



ASSOCIATION of
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES

ENERGY & WILDLIFE POLICY COMMITTEE

Chair: Clay Crowder (AZ)

Vice-Chair: Vacant

1 April 2026

3:30 pm – 5:30 pm

Pierce B (Lobby Lvl, T401)

91st North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference
Columbus, OH

Committee Charge: The energy and wildlife policy committee is focused on understanding and ameliorating the effects of energy development and generation in North America and its impacts on fish and wildlife resources and their landscape habitats at the state, province, territory, region, and international levels.

Agenda

3:30 pm Call to Order / Approval of Minutes from September 2025 AFWA Annual Meeting
Clay Crowder, AZGF

- September 2025 minutes approved (motion + second).
- Strong attendance across state, federal, NGO, and industry partners.

3:35 Ohio Spotlight
Becky Crowe, OH DNR & Lauren Devin, Savion

Regulatory Context (ODNR)

- Ohio regulates solar ≥ 50 MW through the Ohio Power Siting Board (OPSB).
- Projects < 50 MW largely unregulated → variability in outcomes.
- Significant solar expansion since ~2021:
 - 34 operational/under construction; 13 additional approved.
- SB 52 gives counties the authority to restrict or block wind and solar development, shifting key siting decisions from the state to the local level.

State Guidelines & Approach

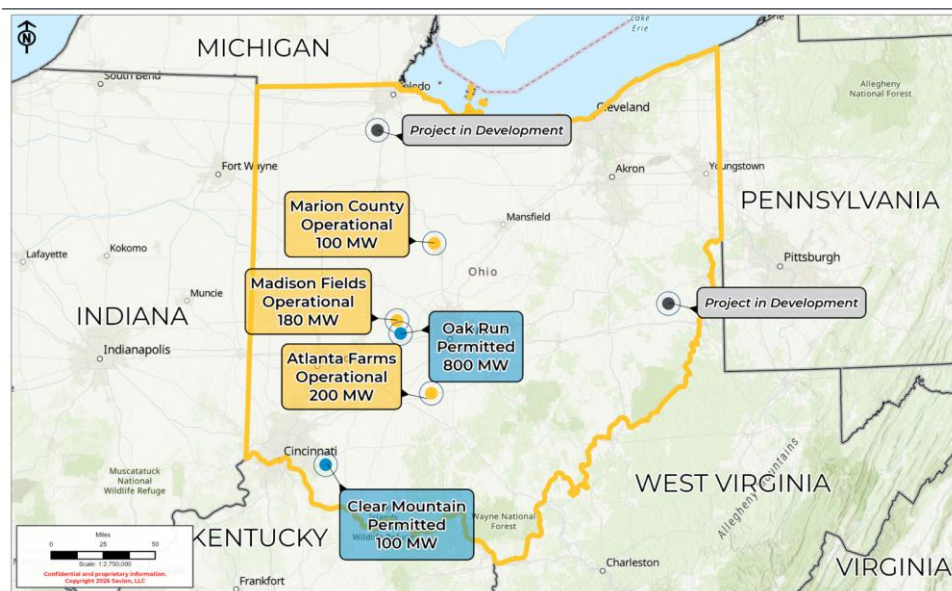
- ODNR developed voluntary solar siting recommendations (2021), including:
 - ~70% of sites planted with pollinator-friendly vegetation
 - Stream/wetland buffers (120–300 ft depending on classification)
 - Emphasis on soil health, biodiversity, and water protection
- Early engagement: ODNR to participate in first 60 days of application review
- Strong multi-partner collaboration (EPA, NRCS, NGOs, etc.)

Industry Perspective and Collaborative Projects (Savion)

- Rapidly evolving development environment:
 - Changing regulations
 - Increasing public opposition
- Shift toward “land stewardship” as a core business model

Key Case Studies

1. Oak Run (800 MW)
 - Agrivoltaics + stream restoration (2,500 ft re-meander, floodplain reconnection)
 - Focus on water quality + watershed/wetland benefits
 - Implementation of ODNR Solar Guidelines
 2. Clear Mountain (100 MW)
 - Negotiated reduced setbacks with offsetting restoration + deed restriction
 - Long-term land protection (limits future development post-decommissioning)
 3. Madison Fields (Operational)
 - Flagship dual-use + collaboration model
 - Initiatives:
 - Prairie restoration (local genotype seed collection)
 - Apiaries + bird monitoring
 - Agrivoltaics (Ohio State partnership)
 - Continued farmer engagement (cropping + grazing)
- Movement toward multi-use landscapes (energy + agriculture + habitat)
 - Early collaboration improves outcomes
 - Projects increasingly require creative, site-specific solutions
 - Stewardship practices can help address public opposition



Discussion Highlights

- Public acceptance remains a major challenge
 - Agrivoltaics and continued farming seen as key mitigation

- Economic justification is still required
 - Stewardship must demonstrate value (permitting advantage, investor acceptance)
- Public opposition:
 - Increasing but often not highly visible (“quiet opposition”)
- Strategy for acceptance:
 - Maintain agricultural productivity
 - Demonstrate co-benefits (habitat, water, soil)
- Clear shift toward:
 - Multi-use landscapes as standard expectation
- Design constraints
 - Equipment spacing, panel layout influence feasibility of dual-use
- Growing recognition that:
 - These practices are becoming expected in difficult permitting environments

