



ASSOCIATION of
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES

ENGAGEMENT & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Chair: Amanda Wuestefeld (IN)

Vice-Chair: Karina Stonesifer (MD)

Thursday, September 17, 2026

1:15pm – 3:15pm

116TH ASSOCIATION OF FISH & WILDLIFE AGENCIES ANNUAL MEETING
LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA

Agenda

Introductions and Welcome- *Amanda Wuestefeld (IN), Karina Stonesifer (MD)* – 5 minutes

- Round robin introductions

[Collaboration on CWD Communications](#) - *Ellen Haynes (SEAFWA Regional Wildlife Health Coordinator)* – 5 minutes

- SEAFWA Cervid Health Group
 - Formed in 2024; meet monthly since 2025
 - Includes participation from SEAFWA directors, wildlife resource committee, cervid WG, wildlife health technical committee, social science committee R3 committee
 - Areas of expertise: wildlife health, deer management, communication/marketing....
 - Conversations about CWD communication challenges; ID need for consistent regional messaging
 - Two documents: ‘Whys’ behind CWD management actions; List of commonly circulating CWD myths (truth, scientific support, references for more information)
 - Next steps for regional messaging:
 - Content created
 - Collaboration with communication and marketing experts to create effective messaging
 - Conduct focus groups
 - Conduct social science research
 - Work with other regional and national CWD communication efforts

- **ASK: help with crafting messages**
 - Design a communication strategy that is effective for multiple audiences; effectively address misinformation; rebuild trust in state agencies
 - Identify who can help from the EEC
 - Identify and share regional resources
- Contact information: ellen.haynes@uga.edu

Presentation and facilitated discussion – *Ashely Smith (Minority Alliance)* – 60 minutes
[From Awareness to Action: The UpCo Model for Strengthening Agency-Community Partnerships](#)

Panelists include:

- Courtney LaCivita, Pennsylvania Game Commission
 - Marion Baker, Georgia DNR
 - Richard von Furstenberg, NC State University
 - Ashley Smith, Minority Outdoor Alliance
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- Wildlife agencies face an urgent ‘relevancy’ challenge
 - Communities are more diverse than ever; engagement is challenging
 - Inclusion maximizes relevancy
 - THE Broad Vision: GOALS 1- assess and enhance the cultural competency of agencies, 2- build unity between communities and their state agencies
 - Getting a baseline- working with three state agencies (GA, MA, PA) → assess agency cultural competence by measuring 1) cultural awareness, 2) desire, 3) skills, 4) encounters.
 - Agency focus group insights:
 - Enthusiasm and momentum
 - Broad recognition ‘outdoors are for everyone’
 - Growth areas: women, youth, urban residents, Spanish speakers, LGBTQ+, disabled
 - Creative entry points: urban fishing, boating safety, pollinator gardens, festivals
 - Stacking points
 - Limited staff time/capacity
 - Uncertainty about how to partner with diverse orgs
 - Admitted inexperience → ‘we need someone to tell us what we’re doing wrong.’
 - Generally- state agencies strongly agree this is important but don’t think they are doing it effectively
 - Reason to do this survey answers- serve more diverse audience and for increased state agency relevancy
 - Largest barriers include- lack of info on diverse constituencies, unsure where to start
 - The path forward: building agency capacity

- Recognize opportunity
 - Identify challenges
 - Build capacity
 - Find bridge-builders
 - Achieve mutual goals
- Going from “Stuck” to Solutions
 - PA- focused on hands-on skills
 - Key takeaways: moved staff from ‘authority’ to ‘neighbors’
 - GA- focused on multigenerational trust
 - Key takeaways -building trust with community partners ahead of the event was critical and valuable;
 - MA- fishing, painting, and crafting
 - Key takeaways -variety of activities supports whole-family engagement
- Key components of the Bridge- Builder Model [the moment the Agency become a community builder]
 - Component 1: trusted bridge builder- agencies build on the social capital of groups like MOA
 - Component 2: cultural shift- making events feel less ‘governmenty’
- Redefine success:
 - Move beyond the license
 - Consider intergenerational ripples
 - Practical skill acquisition (hands-on skill building; moving participants from passive observers to confident outdoors people)
 - Formalizing relationships (repeated encounters, not just one offs; example recommendations: establish permanent community advisory committee)
- Implications for Agency Practitioners
 - Overcoming institutional paralysis
 - Social Capital Gap
 - The Perception Barrier
 - Outdated Success Metrics
- Toolkit Recommendations: strategic framework for action
- Panel discussion:
 - Look at actual needs and wants...not assumed needs and wants. Bring the people to the table prior to any event
 - What do you want to be counted (beyond license sales):
 - Increased awareness; increased support for a program or agency; increase skill level
 - Is there a way to put a value on increased awareness, increased confidence, etc. (ecosystem services) that is measurable/reportable
 - Volunteerism:

- Extremely important for state agencies; needed to run many of the state FW agency programs (ex. Hunter education, mentored hunts, etc.)
- Agency education centers and shooting ranges are dependent on volunteers
- There's a sense of accomplishment when an agency works with you as a volunteer

Key Findings from the 2025 National Participation Tracker- *Kristy Griffith (NORC) and Dan Malato (NORC) – 10 minutes*

- National Participation Tracker = a new survey conducted by NORC which aims to provide
 - More frequent trend estimates
 - New, more detailed data
 - Valuable takeaways for practitioners
- Compliments the National Survey by providing more frequent participation estimates
- Trackers findings can support recruitment, retention and reactivation efforts
- Many Tracker measures can be trended with National Survey estimates
- The National Participation Tracker also provides new estimates across a range of topics
- This survey does not track expenditures, just participation
- Learn more at <https://go.norc.org/outdoor-tracker>

Roundtable/ Report Outs (as time allows)

- Joint WG- reviewed materials of a SWAP comms plan and state SWAP fact sheets; strong desire to get things done; working on identifying the priority audience and priorities products to meet the needs of this group.
- WVNT WG- announcement of the 2028 WVNT Academy at NCTC; had presentation on non-traditional outreach and lessons learned with outreach events; have a WVNT webinar series coming up this Fall/Winter;
- Education WG- presentations on bear education; BearWise; identified topics for possible future webinars
- Engagement & Connections WG- Ty is the new chair as David Buggs has retired; started to identify what priorities this WG should work on; update on the Dashboard; use of AI in the arena; what are we not talking about that we need to talk about
- Outreach & Marketing WG- the current phase in deploying the Relevancy Communication toolkit in 4 new pilot states is having similar (positive) results as with previous phases of this project.
- Workshops:
 - 1) AI Workshop- created several scenarios for people to work through; how to use AI for problem solving and thinking outside the box; how to use AI to do conservation efficiently.

- 2) Succession Planning- almost twice as many people attended the workshop than registered for it. Shows the importance of this work and how we are trying to meet the needs.

Wrap-up & Adjourn

- One of the biggest concerns at the Director level that is of note for this committee is a concern around social media.
 - We may be approached to tackle the subject in the future.