with Congressional staff members. Over three days, we met with twenty-two offices in both the House and Senate as well as Agricultural Committee staff. In addition to sharing AFWA’s Farm Bill priorities, these meetings allowed for insight into some of the current events affecting agricultural conservation:

*Farm Bill Timeline:* A Farm Bill is not the top priority on Congress's lengthy to-do list at this time. And with Republicans holding control of both chambers until at least 2026, there is little time pressure for them to get a Farm Bill done quickly. Nevertheless, some congressional and committee staff we spoke with remain hopeful that a Farm Bill will get passed this year. Others said that 2026 is more realistic. If we do see a Farm Bill passed this year, with everything else Congress has on their slate, it would not likely be until near the end of the year.

*Inflation Reduction Act (IRA):* Offices on both sides of the aisle expressed concerns about paused IRA contracts. Additionally, we heard bipartisan support for including unspent IRA dollars into the conservation title's baseline, which would significantly enhance funding for a suite of private land conservation programs such as EQIP, CSP, ACEP, and RCPP.

### ***Voluntary Public Access Improvement Act ([H.R.1565](#) / [S.704](#)) Introduced***

On February 25, the *Voluntary Public Access Improvement Act* ([H.R.1565](#) / [S.704](#)) was introduced into both the House and Senate in bipartisan and bicameral fashion. The Act proposes increasing funding for the VPA-HIP program to \$150 million over the life of the Farm Bill (VPA-HIP was authorized at \$50 million in the 2018 Farm Bill). Introduction brings attention to this important program and puts pressure on the House and Senate Ag. Committees to fold this marker bill's language into Farm Bill text. AFWA appreciates Reps. Debbie Dingell (D-MI) and Dusty Johnson (R-SD) and Senators Steve Daines (R-MT), Michael Bennet (D-CO), and Roger Marshall (R-KS) for their leadership in co-sponsoring the legislation. Linked [here](#) is a press release from Rep. Dingell's office that includes a quote from AFWA President Judy Camuso, and linked [here](#) is AFWA's press release in support of the Act.

### ***Sporting Goods Excise Tax Modernization Act ([H.R. 1494](#)) Introduced***

[The Association and our partners applauded](#) the February 21 House introduction of the *Sporting Goods Excise Tax Modernization Act* ([H.R. 1494](#)), an AFWA priority which would close a significant gap in the collection of taxes for the Wildlife Restoration and Sport Fish Restoration Trust Funds. The bipartisan legislation was introduced by Representatives Panetta (D-CA) and Moore (R-UT) to make online marketplaces accountable for collection of the excise tax on archery and angling equipment sold directly to consumers from outside of the U.S. by online vendors.

The bill would follow through on the [recent recommendations from the Government Accountability Office](#) by making online marketplace facilitators accountable for the collection of excise taxes on these products. As far as a path forward, given the positive

score we expect from this bill, it is being eyed as a candidate for catching a ride on the final reconciliation bill. If not, we have included it for consideration in the Sportfish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund reauthorization discussed below.

### **Upcoming Reauthorization of the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund**

The excises taxes paid on angling equipment and the portion of the federal gasoline excise tax attributable to motorboats that are deposited into the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund (SFRBTF) must be reauthorized every five years and the current authorization expires at the end of FY26. AFWA has been working with the Angling and Boating Alliance, an informal coalition of organizations representing those who pay into the fund and those who administer and benefit from the fund, to develop legislation to reauthorize the SFRBTF. After a year of discussion, the Alliance has agreed on a platform and draft legislative text to reauthorize the fund. We are now sharing the platform with congressional offices, securing sponsors, and we expect the legislation will be introduced later this spring. Based on previous reauthorizations, the bill will eventually be incorporated into the larger surface transportation bill.

### ***Mississippi River Basin Fisheries Commission Act of 2025* ([H.R. 1514](#)) Introduced**

On February 24, Congressman Mike Ezell (R-MS) and Congressman Troy Carter (D-LA) introduced the Mississippi River Basin Fisheries Commission Act of 2025 to establish the Mississippi River Basin Fisheries Commission. The Mississippi River Basin Fishery Commission will serve as a basin-wide, collaborative, and science-driven body, that will work with federal agencies, state governments, and local stakeholders to tackle challenges such as aquatic invasive species, habitat degradation, and water quality concerns. Modelled on the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission, the Mississippi River Basin Fisheries Commission would be a federally funded entity that provides grants and resources for habitat restoration, fishery research, and invasive species mitigation. Basin state agencies and Indian tribes that manage MS River Basin fisheries are eligible to join, as well as the USGS, USFWS, USACE, and TVA.

