

## International Relations Committee - Report

Meeting of September 23, 2025

Ryan Brown (Virginia), Co-chair

Celine Davis (British Colombia), Co-Chair

Meeting convened from 1:15 pm to 2:45 pm. There were 17 people in attendance.

**Work Plan:** (Deb Hahn): The coming months present key international meetings that offer valuable opportunities to shape the global conservation agenda and ensure that state, provincial, and territorial priorities are represented and heard.

- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Congress: October 9 – 15
- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD): October 20 - 24
- CITES Conference of the Parties (CoP)20: November 24 - December 5
- Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) CoP15: March 23 – 29, 2026
- CBD CoP17: October 19 – 30, 2026

**CITES Technical Work Group Update** (Buddy Baker (SEAFWA), Gordon Batcheller (NEAFWA), Carolyn Caldwell (MAFWA), Stewart Liley (WAFWA))

Every three years, CITES convenes a CoP. The AFWA CITES Technical Work Group started preparing for CoP20 early last year. Those preparations include working with the USFWS and other partners on potential species proposals; engaging with states, provinces and territories; responding to Federal Register Notices; and attending meetings. AFWA submitted a letter in response to the August Federal Register notice containing input on CoP20 agenda items. A summary of our current positions follows

The Association Supports U.S. CITES Proposals at CoP20:

Proposal 7: Transfer Guadalupe Fur Seal from Appendix I to Appendix II

Proposal 8: Remove extinct Caribbean Monk Seal from Appendix I

Proposal 17: Transfer Peregrine Falcon from Appendix I to Appendix II

Proposal 40: Amend annotation for American Ginseng

The Association's Top Species Listing Proposals and Issues:

Proposal 35: Listing *Anguilla* spp. in Appendix II (including American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*) in Appendix II (advanced by the European Union and Honduras): The Association opposes Proposal 35. The listing of American eel offers no conservation benefit and threatens well-managed, culturally significant fisheries while likely increasing illegal trade.

Instead of a listing, the Association supports the draft genus-wide resolution for *Anguilla* (Doc. 87). This resolution would strengthen cooperation and management without creating unnecessary administrative burdens. It is a more appropriate and effective way to address any management concerns, particularly in the Caribbean, where a listing would add administrative burden and little conservation value because of likely a low volume of trade in a small part of the species' range.

Proposal 25: Listing of *Crotalus lepidus* and *Crotalus ravus* in Appendix II and inclusion of the genera *Crotalus* and *Sistrurus* in Appendix II (advanced by Mexico and Bolivia): The Association

opposes Proposal 25. The species do not meet listing criteria.

Doc. 14: Enhancing the Work and Efficiency of the Convention: The Association acknowledges the long-standing concerns of CITES Parties, the Secretariat, and Observers regarding increasing workloads that are diluting the effectiveness of the Convention's implementation. To address this challenge, we support efforts to prioritize the workload of the CITES committees with a strong emphasis on the Convention's core mandate.

Docs. 15.1 & 15.2: The Role of CITES in Reducing Zoonotic Disease: The Association supports collaboration with health partners and improved info-sharing as these fall within CITES mandate (Doc. 15.1). However, we oppose Doc. 15.2 and a One Health resolution as the resolution goes beyond the mandate of the Convention.

Doc. 61: Rapid Movement of Wildlife Diagnostic Samples and Musical Instruments: The Association supports this work and the rapid movement of wildlife samples for conservation purposes, e.g., Black Bear hair samples.

Doc. 102: The 'Lookalike' Criterion: The Association agrees with the proponents of Doc. 102 regarding the use and misuse of the "lookalike" criterion. In the United States, we have examples where a CITES lookalike listing imparts no conservation value (e.g., bobcat, river otter) and look forward to participating in these discussions.

**USFWS International Affairs Update** (Bridget Fahey): The USFWS International Affairs is focused on the upcoming CITES CoP and improving permit implementation. Permitting improvements include a conservation-forward prioritization methodology, a user-friendly application wizard, and streamlined process steps to improve efficiency. They also continue to implement the CITES export program with support from the state fish and wildlife agencies. Next year, Canada will host the Trilateral Committee meeting. Working Tables are resuming technical discussions.

The USFWS continues to prepare for CITES CoP20. Out of 51 species listing proposals, they sponsored or co-sponsored 4 species listing proposals. There are a total of 114 working documents and over 150 items on the agenda. USFWS Director Brian Nesvik is the planned U.S. Head of Delegation. Delegation formation, logistics, and position development are underway with an AFWA representative included on the delegation. The USFWS published the 3rd Federal Register notice in August and is reviewing the comments received. The next Federal Register notice will be published in October/November. It will include tentative negotiating positions.

