



Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

**Private Lands Working Group
and
Public Lands Working Group**

**Annual Report
2015**

May 31, 2015

Respectfully submitted by

**Bob Welsh, Greg Hoch, Jodie Provost
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife Section**

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Meeting Time and Place

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Section hosted the annual joint meeting of the Private and Public Lands Working Groups on May 5-7, 2015, at McKinney's on Southside in Benson, Minnesota.

Attendance

State agency representatives from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio and South Dakota were present at the meeting. Agency representatives from Kentucky and Wisconsin were unable to attend.

Representatives from the Canadian Provinces have not attended the meeting for multiple years. The working groups encourage the Directors to revitalize the connection with our Canadian counterparts.

Executive Summary

The 24th annual meeting of the Midwest Private Lands Work Group and the Public Lands Work Group convened in Benson, Minnesota on May 5-7, 2015.

This years' Private Lands Work Group session included productive dialog and discussion on current conservation challenges and opportunities on Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning. Each state reported on private lands initiatives being utilized to address local conservation needs. The Farm Bill dominated discussions. Below is a summary of the major topics discussed:

1. Private Land Work Group Report at the June, 2014 MAFWA Director's meeting
2. Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
3. Agricultural Land Easements (ALE)
4. Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)
5. Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)
6. Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)
7. Voluntary Public Access (VPA)
8. Farm Bill 2019
9. Pittman-Robertson Funds
10. Cover Crops
11. Bioenergy Fuels

Meeting notes in Appendix 2a include a more detailed summary of each of these discussion points.

The Public Lands Working Group meeting covered the following topics:

1. Public Land Work Group Report at the June, 2014 MAFWA Director's meeting
2. Trends in landscape level planning processes
3. Monitoring/permitting public land use
4. Farming practices on public lands
5. Impacts of the listing of the Northern Long-eared Bat as a Federally threatened species
6. Prescribed fire standards

On Wednesday afternoon, the Private and Public Lands Work Groups attended a field tour that included multiple stops in Lac Qui Parle County demonstrating management techniques and strategies used to enhance prairie landscape grass and wetland habitat. Stops included Federal, State and private land management, and included discussions on patch burn grazing, fencing infrastructure, grassland banking through private grazing on agency land, woody vegetation removal through grants, shallow lake restoration and moist soil management. The tour offered prime examples of the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan in action, was hosted by Local Technical Team members and illustrated the power of working collaboratively toward common goals (as described during the Tuesday plenary session).

On Thursday morning we wrapped up reports and business meetings focusing on action and informational items for the MAFWA directors to consider. Those action items are listed as follows:

Director Action Items—Joint Private and Public Lands Working Group

None

Director Action Items—Private Lands Working Group

ISSUE: Loss of CRP Acreage and Need for a General CRP Sign-Up

Loss of CRP acreage continues. Nationwide, 1.9 million acres expired in 2015 and another 1.18 million acres will expire in 2016. Another general CRP sign-up is needed. Some senators have petitioned the Secretary to hold a general sign-up this fiscal year. More SAFE acreage is also needed. It's a success story to celebrate. / After the Private Lands Working Group Meeting, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack announced on May 29 that a general CRP signup will occur December 1, 2015 through February 26, 2016, making an additional 800,000 acres available for enrollment in continuous CRP practices.

ACTION: MAFWA thank you letter to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack. A proposed letter is attached in Appendix 5a. A resolution paying tribute to the 30th Anniversary of CRP is also attached in Appendix 5b for MAFWA use.

ISSUE/OPPORTUNITY: Cover Crops

Increasing interest in cover crops presents a tremendous opportunity to improve soil, water and habitat. However, concern exists over possible negative impacts to wildlife and possible invasive cover crops.

ACTION: Support research on cover crops to avoid inadvertent use of invasives and increase benefits to wildlife. Encourage tying this support into the Farm Bill, such as through Conservation Innovation Grants. See recommendations in Appendix 5c.