### ***Combating Illicit Xylazine Act* ([H.R. 1266/S. 545](#)) Introduced**

On February 12, the AFWA-endorsed *Combating Illicit Xylazine Act* was introduced. Lead by Sens Cortez-Masto (D-NV), Grassley (R-IA) and 18 original cosponsors in the Senate and Reps Panetta (D-CA) and Pfluger (R-TX) with 35 original cosponsors in the House, we are glad to see strong bipartisan support for the bill, the text of which is identical to the [Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute](#) that nearly passed the Senate by Unanimous Consent at the end of last year. The bill would designate xylazine as a Schedule III drug under the Controlled Substances Act, but with critical exemptions for use by government

wildlife professionals, setting a precedent for exemptions that are much needed for other animal sedatives such as Ketamine.

### ***Nutria Eradication and Control Reauthorization Act of 2025* ([HR776](#)) Passes House**

On February 4, the AFWA-endorsed *Nutria Eradication and Control Reauthorization Act of 2025* from Reps. Harder (D-CA), Valadao (R-CA), and Garamendi (D-CA) passed the House under suspension of the rules by a vote of 361-56. The bill is a clean reauthorization through 2030 for the \$12M annually authorized for the Secretary of the Interior to provide financial assistance States based on the proportion of total area affected by nutria, to eradicate or control nutria and restore marshland, public and private wetlands, and agricultural lands damaged by nutria. While no Senate companion has been introduced, we are optimistic for enactment given the overwhelming support and early passage in the House.

### ***SHARKED Act* ([H.R. 207](#)) Passes House**

On January 21, the House passed the *Supporting the Health of Aquatic Systems through Research, Knowledge, and Enhanced Dialogue Act* ([SHARKED Act, H.R. 207](#)) with overwhelming support. This is the same bill that AFWA endorsed last year. The SHARKED Act seeks to address the issue of shark depredation, whereby a shark eats or damages a hooked fish before the angler can reel in their catch. Anecdotally, depredation is increasing, affecting angler satisfaction as well as posing risks to angler and shark safety.

The bill directs the Secretary of Commerce to establish a task force of fisheries managers and scientists to coordinate efforts to address shark depredation. The task force would develop research priorities and identify funding opportunities to better understand depredation and develop suitable interventions. We are hoping to see introduction of a Senate version this Spring.

### ***Fix our Forests Act* ([HR 8790](#)) Passes House**

On January 23 the House passed Reps. Peters' (D-CA) and Westermans' (R-AR) Fix Our Forests Act (FOFA) by a 279 to 141 vote. The stated purpose of the bill is to "*combat the country's wildfire crisis and help reduce the intensity of catastrophic wildfires, restore forest health, and build fire-safety defenses for communities in high-risk areas.*" The bill provides land managers with tools to streamline forest management projects while maintaining the integrity of the environmental review process. The bill strengthens the role of states, tribes, local government, collaborative groups, and other partners in forest management to leverage expertise, optimize investments, and maximize outcomes. It addresses restoration of key habitat and forest types including white oak and upland oak ecosystems. It also includes a provision to address an AFWA priority supported by the past three Administrations that clarifies a procedural requirement erroneously established in

*Cottonwood Law Center v. U.S. Forest Service* (9th Cir. 2015) and that has confused, delayed and prevented critical forest management for nearly a decade. This is often referred to as the "Cottonwood Fix".

While AFWA has not officially endorsed FOFA, based on the input from our Forestry Working Group, they believe it is a positive bill and recommend AFWA endorsement. Unless there are any concerns from states, we intend to make that recommendation to leadership. Please contact [Shane Behler](#) if you have any questions or concerns.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATES**

We are maintaining regular communication with our state agency members, federal agencies, congressional offices, and conservation partners to assess and document the ongoing effects and challenges associated with the implementation of Executive Orders especially those related to funding and staffing. As part of this effort, we are actively communicating with agency leadership and congress to raise awareness about the importance of these programs and the current and potential consequences of delays and disruptions associated with staffing cuts and funding delays.

### **CWD Listening Session Recap**

On January 16, oral comments were provided to USDA APHIS by AFWA, Tribes, wild deer interest groups, and captive breeders during their annual CWD partner and stakeholder listening session. AFWA's comments were provided by MAFWA Regional Health Coordinator, Tricia Fry. Our main recommendations were to:

- Move to a multiyear funding model for grants;
- Require a letter of support from the SFWA of jurisdiction for university grants;
- Emphasize support for research with an applied management focus; particularly on projects designed to address new introductions of CWD and reduce prevalence of the disease where it is known to exist and to decrease the spread;
- Engage partners in a process to better define grant priorities;
- Reevaluate the current prioritization being given to research on genetic breeding values.

