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**Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies**

**Private Lands Working Group**

**And**

**Public Lands Working Group**

**Annual Report**

**2017**

**May 26, 2017**

**Respectfully submitted by**

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**Nebraska Game and Parks Commission**

**Public and Private Lands Committee Reports**

**Meeting Time and Place**

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) hosted the annual joint meeting from May 2 - 4, 2017 at Fort Robinson State Park in Crawford, NE.

**Attendance**

There were 48 attendees of the joint meeting. All member states were represented except for Wisconsin and Illinois. The AFWA Agriculture Policy Program Manager, National Wild Pheasant Plan Coordinator, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service representatives also attended. See Appendix for attendee list.

**Executive Summary**

The meeting began with both groups attending a morning session kicked off by a talk from the Deputy Director of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Tim McCoy and followed with talks on Nebraska’s Berggren Pheasant Plan, Hunter Research, Nebraska Natural Legacy Plan, CWD, Mountain Lions, and Big Game topics.

Private Lands Working Group

This year’s Private Lands Working Group meeting focused on issues related to the upcoming 2018 Farm Bill but also included updates on several topics of interest to the working group. Each state presented their report and contributed information on the opportunities and challenges of addressing local conservation needs on private land.

National Wild Pheasant Plan

The Committee heard an update on the National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan from Scott Taylor on the activities of the past year. The Technical Committee of the NWPCP met in Kansas in September. Scott discussed the results of a recent survey of member states asking them to prioritize the 2018 AFWA Farm Bill platform. Nineteen states responded with increasing the CRP acreage cap being the #1 priority for respondents. He will be sending out the results of that survey to member states. The Committee also discussed the possibilities of a new Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) practice focused on increasing the early successional habitat within a CRP tract.

AFWA Farm Bill Update

Andrew Schmidt, AFWA Agriculture Policy Program Manager gave the Committee an update on Conservation Program Funding for the remainder of 2017. EQIP funding was cut somewhat but the majority of conservation programs retained full funding. Conservation Technical Assistance will receive $7 million more dollars than FY16. The House of Representatives is in the process of conducting subcommittee hearings and the Senate has held field hearings. Agriculture Committee leaders want a Farm Bill draft to be on the floor by the end of the year. AFWA Directors adopted the AFWA platform for the 2018 Farm Bill at the North American meeting in March. AFWA continues to engage partner organizations, Ag groups, and Congressional staffers on 2018 Farm Bill topics.

Conservation Reserve Program

A group discussion was held on various CRP program topics. State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) allocations from January are already fully enrolled in many states. MAFWA member states are concerned whether SAFE acres that will begin expiring in 2018 will be able to reenroll without additional SAFE allocations. The issue of Palmer Amaranth showing up in CRP seedings has been getting lots of attention in the past year. FSA and NRCS sent letters to producers who have planted CP 42 and CP 33 recently.

A marker bill was introduced by Senator Thune with proposed changes to CRP. There are concerns with several of the proposals within the bill and AFWA will continue to monitor. Senator Thune’s staff are open to revisions and have met with Mark Norton to get feedback. AFWA will be proactive and provide recommendations.

One of the most important items in the AFWA Farm Bill platform is the request that the CRP cap be increased to 36-40 million acres from the current 24 million acres. The question however is how to do so without adding billions of dollars in cost to the program. The Committee discussed several cost saving options and it was determined that a small group should be convened to work on a list of ideas. Related to this is the desire by some in Congress to transition CRP acres that have been in the program for 25 to 30 years out of CRP.

FSA reviewed each state’s MCM activities last year and some states are getting notified of the changes to their activities. Some states are no longer able to use certain MCM activities on certain practices and there seem to be inconsistencies with one state having one thing allowed, one state calling it something different, etc. Member states should gather more information so that AFWA can effectively communicate the state’s needs.