Director Action Items—Public Lands Working Group

None

Director Information Items—Private Lands Working Group

OPPORTUNITY: Brainstorming for Future Farm Bill (2019)

ACTION: Consider the following ideas: Encourage conservation program funding increases. Management of WRP and clarification on its management is needed. Continue to strengthen Sodsaver. CRP is program in greatest need of a funding and acreage increase. Work hard to at least maintain the current level, but preferably increase. “Modernize” CRP - try grazing pilots, keep it a functional program that’s easy, flexible, and for working lands. Try ten-year contracts with the potential to withdraw at five years. Increase SAFE acres. It is popular – learn from it. Allow states or regions design it. Form a coalition with agricultural groups at the national level, such as with cattlemen and other livestock producers.

ISSUE/OPPORTUNITY: Bioenergy Fuels

Biomass production and harvest can be a useful habitat management tool if used appropriately. Wildlife issues should be fleshed out and BMPs developed. Risks include invasive plants, over harvest, and disturbance to wildlife. The Bioenergy Working Group is working to secure funds for a bioenergy contractor to engage the bioenergy industry and promote the wildlife message. PF submitted a multi-state grant last year and will again this year to fund a bioenergy contractor. The Farm Bill can incentivize local markets. The Biomass Crop Assistance Program rule is being finalized. AFWA submitted comments. Biomass and “modernizing” CRP could go hand in hand.

ACTION: No action required.

Director Information Items—Public Lands Working Group

None

Time and Place of Next Meeting

The 25th annual meeting will be held in northeast Missouri in 2016.

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6. State Reports

Appendix 1



Public and Private Lands Work Groups Agenda

May 4 – May 7, 2015

McKinney's on Southside

Benson, Minnesota

Monday May 4th

4:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Registration & Welcome

Dinner (on your own)

Tuesday May 5th

7:00 AM – 8:30 AM

Breakfast & Registration

8:30 AM – 9:30 AM

Welcome and MAFWA Overview

Ed Boggess, Direction of the Division of Fish and Wildlife

Reflections from a MAFWA Private Lands Founding Member

Kevin Lines, DNR FAW Pheasant Action Plan Coordinator

Habitat Management in Minnesota

Paul Telander, Chief of the Section of Wildlife

9:30 AM – 10:00 AM

The Vanishing Tallgrass Prairie, An Endangered Landscape

Tom Landwehr, Commissioner of the MN DNR

10:00 AM – 10:30 AM

The Prairie Partnership

Neal Feeken, The Nature Conservancy

10:30 AM – 10:45 AM

Break

10:45 AM – 11:15 AM

Implementing Minnesota's Prairie Conservation Plan

Introduction to Local Technical Teams and what they do

Marybeth Block, DNR Grassland Strategist

Perspectives from team members

Joe Blastick, TNC

Will Clayton, PF Biologist

Alice Hanley, USFWS

Curt Vacek, MN DNR

11:45 AM – 12:00 PM

Q&A and Discussion with panel, speakers and participants

12:00 PM

Lunch

1:00 PM – 3:15 PM

Public/Private Breakout Sessions (see separate agendas)

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Public and Private Lands Meeting Agenda
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3:15 PM – 3:30 PM	Break
3:30 PM – 5:00 PM	Public/Private Breakout Sessions
5:30 PM	Dinner

Wednesday May 6th

7:00 AM – 8:00 AM	Breakfast
8:00 AM – 10:00 AM	Public/Private Breakout Sessions
10:00 AM – 10:15 AM	Break
10:15 AM – 11:30 AM	Public/Private Breakout Sessions
11:30 AM – 11:45 PM	Board bus for field trip (box lunch provided)
11:45 AM – 5:30 PM	Field Tour – Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan in Action
6:00 – 9:00 PM	BBQ at Glacial Lakes State Park

Thursday May 7th

7:00 AM – 8:00 AM	Breakfast
8:00 AM – 10:00 AM	Public/Private Breakout Sessions Development of issue documents for MAFWA Directors
10:00 AM – 10:15 AM	Break
10:15 AM – 12:00 PM	Public/Private Breakout Sessions Development of issue documents for MAFWA Directors