**IUCN: What it is and why it makes** (Shane Mahoney): The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is a membership Union uniquely composed of both government and civil society organizations. By harnessing the experience, resources and reach of its more than 1,400 Member organizations and the input of some 15,000 experts, IUCN has positioned itself as the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it. IUCN Member organizations set the direction of the Union's work, and global conservation efforts more broadly, every four years at the IUCN World Conservation Congress. IUCN has 7 Expert Commissions, which include thousands of experts from around the world who inform IUCN's knowledge and help produce its work. The IUCN Secretariat works to achieve the vision of the Union's membership. It includes around 1,000 staff in over 160 countries. IUCN's objectives are to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable. IUCN's policy work is essential to achieve its objectives and to help set conservation priorities and inform and influence international agreements.

Work themes include Biodiversity, Business, Finance & Economics, Climate Change, Freshwater and Water Security, Governance – Law & Rights, Nature-based Solutions, Ocean & Coasts, and Protected Areas & Land Use. To effectively engage these broad themes, IUCN's Commissions create Specialist Groups comprised of volunteer experts led by an SG Chair who is appointed to carry out long-term activities on behalf of the Commission including the Sustainable Use & Livelihoods Specialist Group.

Why does all this matter? IUCN provides global assessments and best practices that agencies can rely on, establishes internationally recognized standards (e.g., for species status, protected areas, conservation planning), connects agencies to a global community of peers, and shapes global agreements (CBD, CITES, climate frameworks) that cascade down to subnational levels.

Even though IUCN is global, its tools and standards cascade down to the local level. It can provide legitimacy and credibility to state/provincial conservation work, help agencies align with national and international goals, offer practical guidance and global knowledge that make state-level management more effective, and ensure that local conservation successes add up to global impact — and are recognized as such.

**IUCN Motions** (Deb Hahn): The IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC) will be held from October 9 to 15. Critical actions before and during the WCC are voting for councilors, officers, Commission chairs, and motions. We know IUCN motions can be used to impact decisions in other forums. Additionally, they guide IUCN programing and policy. AFWA engaged in online discussions and voted electronically on 97 motions. All 97 motions were approved including a motion to review the IUCN Sustainable Use Policy. This underscores the importance of early engagement and ensuring accurate and beneficial text as it is highly unlikely that a motion will be voted down. There are 40 additional motions that are moving to the WCC for debate and vote. Among those, the following is a short list that are of interest to AFWA.

**Motion 6:** Promoting the model of regional or sub-national protected natural areas to achieve the global target of 30% protected and conserved areas by 2030

**Motion 8:** Conservation and sustainable management of rangelands and pastoralism

**Motion 94:** Recognizing the importance of Indigenous [and local] languages, knowledge and cultural heritage in biodiversity conservation

**Motion 108:** Development of IUCN guidelines to effectively control the commercial pet trade in terrestrial wildlife

**Motion 113:** Strengthening planning for preserving biodiversity through the use of Longevity Conservation approaches

**Motion 136:** Addressing the Direct Exploitation of Wild Species

#### **Action Items / Resolutions / Motions**

- Engage the Committee and subject matter experts in IUCN and CITES issues as needed

**OTHER ITEMS MENTIONED:**

**NEW OPPORTUNITIES IDENTIFIED:**

Submitted by Ryan Brown

Committee Member Attendees:

Ryan Brown, Virginia Department of Wildlife Conservation

Gordon Batcheller, NEAFWA CITES Representative

Laura Conlee, Missouri Department of Conservation

Joe Goergen, Conservation Force

Stewart Liley, NM Game and Fish Department, WAFWA CITES Representative

Christopher Tymeson, Safari Club International

Non-Committee Members Attendees:

Jim Heffelfinger, Arizona Game and Fish Department

Alan Cain, Texas Parks & Wildlife

Greg McClinchey, Great Lakes Fisheries Commission

Keely Hopkins, Safari Club International

George Greene, Canadian Wildlife Federation

Bridget Fahey, USFWS

Hannah Griscom, Arizona Game and Fish Department

Jane Graham, Great Lakes Fishery Commission

Shane Mahoney, Conservation Visions

Patricia Dwyer, Canadian Wildlife Federation

# TIMELINE