While at the meeting FSA put a hold on new CRP application acceptance. The last day for FY17 offers was May 3rd, and for FY18 it has to be in the system or it won’t be accepted right now. Secretary Perdue will decide what to do with remaining acres (general sign up, SAFE, etc.). Producers can still make offers on SAFE but no decision will be made. This does not apply to CREP projects where offers can continue to be made and approved.

Thune Proposal

Senator Thune has introduced the Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP) to help raise commodity prices. Overall the wildlife benefits from this program would be minimal. It’s not designed to be a wildlife program but states could use it this way if they would like to offer incentives. Senator Thune is open to feedback on it and changes/improvements.

Monarch Updates

The states present gave updates on their respective Monarch Programs and Plans. Several states are working on or have finished plans. There is some frustration that NRCS’s Monarch initiative has excluded some states although those states are considered key habitat as shown on NRCS Monarch maps. States will continue to work on monarch planning implementation.

The Private Lands Working Group participated in a field tour on Wednesday to explore several habitat enhancement projects in the area.

Public Lands Working Group

This year’s Public Lands Working Group meeting focused on issues related to compatible uses on public lands but also included topics of interest to public lands management. State reports were given which generated many discussion items that are included below.

Drones

The use of drones, both by agencies and the public generated much discussion. Drones can be a valuable management and research tool used for a variety of activities. Management and research uses include monitoring species, determining vegetation composition, prescribed burning (monitoring and ignition), training and taking video for agency use. Public use of drones is becoming a problem as sales are soaring and hobbyists are looking for areas to operate drones, including on public lands. Hobbyist use of drones on public lands could result in interfering with other area users, harassment of wildlife and in some cases to aid in hunting, which is illegal in most states. Most states are using existing regulations and rules to control drone use, but it was felt that specific drone rules were needed.

UTV Use Restrictions and Resulting Impacts

This is a newly emerging issue regarding the restrictions imposed on utility task vehicles (UTV) by manufacturers that have the potential to limit the usefulness of these vehicles by agency staff. As these vehicles become more powerful and faster, manufacturer imposed restrictions limit the practicality as a working machine for public lands work i.e. prohibiting the carrying of fuel or fuel containing devices which would limit their use for prescribed burning, spraying and many other uses. UTV’s are typically categorized as ROV (Recreational Off-road Vehicles) or MOHUV (Multi-use Off-highway Utility Vehicles) which have different operating standards. MOHUV UTV’s typically have less stringent requirements and therefore work better for utility vehicles for public lands work. Minnesota experienced an accident with a staff member in an UTV in which an injury occurred. OSHA became involved and subsequently levied a penalty against the agency due to alteration of side restraints. As a result of this incident, Minnesota now strictly adheres to the owner’ manual for this and similar machines and strives to use UTV options more effectively, not how to avoid using them. Although UTV’s will continue to be purchased by agencies, careful scrutiny should be taken when selecting specific models to ensure that manufacture restrictions do not compromise their use as a management tool.

Compatible Uses

Public lands managed for wildlife are seeing an increase in non-traditional uses such as Pokemon Go and geocaching, which are bringing a new type of user to these areas that compete with traditional hunters, fishers and trappers. Although these uses tend to wax and wane in their popularity, these typical younger users tend to concentrate on these types of activities rather than the natural world around them. Some feel that even if these uses are non-traditional, they still bring users to the outdoors and agencies should encourage them to take notice of the outdoors. Requests for establishment of trails on public lands is another non-traditional use that continues to increase yearly. Requests for trails for hiker/bikers, horseback riding, ATV/UTV are problematic for some states who see conflicts with hunters and hunting on wildlife areas. Some states are getting requests to open up access on public lands from organizations such as North Country Trails and Backcountry Hunters & Anglers. North Country Trails has developed a trail system from New York to North Dakota. This organization helps to maintain these trails, but are tending to request more liberties with the operation of these trails. Horseback riding tends to be a more acceptable use on public lands in western states compared to eastern states, although restricting horseback riding trails is sought by the majority of MAFWA states.