Adjourn

Appendix 2

Private Lands Working Group Agenda May 5-7, 2015 McKinney's on Southside Benson, Minnesota

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

Tuesday

1:00 pm Housekeeping, Introductions
1:15 pm 2014 Private Land Work Group Report to MAFWA Directors (Mike Parker)
Review of E-mail Action Items Since last meeting (none)
1:30 pm State/Province Reports (10 minutes each)
3:30 pm Share and Discuss Issues & Opportunities
Farm Bill (CRP, EQIP, ACEP, WRE, RCPP, VPA, etc.), Pittman-Robertson funds, cover crops, bioenergy fuels

Wednesday

8:00 am Issues & Opportunities continued
11:30 am Tour

Thursday

8:00 am Develop Actions/Recommendations & Informational Items to the Directors
Noon Adjourn
Next meeting – Missouri 2016

Appendix 2a

Private Lands Working Group Meeting Notes:

1. 2014 Private Land Work Group Report to MAFWA Directors:

- Mike Parker shared last year's report.

2. State Reports:

- Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, and South Dakota shared their 2014-2015 reports. See Appendix 6.

3. Interstate Working Groups for Greater Prairie-Chickens and Sharp-tailed Grouse:

- The North American Grouse Partnership and the Ecosystem Management Research Institute are promoting establishment of interstate work groups for greater prairie-chickens and sharp-tailed grouse. They will keep the MAFWA public and private land work groups informed and update Directors at their meeting.
- Jonathan Haufler, Executive Director, Ecosystem Management Research Institute, sent information to share regarding this effort.

TO DO: Jodie will forward interstate work group information.

4. Conservation Reserve Program (CRP):

- Loss of CRP acreage continues. Nationwide, 1.9 million acres expired in 2015 and another 1.18 million acres will expire in 2016.
- Another general CRP sign-up is needed. Some senators have petitioned the Secretary to hold a general sign-up this fiscal year.
- Ideas to encourage more CRP included a one year extension, not limiting contracts to 15 years or less, pushing for more continuous CRP, support of the previous request, and letters to support these ideas. Should the request be for a specific acreage or general?
- Establishment of new acreage is better than retaining 30 year old tracts. It can be difficult to re-invigorate old stands.
- More SAFE acreage is also needed. A request should explain why. It's a success story that should be celebrated. Landowner interest, wildlife benefits, and accomplishments over a relatively short time period exist.
- Pollinator practice – Should it include whole fields? Should flexibility of the practice continue? Ohio has had difficulties getting landowners to enroll in CP42 due to the lack of a Practice Incentive Payment (PIP).

TO DO: Develop letter for Directors requesting general CRP sign-up in next year. Ask for more SAFE acres. / After the Private Lands Working Group Meeting, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack announced on May 29 that a general CRP signup will occur December 1, 2015 through February 26, 2016, making an additional 800,000 acres available for enrollment in continuous CRP practices. Thus, this action was revised to development of a thank you letter.

5. Agricultural Land Easements (ALE):

- Availability and willingness of third parties to hold ALE conservation easements is a bottleneck. Most states don't have them. The Missouri Prairie Foundation is overwhelmed by the requirements. In Nebraska, easements exist through the former Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program. TNC holds the easements. The process is lengthy and complicated. They are getting about one easement per year secured. How many states are participating?
- The ACEP rule was extended another month.

TO DO: Continue discussion on improvement of ACEP. Share information with Jodie who will pass it along.

6. Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP):

- EQIP for wildlife habitat is not functioning well in some states such as Michigan. Mike Parker inquired about how to access funds, focus them, what practices are used, and ranking of applications.
- In other states, EQIP is functioning well, such as in Iowa, Nebraska, and Minnesota. The latter has local work groups that identify local resource needs to address with EQIP.
- Where EQIP is not functioning well, NRCS may not be doing their part due to workload.