We shared a formalized, annotated version of the oral comments presented by AFWA with the Federal DOI/USDA CWD Steering Committee, which includes all relevant federal agencies. We included a cover letter from AFWA Fish and Wildlife Health Committee Chair, Paul Johansen, inviting responses in hopes of creating a constructive dialogue to move



forward. Please [click here](#) to read our comments, which we encourage you to share as you see fit.

### **NOAA Speed Vessel Rule Withdrawal**

On January 16, the National Marine Fisheries Service [withdrew its proposed rule](#) to amend the North Atlantic Right Whale (NARW) vessel speed regulations intended to further reduce the likelihood of vessel strikes to endangered NARWs. First published back on August 1, 2022, the rule would have extended existing NARW vessel speed rule regulations to vessels greater than 35 ft in length, enlarged the boundaries and timing of seasonal speed zones, and introduced mandatory dynamic speed zones in areas where NARWs were known to be present outside of active seasonal zones. The proposed rule met with strong opposition in Congress and from many groups representing coastal and marine users (fishermen, recreational boaters, ports and marinas, etc.).

AFWA joined others in [expressing concerns about the proposed rule](#), including: the scientific methodology on which it was based, the enforceability of such regulations, and a failure to engage with state partners and key stakeholders, particularly recreational anglers, boaters, and coastal communities along the Atlantic coast. Since the proposed rule was published, AFWA has worked with partners including ASA and NMMA to advocate for development and adoption of technological solutions that could reduce the likelihood of vessel strikes prior to implementation of the rule. We will continue to monitor and remain engaged as new rules and policies regarding the NARW are developed.

### **Grizzly Bear ESA Decisions**

On January 15, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [announced a proposed rule to revise the ESA listing for grizzly bears as well as 12-month findings](#) for the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) and the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE).

Rather than recognizing the significant efforts to recover the population by state fish and wildlife agencies, and delist the grizzly as recovered in the current Distinct Population Segments (DPS), the Service's proposal designates a single DPS for a much broader area, across much of the lower 48 states, including areas likely to never see grizzly bear populations, and maintains their threatened status across all recovery zones.

The rule also incorporates a revised Section 4(d) rule that is intended to provide enhanced management flexibility. While enhanced management flexibility is certainly welcomed, it seems like awkward timing for a species that is arguably recovered in their core areas. The proposed 4(d) rule outlines additional tools for addressing human-bear conflicts. The proposed rule will be open for public comment for 60 days following publication in the

Federal Register. You can find details and documents regarding this announcement on the [project webpage](#).

In addition to this proposed rule, the Service denied petitions from Montana and Wyoming seeking to delist grizzly bears in the NCDE and GYE. AFWA anticipates this issue, and other recent ESA decisions will receive the attention of the incoming DOI and USFWS leadership once they are in place.

### **USFWS Injurious Species Listing**

On January 10, USFWS published a [final rule](#) combined with an interim rule listing multiple genera of salamanders as injurious wildlife due to their ability to carry the chytrid fungal pathogen *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* (BSal). This is important in order to protect native salamander species from the introduction and dissemination of this highly consequential pathogen.

USFWS has also published a [proposed rule](#) to add all species of freshwater mussels from two genera, Asian pond mussels (*Sinanodonta* species) and golden mussels (*Limnoperna* species), to the list of injurious mollusks. Additionally, the Service proposes to add marbled crayfish (*Procambarus virginalis*) to the list of injurious crustaceans. Listing these taxa as injurious as under 18 U.S.C. 42 (also known as a provision of the Lacey Act) will prohibit the importation of any live animal, larvae, viable egg, or hybrid of these species into the United States, as well as shipment between the continental United States, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, or any territory or possession of the United States, except as specifically authorized. Recall that in *U.S. Association of Reptile Keepers, Inc. v. Zinke*, the D.C. Circuit held that [18 U.S.C. § 42\(a\)\(1\)](#) does not prohibit transport of injurious wildlife between States within the continental United States.

### **Rotenone Re-registration Update**

In January, the EPA granted the registrant of rotenone, Central Life Sciences, another 90-day extension to start the 21-day inhalation study. The registrant is now due to provide its next status update on progress toward initiating study to the EPA on April 6, 2025. Meanwhile, AFWA is including funding for the study in its discussions with Appropriators. We are also engaging with EPA leadership to determine what, if anything, has changed regarding requirements, timelines, etc. since we last spoke with them in 2024.