Federal Budget Issues

Federal grants are very important to states management of the hundreds of thousands of acres of public lands managed for wildlife. Pittman Robertson wildlife restoration grants, State Wildlife grants, Section 6 grants, Tribal grants, etc. are an extremely important funding source for research, habitat and species management. States all expressed their support to maintain federal funding levels in the federal agencies that administer these grants.

Federal Aid Issues

Paul Glander, USFWS Region 3 Federal Aid office provided the following issues and information items. The Secretary of the Interior directed that federal grants over $100,000 will be first reviewed by the Secretary’s Office before going through the approval process. Fish and Wildlife leadership has asked that “mandatory” grants such as PR and SFR be exempted from this review process. AFWA has sent a letter to the Secretary expressing concerns with the grant review requirement. Nationwide, WSFR is developing the TRACS grant management tool, a web based reporting and decision support tool to track the performance effectiveness of grants that provide for conservation of natural resources. The current guidance in the FWS Manual concerning land acquisition grants through the PR and DJ programs is old and inadequate. Federal Aid staff in regional and Headquarters offices have been working on development of new guidance for land acquisition grants, appraisals, appraisal reviews, review, etc.

Neonicotinoids

The Public Lands Working Group, in 2016, submitted a resolution to evaluate the use of neonicotinoid treated seed on public lands managed for wildlife, while pursuing alternatives and supporting the discontinued use of neonic treated seed. This group continues to support this position and individual states are in various stages of implementation.

Pollinators

Nebraska indicated that pollinators will be emphasized at the upcoming MAFWA Director’s Meeting in June. Discussion centered around the use of commercial beekeepers on public lands and the impact of those pollinators as well as different management activities taking place.

Solar Eclipse

This eclipse, which will take place on August 21st, will take a “path” through Nebraska and the northwest corner of Missouri. Towns along the path are gearing up for an eclipse celebration that will attract many visitors for viewing and related activities. Alliance with a population of 9000, is expecting 40,000 – 50,000 visitors for this event. One local Chamber of Commerce has indicated that a nearby wildlife management area, Smith Lake WMA, will host a crowd of up to 1000 visitors for this event. This could be problematic as this area has minimal facilities and was not designed for events of this type and crowds of this size. Nebraska is working with this Chamber of Commerce and will expect to have to deal with this same issue on other WMA’s along the path of the eclipse.

The Public Lands Working Group participated in a tour on Wednesday to the Petersen and Chadron Creek Ranch Wildlife Management Areas to hear presentations from area Biologists regarding management activities that have occurred and are taking place on these areas.

Overall the meeting was extremely successful and several productive discussions were held during the committee meeting which led to items that will continue to be deliberated further.

**Director Action Items**

None

**Director Information Items-Private Lands Working Group**

OPPORTUNITY: At the North American Fish and Wildlife Resources Conference in Spokane, WA this past March, the Directors adopted the 2018 Farm Bill Policy Priorities. This platform will ensure that MAFWA member states communicate a unified set of goals and objectives during the development of the 2018 Farm Bill. At each Director’s discretion, the platform can be disseminated to partner organizations, agricultural groups, and Congressional staff to encourage state-led and partnership-driven proactive, voluntary, incentive based conservation.

ACTION: None

**Director Information Items-Private Lands Working Group**

OPPORTUNITY: The 2018 AFWA Farm Bill Policy Priorities outlines the need to increase the CRP cap from 24 million acres to 36-40 million acres. Adding 12 to 16 million acres to the CRP program will require innovative cost-saving measures be developed. The AFWA CRP Working Group will be exploring the economics of CRP in an effort to prevent sticker-shock from a larger CRP. Among the economics of interest is the comparison of the costs of enrolling an acre into CRP vs. the cost of Crop Insurance on that same acre as well as modifying the current incentives available for enrollment.