TO DO: Continue discussion and share ideas on how to address improve EQIP for wildlife.

7. Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE):

- Keeping trees off and managing WRE for waterfowl nesting cover and habitat is a challenge. Coarse pre-settlement data are used by some states such as Michigan, to determine what areas were treed. State plans also guide where trees will or will not be encouraged. In Indiana, short of an approved compatible use variance (which is not easily granted), there is no management or maintenance provision for retardation of woody encroachment, or succession control on WRP easements.
- NRCS is giving mixed management recommendations. In some states, they do not want to build dikes on WRP. In Nebraska, enhancement such as dikes and water control structures are allowed unless threatened and endangered species are a concern. Michigan started with an audit of WRE, and then took it to an extreme. In Minnesota, there is interest by watershed districts to use WRE for flood retention in the Red River Valley vs. primarily for waterfowl as intended. The best practices, matches of vegetation to soil, and local site-level decisions are needed.
- Management provisions are needed in the Farm Bill. Missouri is developing a state management program for WRE. Iowa DNR has placed higher priority on spending funds on enrollment of easements than on management of existing easements (based on input collected during development of Farm Bills and the rule making process). Only 3% of Iowa is permanently protected. Great need exists to increase the amount of protected land. Iowa believes each state know their needs best and thus supports state led funding decisions on purchase and management of easements. Nebraska has regularly completed prescribed burns and tree removal fully funded by NRCS, but it has declined in recent years. They funded a position, placing an NGPC person in an NRCS office to help with management bottlenecks. Ohio has done monitoring and asks landowners if they'd like a management plan to encourage more active management of WRE.

- WRE management is a big issue for NRCS. They do not have the capacity to handle it. Rather than nit-picking at details, a full-scale revision of WRE in the Farm Bill is needed.

TO DO: Determine language for improved WRE management. Get suggestions to Jodie/Kevin.

8. Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP):

- Much interest in this new Farm Bill program. Many useful partnerships and interstate collaborations are occurring. The next pre-proposal deadline is July 8.
- Missouri plans to submit a pre-proposal for a project that will benefit wetland enhancement / bottomland forest, riparian corridor and the Indiana bat.
- Iowa plans to work with agricultural and conservation partners in the Raccoon River watershed which is one of the major watersheds supplying Des Moines metro's water.
- Michigan will resubmit a forestry proposal. Securing leverage is the challenge. They will work with foundations
- Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan are scoping out a pre-proposal for early successional habitat management to enhance and restore barrens and brushlands for sharp-tailed grouse.
- Partners with RCPP grants are using them to fund staff, such as foresters by the American Bird Conservancy.
- Ducks Unlimited plans to submit a multi-state pothole project.

9. Voluntary Public Access (VPA):

- Would like to have the ability to submit applications for VPA that include only access funds, not also management funds. Sites can be selected that are already good quality. How can mid-contract management on CRP be done with this funding?

TO DO: Request more funding for VPA, keep it flexible, and make management optional but not mandatory.

10. Brainstorming for future Farm Bill (2019):

- Push hard for conservation program funding increases.
- WRE – Management of WRP is needed. Clarification is needed. Nebraska is making it work. Would like it as an option but not mandatory, so the state can use its discretion.
- Sodsaver – Address landowners committing 'insurance fraud'. Fix wormhole
- Conservation compliance – Its linkage back to crop insurance helpful.
- Soil rental rates - \$200/acre rental rates in some locations, but paying \$80/ac through Farm Bill programs. Rates are currently being updated.
- CRP - Encourage general CRP sign-up. Request more SAFE acres. This program in greatest need of a funding and acreage increase. Work hard to least maintain the current level, but preferably increase.
- CRP needs "modernizing". Try grazing pilots. Keep it a functional program that's easy, flexible, and for working lands, and thus more acceptable to landowners. SAFE is popular – learn from it. Let states or regions design it. Ohio's human dimensions study showed farmers didn't like longer contracts. Try ten-year contracts with the potential to withdraw at five years? Form a coalition with agricultural groups at the national level, such as with cattlemen and other livestock producers.

