



Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

**Private Lands Working Group
&
Public Lands Working Group**

Annual Report

**Manhattan, Kansas
May 6 - 9, 2012**

Respectfully submitted by:

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Attendance

State agency representatives for private and public lands from Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, and South Dakota were present at the meeting (please see attached attendance list). Agency representatives from Indiana and Wisconsin were unable to attend. Kansas staff and the members of the two working groups thank the Directors for their continued support in allowing staff to attend these meetings.

Executive Summary

The 21ST annual meeting of the Midwest Private Lands Working Group and the annual meeting of the Midwest Public Lands Working Group convened in Manhattan, Kansas on May 6-9, 2012. The Private Lands Working Group meeting covered the following topics: Eastern Tallgrass Prairie Big Rivers LCC research recommendations, 2012 Farm Bill overview and discussion, wetland determination compliance, tying crop insurance to conservation compliance, and FY2013 budget recommendations. The Public Lands Working Group meeting covered the following topics: PF Habitat Share Program in NE, lead shot – management and education, AFWA Management Assistance Team, new technologies, applications and strategies for public lands management, Other Power Driven Mobility Devices (OPDMD) and ADA requirements, results from the allowable use survey, surveys on public lands, and FY2013 budget priorities.

Private and Public Lands Working Group attendees participated in a joint field tour highlighting land management within the Flint Hills. The tour included stops at private properties for a review of the KS Walk-In Hunting Access (WIHA) program and private land habitat work. A tour of the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve was also completed with discussion on patch burn grazing management for grasslands.

The business meetings on Wednesday morning focused on the discussion and development of action and informational items for the MAFWA directors' consideration. Those action and informational items are listed below.

Directors Action Items – Private Lands Working Group

ISSUE: Wetland Determination Compliance – Off-Site Wetland Identification

The working group discussed potential issues with the NRCS development of a more standardized approach to Swampbuster procedures throughout the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) states of Minnesota, Iowa, South Dakota and North Dakota. Primary concern was centered around the potential exclusion of National Wetland Inventory (NWI) maps as a central component of wetland identification, with too much emphasis being placed on Farm Service Agency (FSA) imagery. FSA crop compliance photography, being gathered primarily later in the summer, has the potential to miss a significant number of temporary and seasonal wetlands. This would be particularly true in the more westerly portions of the PPR should FSA crop

compliance photography be used as the sole source of imagery in an off-site wetland assessment.

ACTION: No further action is required. Due to the time sensitive nature of this issue, the draft letter was reviewed and approved by the Midwest Executive Committee on May 15, 2012. The letter was sent to the Chief of NRCS on behalf of MAFWA to promote the inclusion of NWI maps as a central component of any off-site methods developed with the new standardized approach to wetland identification. **(Letter included as Appendix 3a)**

Lead: Kevin Kading - NDGF

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Directors Action Items – Public Lands Working Group

None

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Director Informational Items – Private Lands Working Group

ISSUE: Tying Crop Insurance to Conservation Compliance

The Senate Ag committee's draft 2012 Farm Bill proposes to eliminate most USDA subsidies and replace them with federal crop insurance. Federal crop insurance is the only USDA program that is not subject to conservation compliance. The working group discussed the many negative natural resource implications should Congress choose to not re-couple eligibility for federally subsidized crop insurance to all conservation compliance provisions in the bill.

ACTION: The working group requests that the Directors review the short briefing on the importance of tying conservation compliance to crop insurance within the 2012 Farm Bill and, with every opportunity, share this information with congressional delegates. The working group feels that the importance of this issue cannot be oversold. **(Briefing included as Appendix 3b)**

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ISSUE: Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers LCC – Research Recommendations

The working group discussed potential research topics for the Eastern Tallgrass and Big Rivers LCC at their request. The list developed by the Midwest Private Lands working group was given to and discussed with the LCC. Their committee chose to pursue two of the human dimensions studies the working group put forward. We will be working with the LCC to develop projects which assess motivators for landowners/producers to participate in and maintain wildlife

beneficial conservation programs and sustainable agricultural practices, relating these issues to their focus on sedimentation and nutrient loading.

ACTION: No action for the Directors at this time.

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Director Informational Items – Public Lands Working Group

ISSUE: Threat of Wildlife Disease and Invasive Species

The committee is concerned about the loss of federal funds to monitor wildlife diseases, primarily CWD, and invasive species. We support any recommendations for requests to establish or to continue funding since wildlife diseases can pose a significant health and safety issue to public land users. The occurrence and expansion of wildlife diseases and invasive species continues to be a concern.

ACTION: The committee recommends the Midwest Directors encourage requests to support federal funding to monitor spread of wildlife diseases and invasive species. This federal funding is very important to state programs.