ACTION: None

**Director Information Items-Public Lands Working Group**

OPPORTUNITY: At both the 2016 and 2017 Public Lands Working Group meetings, discussion took place on the use of drones, both by hobbyists on public lands and agency use of drones to serve as a management and research tool. Currently very few states have specific existing rules, regulations or policies regarding the use of drones by the public or for their own use. Drones have the potential to be a beneficial tool for agencies i.e. marketing promotions or habitat monitoring, yet have the potential to be a disruptive force on public lands. Lacking specific drone protocols, states tend to use existing rules and regulations (airborne hunting acts, use of electronic devices, fair chase, and hunter harassment) to enforce the public’s use of drones on public lands and struggle to develop agencies policies and protocols for agency use. With the proliferation of private drone ownership and the potential for use as a management tool, states see a need for the development of official agency policies regarding drone use on public lands. States should continue to document conflicts and research the impacts to wildlife, such as the physiological impacts to bears from drone use in Minnesota.

ACTION: None

**Director Information Item – Public Lands Working Group**

A perennial discussion item at these annual meetings is compatible uses on public lands managed for wildlife. These lands were purchased primarily for consumptive uses such as hunting, fishing and trapping although secondary uses (hiking, wildlife viewing…etc.) occur and are accepted. These traditional uses of public lands are now being supplanted by new activities such as geo-caching and Pokemon Go and conflicts between these user groups and traditional users are occurring. There is also the concern that this new group of area users might not recognize that habitat management and conservation, hunting, fishing and trapping are the primary and original reasons these areas were purchased. Because conflicts are occurring, states feel that we need to protect the intended use of the area and its’ traditional users, although we do not want to alienate non-traditional users who may provide future support for these areas. Two approaches are suggested to address this issue. First, educate the public about the funding sources used to purchase and operate these areas and secondly, clearly specify in acquisition grants, the intended use of the area as well as indicating that secondary uses are allowed as long as they do not conflict with primary uses.

ACTION: None

**Director Information Item-Public Lands Working Group**

In 2016, the Public Lands Working Group submitted a resolution for consideration to encourage evaluation of neonicotinoid treated seed use on public lands, while pursuing and implementing wildlife friendly alternatives and supporting the discontinued use of neonicotinoids on state managed land under state’s authority. This Working Group wishes to re-affirm their support of this resolution.

ACTION: None

**Time and Place of Next Meeting**

The next annual meeting will be held in early May 2017 in central or western North Dakota.

**Appendices**:

Appendix A: Attendance List

Appendix B: Private Lands Meeting Agenda

Appendix C: Public Lands Meeting Agenda

**Appendix A**

MAFWA Private and Public Lands Committee Attendance List

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| --- | --- | --- |
| First Name | Last Name | Organization |
| Andrew | Schmidt | Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies |
| Kelly | Smith | Iowa DNR |
| Scott | Taylor | MAFWA/PF |
| Jeff | Burris | Ohio Division of Wildlife |
| Mike | Parker | Michigan DNR |
| Mark | Norton | SD Game, Fish and Parks |
| Kevin | Kading | North Dakota Game and Fish Department |
| Jake | George | Kansas Dept. of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism |
| Wesley | Sowards | Kansas Dept. Wildlife, Parks & Tourism |
| Lisa | Potter | Missouri Department of Conservation |
| Jason | Sykes | Missouri Department of Conservation |
| Jodie | Provost | Minnesota DNR-Division of Fish and Wildlife |
| Sara | Thompson | State of Michigan |
| Mark | Wiley | Ohio Dept. Natural Resources, Div. of Wildlife |
| Nate | Harling | ND Game and Fish Dept. |
| Levi | Jacobson | North Dakota Game and Fish |
| Sam | Whiteleather | Indiana Fish and Wildlife, Private Lands Unit |
| Kelsi | Wehrman | Pheasants Forever |
| John | Laux | Nebraska Game & Parks Commission |
| T. J. | Walker | Nebraska Game and Parks Commission |
| Logan | Shoup | Nebraska Game and Parks Commission |
| Eric | Zach | Nebraska Game and Parks Commission |
| Scott | Luedtke | Nebraska Game and Parks Commission |
| Shelley | Steffl | Nebraska Game and Parks Commission |
| Matt | Steffl | Nebraska Game and Parks Commission |
| Cassidy | Wessel | Nebraska Game and Parks Commission |
| Michele | Fuhrer-Hurt | Nebraska Game and Parks Commission |
| Adam | Kester | Nebraska Game and Parks Commission |
| Scott | Wessel | Nebraska Game and Parks Commission |
| Michaela | Wilson | Nebraska Game and Parks Commission |
| Scott | Aden | Nebraska Game and Parks Commission |
| Alicia | Hardin | Nebraska Game and Parks Commission |
| Tom | Despot | Indiana Fish and Wildlife, Public Lands Unit |
| Pete | Hildreth | Iowa DNR |
| Earl | Flegler | Michigan DNR, Wildlife Division |
| Paul | Coughlin | SD Game and Fish |
| Bob | Welsh | Minnesota DNR-Division of Fish and Wildlife |
| Lee | Hughes | Missouri Department of Conservation |
| Kent | Luttschwager | North Dakota Game and Fish Department |
| Dan | Halstead | North Dakota Game and Fish Department |
| Mike | Ervin | Ohio Division of Wildlife |
| Jeff | Hoffman | Nebraska Game and Parks Commission |
| Micah | Ellstrom | Nebraska Game and Parks Commission |
| Chris | Garland | Kentucky Fish and Game |
| Ryan | Stucky | Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism |
| Dustin | Mengarelli | Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism |
| Stuart | Schrag | Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism |
| Paul | Glander | USFWS |
| Anthony | Hewitt | USFWS |

