

Engagement & Connection WORKING GROUP

Chair: David Buggs (TX)

Vice Chair: TBD

Monday, September 22, 2025

1:15pm – 3:45pm

Attendees = 35

Agenda

- Call to order, introductions, and review of agenda – David Buggs (TX)
 - Round robin intro- name/title/organization
- **Revisiting the Working Group Name and Charge** (Suggested language and actions) - Patty Allen (AFWA), David Buggs (TX)
 - Discussion on proposed **updated charge**: To inspire, guide, and support the AFWA member organizations in embracing the richness of various lived experiences and perspectives, and supporting those organizations in their efforts to eliminate barriers, develop broad and meaningful relationships, **and increase access and connection with** the broader conservation community.

Goals

- Assist our agencies to develop a foundational understanding of the terms accessible and engagement.
- Be a resource for agencies that are striving to create a more broad-minded and engaging workforce.
- Be a resource for agencies to help them develop meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships with myriad individuals and groups that have been overlooked in the natural resource field. **Broaden the spectrum of partners and professional participants, with AFWA member organizations.**

Objectives

- Create an AEC (Access, Engagement, Connected) resource library with contacts, books, webinars, TED talks, training resources, etc., that will be available for all member agencies.
 - Provide training opportunities on how to create a welcoming environment.
 - Provide training opportunities in community engagement.
 - Share best encompassing practices among our agencies. Acknowledge and celebrate our successes.
 - Be a supportive and confidential listening ear for employees that are striving to work toward achieving their agency access and engagement goals.
 - Approved by group in attendance.
- **Coffee Talks: Review** - Taniya Bethke (CHASS)
 - Review of past coffee talks: started with asking and trying to meet the needs of this group; graduated to spotlighting the work in action and how to do this work on the ground. The coffee talks were suspended after the cancellation of the MSCG that was supporting this work.
 - Three outcomes we're aiming at in 2026
 - Equipping agencies with public engagement strategies for decision making (human dimensions)

- Equipping outreach and engagement staff with partnership development tools and processes
 - Increasing future funding
- Upcoming skills development options and possibilities:
 - Workshops, webinars, partnerships with MAT to help with this skills development focus
 - What is the preferred delivery mechanism for folks in the meeting? [discussion]
 - Loved the coffee talk series → but there's a hesitancy with the current climate (assuming no place is completely safe)
 - There's still a big job to do → showing that the state agencies are there to make the public's life better; how do we engage the public to become relevant to them.
 - Start focusing on partner development and customer service → safe area to work in and get important work done that addresses the goals and objectives of this working group.
 - Platforms: webinars that require some work for the attendees (similar to a MAT Webinar); look at partnering with MAT.
 - Partnerships are good to focus on; partners can say things that we may not be able to say.
- **Wildlife Viewing discussion - Shelly Plante**
 - How to engage with wildlife viewers - and why it matters for agency relevancy
 - Research: 2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation [\[link to report\]](#)
 - Research: National and Regional Results of the Wildlife Viewer Survey- Enhancing Relevancy and Engaging Support from a Broader Constituency [\[link to report\]](#)
 - Wildlife Viewing Activities: feeding wild birds, visiting parks, photography, observing, taking trips/outings, feeding wildlife, maintaining plantings/natural areas.
 - 90% of survey respondents consider themselves 'beginners' with wildlife viewing (more general user). Top items viewers liked were birds (79%), big game (68%), marine life
 - In the past 20 yrs, the number of wildlife-related recreationists have almost doubled; many more are now viewing wildlife only; supporting wildlife viewers supports almost all hunters and anglers too.
 - Important takeaways from survey:
 - Viewers growing in number & potential influence
 - Viewers difficult for agencies to reach
 - Previous lack of information on viewers' thoughts, preferences, behaviors
 - Better serve & communicate with viewers & other underserved groups
 - Connect viewers to mechanisms to contribute financially
 - Top preferred agency support for viewing
 - More info on state wildlife
 - More info about where to see wildlife
 - Access to more places to view wildlife.
 - Preferred methods of communication:
 - Website (50%)
 - Printed materials (49%)
 - Email (46%)

- Facebook (39%)
 - Conservation behaviors
 - Clean up trash or litter
 - Purchase environmentally friendly product
 - Willing to purchase tangible products; conservation lottery tickets, donations, conservation license plate.
 - Wildlife Viewer Survey resulted in 5 recommendations
 - developing programs for and engage with wildlife viewers
 - Broaden constituency to wildlife viewers
 - Develop opportunities for viewers to financially support agencies
 - Support agencies in implementing results
 - Conduct future research
- 2026 Wildlife Viewing and Nature Tourism Academy- Registration OPEN
 - Seattle, WA, February 16-20, 2026
 - <https://www.wvntacademy.com>
- What happens if we increase non-traditional engagement?
 - Non-traditional constituents become actively involved in wildlife conservation with their state wildlife agency & building bridges
 - Added revenue for the Department
 - Increase ability to expand Wildlife Viewing opportunities and engagement
 - Traditional constituents benefit because:
 - No increase in wait times for draw or reduce odds
 - No added pressure on the resources
 - Most hunters/anglers are also viewers, so they benefit from new programs as well
- Virginia has a “Restore the WILD” program – a membership program that supports conservation (<https://dwr.virginia.gov/restore-the-wild/>)
- Florida- online store to support conservation (in partnership with their foundation)
- What does this all mean?
 - Engaging nonconsumptive viewers in supporting agencies financially will require re-thinking current funding models and staffing decisions
 - Wildlife viewer-specific funding mechanisms could provide a way to agencies to increase their connection with viewers, particularly nonconsumptive viewers
 - Use funds for species conservation or further wildlife viewing opportunities
 - Look for models that make sense to this constituency
 - Don’t reinvent the wheel- what have other states done successfully to tap into this opportunity?
 - Let’s pursue opportunities for wildlife viewers to support conservation. What would that look like?
- **Discussion**
 - TX: Having ‘Partners’ partner with other ‘Partners’ to get work done; have the state agency help coordinate that effort and bring everyone together in the same room.
 - Creation of a partner list; state agency can help connect groups to partners.
 - [Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model](#) (ORAM) is a good tool to map out your existing programs and where partners can plug in.
- **Vice Chair nominations** - David Buggs, Patty Allen
 - Patty (AFWA) will be emailing you soliciting nominations for a Vice-Chair.

- **Needs and deeds** (When it comes to Broadening Engagement, what is going well for your agency or your region and what do you need help with)
 - NE- looking for a good registration platform
 - Kalkomey, eventbrite, Microsoft 365, etc were a few suggestions.
 - TX- wildlife viewing was recently added to the Texas R3 plan
 - TX- R3 women and R3 Veterans program→ this is an internal program for staff (ie. HR staff, IT staff, etc.) to get them exposed to hunting and fishing; helps build staff support; staff understand why what we do is important
 - Louisiana- building out a volunteer program; funding has become an issue.
 - Discussion- conservation plates, online stores, etc have become a source of income to help fund these programs.
- **WORKSHOP:** Are we asking the right questions within our agencies' strategies and across the conservation landscape to support the future of Natural Resource Conservation?
 - Please come to our workshop tomorrow @1:15pm.

Adjourn