3:55 Wind Wildlife Working Group Update
 Laura Zebehazi, Texas Parks and Wildlife

- Established (2019) to improve:
 - Collaboration across agencies, industry, NGOs
 - Information sharing on regulatory/non-regulatory tools
 - Science on wind-wildlife interactions

Recent Focus Areas

- Changing federal/state regulatory landscape
- Broader energy trends (e.g., data centers, grid demand)
- State adaptation to reduced federal capacity
- Incidental take permitting discussions
- Mitigation strategies
- Transmission emerging as major issue:
 - Example: 765 kV lines in Ohio
- Need for:
 - Clear expectations on wildlife impacts
 - Better coordination across jurisdictions

Products/Accomplishments

- State regulatory tracking
- Wind communication framework (“early and often” engagement model)

Upcoming

- REWI listening session (stakeholder input)
- TNC renewable siting tool expansion (national scale)

Discussion

- Increasing need for:
 - States to fill gaps in coordination and guidance
 - Better alignment with emerging energy demands (e.g., data centers)
- Recognition that wind cannot be considered in isolation from:
 - Broader energy infrastructure and other stressors

4:10 Solar Wildlife Working Group Update
Melissa Marinovich, Nebraska Game and Parks

- Continues focus on:
 - Solar siting practices
 - Functional uplift within solar footprints
 - Implementation of new guidelines (e.g., NUSSWG); undergoing technical editing, then approval process; expected finalization by AFWA at Fall Business Meeting

4:25 Committee Priorities Discussion
Clay Crowder, AZGFD; ALL

Core Question: How should EWPC prioritize work over next 1–3 years?

- Strong agreement to expand from wind/solar to “all energy” framework

Expand Beyond Wind & Solar

- Strong consensus to move toward “all energy” framework
- Topics identified:
 - Oil & gas
 - Critical minerals
 - Nuclear (including modular)
 - Transmission infrastructure
 - Energy storage

Data Centers as Emerging Driver

- Major new energy demand driver
- Need to:
 - Understand ecological footprint
 - Anticipate siting conflicts
 - Engage early in planning

Transmission

- Increasing pressure point:
 - Wildlife impacts
 - Permitting complexity
 - Legal challenges

Species Impacts from Infrastructure

- Examples:
 - Raven expansion (NV) affecting sensitive species
 - Eastern wind expansion: Waterfowl concerns (AR)
- Highlights need to address:
 - Indirect and system-level impacts

Committee Considerations:

Diversification = Relevance

- Committee risks becoming too narrow
- Opportunity to:

- Apply lessons from wind/solar to other sectors
- Stay aligned with evolving energy landscape

Relationships Are the Core Value

- Most impactful contribution:
 - Convening partners
 - Building trust across sectors, helps:
 - Identify shared solutions
 - Reduce conflict early

Need for Broader Engagement

- Expand participation:
 - APLIC, ACP, EPRI, others?
- Improve cross-sector dialogue

Cumulative Impacts & Systems Thinking

- Increasing need to address:
 - Full energy lifecycle
 - Landscape-scale impacts
 - Cross-resource interactions (e.g., water + minerals)

Potential New Focus Areas

- Geothermal (WAFWA subgroup)
- Critical minerals
- Transmission & storage
- Joint work with water/fish committees

4:45 Federal Agency and Partner Updates

USGS (handouts, ppt slide)

- Congressional appropriations to the Species Management Research Program and Land Management Research Program were reduced by \$4M from FY25
- FY26 Q1–Q2 Research Highlights
 - Oil & Gas: mule deer trends, contaminant pathways, water & proppants
 - Bats/Birds and Wind: national bat-fatality modeling, turbine decommissioning trends, eagle flight models
 - Hydropower: fish passage, Atlantic sturgeon use of harbor; hydropeaking effects on riparian communities
 - Solar/Floating PV: microclimate shifts, plant responses, bird-risk framework

USFWS

- Federal role perceived as shifting/reduced
- Working to expedite the permitting process
- All grants/coop agreements require review by DOI

REWI

- Continues to provide actionable science and data synthesis to inform responsible renewable energy development.

- Expanding focus on solar–wildlife research, with priority gaps identified through structured, multi-stakeholder processes.
- Advancing large-scale monitoring and datasets (AWWIC) to improve understanding of bird and bat impacts and variability.
- Supporting development and evaluation of impact minimization technologies (e.g., curtailment, deterrents, blade visibility).
- Engaging partners through listening sessions and collaborative planning to guide future wind–wildlife research priorities.

TCF

- State fish and wildlife agencies are critical, trusted experts in shaping effective mitigation outcomes.
- Demonstrates real-world mitigation success through large-scale habitat conservation and restoration tied to energy infrastructure.
- Example (SunZia Transmission Line):
- Habitat conversion (1,100 acres to waterfowl habitat, NM)
- Permanent conservation (8,600 acres desert habitat, AZ)
- Highlights importance of early coordination and applying agency recommendations to achieve durable conservation outcomes.

5:15

State and Provincial Roundtable

One representative per state agency highlights a couple of legislative and policy initiatives, issues, or success stories. Non-state participants, please introduce self.

- Reported local opposition to energy development, transmission as a cross-cutting challenge, and species-specific concerns. Reflect a more complex energy landscape and states' increasingly important role in coordination and managing impacts to fish and wildlife.

5:30

Wrap-up and Adjourn

AFWA Energy and Wildlife Policy
Committee, 1 April 2026