TO DO: Share as an information item with Directors.

11. Pittman-Robertson Funds (PR):

- Gun and ammunition sales have provided extra PR funds. We are finding creative ways to use it and maximize our state match.
- Paul Glander with USFWS Region 3 shared how states are maximizing match. Several states are using value of land previously acquired. Partner organizations such as s PF, NWTF, etc. are being supported. Vehicle expenses are eligible if the vehicle is used for multiple purposes and depending on they are tracked. In Ohio, the state wildlife grant is used to subcontract research work to OSU. The university overhead rate is used as match.
- We must be aware the PR funds increase is not long-term and thus not use it for long term staff, but rather research, acquisition, etc. Nebraska is using PR funds for Farm Bill Biologist positions.

12. Cover Crops:

- Missouri began using cover crops a couple years ago. They have a working group. Benefits pollinators and ground nesting birds. They created a 'do not plant' list. Single species and mixes are used. Follows wheat in food plots. A \$10,000 grant from NFWF has been secured to examine nest success and pollinator communities. Cover crops are used to prep for restoration and in rotations for farming practices
- Michigan uses cover crops on state lands for residue management. A rotation of corn, fallow corn, and multi-species cover crop is used. Provides fallow forage for wildlife.
- In Iowa, cover crop use is increasing. The Iowa DNR Wildlife Bureau sees a need to learn more about how cover crop use affects wildlife. Funds are spent on cover corps through EQIP, State Department of Agriculture and Lands Stewardship (through the state Nutrient Reduction Strategy).
- Due to the highly publicized water quality problems in the Western Basin of Lake Erie, cover crops have been a popular conservation practice afforded landowners as a way to reduce sediment and nutrients from entering waterways. Ohio is interested in research on the wildlife benefits of cover crops.
- Nebraska uses cover crops such as winter wheat on fire breaks. This practice replaces food plots.

TO DO: Encourage Directors to recommend avoidance of invasives in cover crop mixes, support research on impacts to wildlife, soil and water (use Conservation Innovation Grants), and to tie these recommendations into the Farm Bill.

13. Bioenergy Fuels:

- The Bioenergy Working Group is trying to secure funds for a bioenergy contractor. The contractor would engage the bioenergy industry and promote wildlife message. PF submitted a multi-state grant last year and will again this year to fund a bioenergy contractor.
- This type of work is new and beyond our expertise. Staff with the expertise for outreach/marketing is needed. European countries are way ahead of us. In the Southeast U.S., trees are being pelletized and shipped to Europe.
- The Farm Bill can incentivize local markets. The Biomass Crop Assistance Program rule is being finalized. AFWA submitted comments. Biomass and modernizing CRP may go hand in hand.

- Biomass harvesting can be a useful habitat management tool if used properly. Potential for abuse exists. Wildlife issues should be fleshed out early and BMPs developed. A risk assessment tool for invasives exists.

TO DO: Share as an information item with Directors.

Appendix 3

Public Lands Working Group Agenda May 5-7, 2015 McKinney's on Southside Benson, Minnesota

Meeting Purpose: Disseminate information on emerging issues and provide input to the Midwest Association of Fish & Wildlife Agency Directors on issues affecting public land.