**Appendix B**

**Private Lands Working Group Meeting**

**May 1 - 4, 2017**

Fort Robinson State Park

Crawford, NE

**Meeting Purpose**: Share and discuss information regarding issues and opportunities affecting private land forest, fish and wildlife resources and provide input on suggested action and informational items to the Midwest Association of Fish & Wildlife Agency Directors.

**Tuesday May 2, 2017**

1:00 Introductions

1:10 Review of actions since May 2016 meeting – Lisa Potter

1:20 State Reports (5 - 10 minutes each)

3:15 Break

3:30 National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan Coordinator Update – Scott Taylor

3:45 2018 Farm Bill Update and Brainstorming – Andrew Schmidt

5:00 Adjourn

**Wednesday May 3, 2017**

8:00 CRP

SAFE Acres

Improvements to Grassland CRP

Palmer Amaranth

Thune Proposals for Haying and Grazing

Cost savings ideas for a bigger CRP program

Transitioning CRP to working lands

10:00 Field Tour

**Thursday May 4, 2017**

8:00 Soil Health and Income Protection Program

8:30 Monarch Programs Updates - All

9:30 **Break**

9:45 Soil Health practices impacts on wildlife habitat – Mark Norton

10:15 Wrap-up Discussions

11:30 **Action Items for Directors - All**

12:00 Adjourn!

**Appendix C**

MAFWA Public Lands Working Group Agenda

May 1 – 4, 2017

Fort Robinson State Park

Crawford, Nebraska

**Meeting Purpose**: Share and discuss information regarding issues and opportunities affecting public lands managed for wildlife and provide input on suggested action and informational items to the Midwest Association of Fish & Wildlife Agency Directors.

Tuesday, May 2, 2017

1:00 Welcome, introductions, miscellaneous

1:15 2016 MAFWA Committee Report Missouri

1:30 State Reports (5-10 minutes each) Group

3:00 Break

3:20 Issues

* UTV Restrictions Minnesota
* Drone Use Kentucky
* Neonicotinoids Group
* Solar Eclipse Nebraska
* Pollinators Group
* Federal Budget/Federal Aid Group
* Compatible Uses Group
  + Shed hunting
  + Pokemon Go…etc.
  + Geocaching
  + Mushroom hunting
  + Trails

Wednesday, May 3, 2017

8:00 Continue discussion on issues Group

10:00 Field trip – Petersen WMA

Chadron Creek Ranch WMA

Thursday, May 4, 2017

8:00 Finalize issues, information items Group

12:00 Adjourn