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ISSUE: Prescribed Fire Training

The perennial topic of prescribed training requirements generated discussion among member states. Most states in the Midwest manage land for Federal agencies such as the US Army Corps of Engineers, US Bureau of Reclamation, US Fish and Wildlife Service and perhaps several others. There appears to be a trend for federal agencies to force state partners to adopt federal prescribed burn training guidelines. States do not have the time or resources to keep up with the constantly changing training requirement resulting in less fire on the ground. Burning is a grassland management tool that is used by resource managers for a number of reasons including noxious weed control, invasive species management, or to keep native prairie ecosystems diverse and vigorous. The various states in the Midwest have traditionally adopted their own respective prescribed burn training guidelines. While these guidelines may vary somewhat from state to state, there is at least a minimum standard set to help ensure the safety of personnel and property. Prescribed burning produces results in a native prairie ecosystem that no other management tool alone can produce including grazing or haying.

ACTION: It is vitally important to keep prescribed fire as a tool for managing our landscape. The committee urges the Midwest Directors work with our federal partners to limit mandatory training and accept each state's fire training qualifications. It becomes harder and harder for states to conduct prescribed burning when they have to follow federal standards.

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ISSUE: Attendance at Public Lands Working Group Meeting

Although all but two states were represented at this year's committee meeting, the committee continues to encourage Director support for one representative from each state to attend, at a minimum. The committee understands that all states are facing budget issues but feels the representation from each state is critical to the optimal functioning of this group.

ACTION: The committee encourages the Midwest Directors to annually send representatives for both public and private lands.

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ISSUE: Mineral Exploration

Oil and gas exploration and production in the Midwest has expanded rapidly in the last few years, including requests to obtain mineral rights on public lands. Midwest states need to be proactive in identifying mineral rights ownership and existing leases on their public lands. The impacts of this exploration and development on wildlife management areas are not clearly understood and need to be better defined. They may have impacts on wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities, as well as Federal Aid implications depending on the funds used to acquire the properties.

ACTION: No action required.

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ISSUE: Budgets

A common theme throughout the Midwest was budget reductions, including land acquisition funding, and loss of FTE positions. The committee recognizes that budget decisions are difficult and that there are many variables that impact decision making. The committee supports the Midwest Directors to encourage land acquisition funding and FTE positions that are dedicated to providing public access, wildlife recreational opportunities, and wildlife area management.

ACTION: No action required.

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ISSUE: Compatible Uses on Wildlife Management Areas (Survey results)

The committee again extensively discussed compatible use issues. There is a constant public demand to use state wildlife lands for purposes that are not compatible with the primary purpose and funding sources of the property. A matrix identifying activities and status for each state was developed. The first top ten was identified and listed by state. (Appendix 1)

As a direct outcome of the 2010 Public Lands Committee meeting, an Allowable Use Survey was developed and deployed among committee members to assess how each state deals with the “top 12” public use issues identified by the committee. The past two years survey topics included the following:

2011

Horseback Riding
ATVs
Field Trials
Wind Turbines
Biomass Harvest
Geocaching
Guide Hunting
Paintball
Dog Trials
Camping
Disabled Access
Dog Training

2012

Baiting
Mountain bikes
Designated Hiking Trails
Tree stands
Target Ranges
Trail cameras
Target practice/clay targets
Oil and gas
Earth caching
Snowmobiles
Shed Hunting
Seed collecting/fern fronds/roots/tubers/etc..

The survey and results are available in Appendix 5.b. State by state responses and the associated comments were summarized and are available to committee members interested in more detailed information from an individual state. The survey results serve as an overview of the ways in which MAFWA states deal with these activities and their assessment of the impacts (or potential impacts) of accommodating these activities.

Responses of particular interest included:

Whether or not each state allowed a particular use on a state wildlife area
Each states assessment of the likelihood that an activity would interfere with the primary purpose of the state wildlife area
The assessment of whether the activity would increase user conflicts
And perhaps most insightful, the future trends for various activities – how likely the interest in participating in activity will increase, decrease, or stay the same.

Survey topics from 2012 that received additional discussion or were noted as having a higher degree of conflict included baiting, oil/gas development and plant collecting. Although baiting is not allowed in nine of the states, it was noted as creating a high potential for user conflicts. Additional discussion was held regarding the definition of baiting and “feeding” of wildlife. Oil

and gas development on public lands does interfere with the primary purpose of the property in most states as well as creating increased user conflicts. Plant collecting was identified as a moderate problem in ten states.

ACTION: No action required at this time. The committee will continue to identify other allowable use conflicts to be added to the matrix. This matrix is a valuable tool in recognizing how each state deals with similar issues and helps identify different ways states can deal with these issues. **(Survey Questions and Tabular Results included as Appendix 4)**

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ISSUE: Lead vs. Non-toxic Shot

The committee continues to recognize the use of lead as a contentious issue in many of the states. It is controversial among resource agencies, industry, and outdoor recreational users.

ACTION: No action required but the committee is aware this issue is on the Directors agenda. Each state has varying regulations regarding use of lead, yet the committee recognizes lead as toxic and efforts should be made to reduce the impacts to wildlife and the environment.

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Next year's Private and Public Lands Working Group meetings will be held in Kentucky. Final date and location are TBD.