- Housekeeping
- Introductions
- 2014 Committee Report to MAFWA Directors (Earl Flegler)
- Review of E-mail Action Items Since last meeting
 - Solicitation for National Conservation Needs – 2016 Grant Program Cycle
 - Landscape level planning processes and needs
- State Report

Illinois	Minnesota
Indiana	Missouri
Iowa	Nebraska
Kansas	North Dakota
Kentucky	Ohio
Michigan	South Dakota
	Wisconsin
- Emerging/Existing Issues
 - Monitoring Use of Public Lands (Kansas – electronic daily hunt permit system)
 - Farming Practices on Public Lands (Minnesota – Reviewing farming practices)
 - Attachment
 - Northern Long-eared Bat (Results of Listing)
 - Prescribed fire standards – What are States adopting? (Nebraska requests discussion)
- MAFWA Requests
 - None thus far
- Time Permitting – The Conservation Atlas for Midwest Grassland Birds (Michigan - feedback requested by the Midwest Grassland Network) – *pulled from the agenda*
- Next Meeting – Missouri 2016

Appendix 3a

Midwest Public Lands Working Group

Meeting Notes:

Present: Bob Welsh (Minnesota), Mike Wefer (Illinois), Kent Luttschwayer (North Dakota), Jeff Hoffman (Nebraska), Pat Molini (Nebraska), Mike Ervin (Ohio), Paul Glander (USFWS), Paul Coughlin (South Dakota) Dustin Mengarelli (Kansas), Brad Simpson (Kansas), Brad Feaster (Indiana), Pete Hildreth (Iowa), Earl Flegler (Michigan), Lee Hughes (Missouri), Bill Haase (North Dakota)

Tuesday, May 5, 1:00 p.m. – Thursday May 7, 2015 10:00 a.m.

2014 Committee Report to MAFWA Directors

Earl Flegler gave the 2014 Committee Report to MAFWA Directors. He shared the action item reactions from the Director's.

Since national Rx fire training standards were an item on the agenda last year and further discussion requested this year, the group discussed training of staff for Rx burning and potential differences if burning on federal lands managed by the State. States that are managing specifically Bureau of Reclamation land are being told that in order to burn on those lands, they must meet federal NWCG standards. Kansas on the other hand has standards developed in a "Fire Handbook" that the Bureau of Reclamation has tentatively indicated that they will likely approve. Iowa also indicated that the USFWS requires Iowa staff burning on USFWS Waterfowl Production Areas to meet NWCG standards. This is only an issue with having a burn boss available. Earlier, most of Iowa's burns were rated as low complexity burns and they were able to have State burn bosses available. But over time, most burns have been re-categorized as moderate complexity and Iowa standards are no longer able to meet the federal burn boss standard requirements. Burning is occurring with USFWS leadership, but Iowa feels more burns could be completed if their standards were accepted. With the exception of Michigan, other States have adopted their own Rx burn training standards that are specific to their local needs and tend to be less stringent than federal NWCG standards. Michigan has adopted NWCG standards. Some states have recently implemented some level of physical fitness standards as well.

E-Mail Action Items Since Last Meeting

- National conservation needs grant cycle call for grant ideas packet was passed around for review. The packet had been e-mailed out and no grant ideas were submitted.
- Landscape Level Planning Processes and Needs: Iowa inquired about landscape level planning processes that other States were using. They were embarking on planning that is a step down from State Wildlife Action Plan requirements yet covering a broader landscape than individual unit plans. They and Indiana are both using a process to incorporate surrounding private land into guidance documents that cluster public land units together in a similar landscape. Illinois has recently shifted from trying to include multiple habitat types on every parcel and are now managing units consistent with the landscape. They are also set up for Wildlife staff to be in more of an advisory role for land management. Missouri is setting up priority geography areas and developing teams around those geographies. Minnesota talked about Management

Guidance Documents that are developed for individual units and are meant to inform of management obligations and unit specifics. The concept is that a new manager could pick up the document and instantly know what routine work needs to be done and when. Also, Minnesota has the Prairie Conservation Plan that is done on the prairie landscape and identifies core and corridor areas to focus efforts by all conservation organizations. The strength of the plan is that it assembles teams from multiple agencies and NGOs that all work together to a common goal.

State Reports: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, USFWS (individual reports in Appendix 6).

As a new member on the workgroup, the USFWS was given the opportunity to share pertinent issues outside of a formal written report. Federal aid issues were discussed and that a team has been formed to work on backlog of federal aid lands review projects. They are working at updating the acquisition section of the federal aid handbook. There was some discussion on creative processes some states are using to acquire lands with federal aid assistance.

Rifle ranges and compatibility were discussed. From a federal aid stand point, they need to be open to the public. Several states have ranges and some are staffed and some are unstaffed. Staffed ranges are costly to operate and unstaffed ranges have many problems associated with litter, abuse and vandalism. States that currently have ranges on their Wildlife lands advised that they are problematic and that states that don't currently have them should avoid them if possible.

Emerging/Existing Issues

- **Monitoring Use of Public Lands – Kansas Electronic Hunt Permit System:** Kansas demonstrated their new hunt permit system using iSportsman on-line. Cost for development was about \$150,000 and maintenance costs are about \$14,000 annually. The system is designed to account for use of management units and issue permits to users. They currently require permits for access to 14 units. The system was built to give the option of limiting access. Historically, considerable time and money was expended on a daily basis to manage permit cards at parking lots and access points. The system was demonstrated live showing how the multi-state and agency system could be used by users to create and account and manage their own permits and by the agency to generate reports and track users and use. iSportsman is located out of Virginia.
- **Farming Practices on Public Lands (Minnesota – Reviewing Farming Practices):** Minnesota initiated a discussion on farming practices used on public land managed for wildlife.
 - Background: Minnesota presented the issue of farming practices last year as an informational item. Concern over pollinators, especially honey bees, prompt legislation in Minnesota to develop BMPs for habitat management and restoration on state lands. This precipitated a discussion about farming practices related to pollinators, especially farming used as a wildlife management tool. Minnesota has initiated a review of farming practices used on Wildlife Management Areas. In last years' report, several states indicating moving toward practices including conservation planning, cover cropping, avoidance of genetically modified (GMO) crops. States agreed that there is a trend toward more environmentally friendly farming practices used by conservation agencies, and it would be prudent to review farming practices and be proactive.

- Current discussion:
 - Minnesota is several meetings into a formal review of farming practices on WMAs.
 - Missouri is discussing strategies to address GMOs but are concerned about loss of Round-Up Ready crops for habitat restoration. Working with seed producers to purchase non-neonic treated seed. They also require formal agency approval for all pesticide applications.
 - South Dakota is beginning to look at the neonic issue and are currently discouraging use on public lands. They are reading the writing on the wall about GMOs and are beginning to encourage non-GMOs but do not anticipate a ban in the near future.
 - Indiana is focusing attention on neonics. They are developing BMPs but are not banning them. There is concern that an all-out ban could have the unintended consequences of resulting in the use of far more damaging options.
 - Illinois has drafted a whitepaper on wildlife friendly farming but there has been little movement since then.
 - Iowa is requiring a conservation plan and cover cropping techniques unless there is an objective that can only be achieved by not using cover crops.
 - Several states anticipate moving towards restricting use of Round-Up Ready crops except for habitat restoration purposes.
 - Iowa has a policy that ensures a minimum 120 foot buffer along all lakes (normal pool elevation) and riparian areas (rivers, creeks, and streams) on all wildlife and forestry lands. Exceptions are made for habitat restoration activities.
 - North Dakota has a buffer requirement of 65 feet and is currently experimenting with cover crops. The length of the growing season makes cover crop options challenging.
 - All states expressed concern about availability of seed if large quantities of non-neonic treated seed are needed.
- **Northern Long-eared Bat:** The Northern Long-eared Bat was listed as threatened on April 2, 2015. The potential listing and ramifications was a topic at last year's meeting and was a topic of discussion to see how states were affected by the listing. Minnesota talked about current discussions with USFWS Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration programs related to land management and technical guidance federal aid grants. Minnesota is currently working with the feds on a phase 1 Section 7 evaluation and is optimistic that conservation measures built into management activities will meet with favorable determination of effects and shared those discussions and inquired about other state's activities. Missouri and Indiana shared conservation measures and survey practices they have developed into management guidelines and are following relative to the Indiana bat but recognize that the NLEB is more widely distributed and anticipate needing to beef up survey information. Iowa is partnering with Iowa State University to conduct acoustic monitoring surveys to improve distribution information.
- **Prescribed Fire Standards:** See discussion in the "2014 Committee Report to MAFWA Directors" Section above.

MAFWA Requests: None.

Closing Remarks and Additions: The group urged the MAFWA Director's to continue to realize the importance of this forum for States to get together to discuss management challenges and to

support continued participation and attendance of their states. The group wished for the Directors to know that only Kentucky and Wisconsin were unable to attend this year. The group appreciates that even with Director support, there will inevitably be circumstances that prevent some from attending, but with continued MAFWA Director support, the group is optimistic that the number of states unable to attend will remain small.

Missouri announced that they expect next year's meeting to be held in Northeast Missouri near Kirksville sometime after the spring turkey hunting season. *See ya'all then!*

Adjourn

Appendix 4a

Private Lands Working Group Meeting Attendees

State	Name	E-mail address	Telephone
Illinois	Phil Borsdorf	phil.borsdorf@illinois.gov	217-784-4730
Indiana	Josh Griffin	jgriffin@dnr.in.gov	812-526-8475
Iowa	Kelly Smith	kelly.smith@dnr.iowa.gov	712-520-0313
Kansas	Jake George	jake.george@ksoutdoors.com	620-672-0760
Kansas	Mike Mitchener	mike.mitchener@ksoutdoors.com	620-672-5911
Kansas	Matt Smith	matt.smith@ksoutdoors.com	785-658-2465
Michigan	Ken Kesson	kessonk1@michigan.gov	269-244-5928
Michigan	Mike Parker	parkerm5@michigan.gov	517-284-6217
Minnesota	Greg Hoch	greg.hoch@state.mn.us	507-642-8478
Minnesota	Jodie Provost	jodie.provost@state.mn.us	218-429-3052
Minnesota	Randy Schindle	randy.schindle@state.mn.us	507-642-8478
Minnesota	Kevin Lines	kevin.lines@state.mn.us	651-259-5183
Missouri	Chris McLeland	chris.mcleland@mdc.mo.gov	573-876-9365
Missouri	Lisa Potter	lisa.potter@mdc.mo.gov	573-819-9024
Missouri	Scott Radford	scott.radford@mdc.mo.gov	417-581-2719
Nebraska	Alicia Hardin	alicia.hardin@nebraska.gov	402-471-5448
Nebraska	Scott Wessel	scott.wessel@nebraksa.gov	402-370-3374
Nebraska	Eric Zach	eric.zach@nebraska.gov	402-471-5448
North Dakota	Kevin Kading	kkading@nd.gov	701-527-1081
North Dakota	Nate Harling	nharling@nd.gov	701-328-6395
North Dakota	Doug Howie	dhowie@nd.gov	701-328-6333
South Dakota	Mark Norton	mark.norton@state.sd.us	605-773-3096
Ohio	Jeff Burris	jeff.burris@dnr.state.oh.us	740-362-2410

Appendix 4b

Public Lands Working Group Meeting Attendees

State	Name	E-mail address	Telephone
Illinois	Michael Wefer	mike.wefer@illinois.gov	217-524-5883
Indiana	Brad Feaster	bfeaster@dnr.in.gov	812-659-9901
Iowa	Pete Hildreth	pete.hildreth@dnr.iowa.gov	712-254-0955
Kansas	Brad Simpson	brad.simpson@ksoutdoors.com	620-672-5911
Kansas	Dustin Mengarelli	dustin.mengarelli@ksoutdoors.com	785-945-6615
Michigan	Earl Flegler	fleglere@michigan.gov	517-641-4903
Minnesota	Bob Welsh	bob.welsh@state.mn.us	651-259-5169
Missouri	Lee Hughes	lee.hughes@mdc.mo.gov	573-522-4115
Nebraska	Jeff Hoffman	jeff.hoffman@nebraska.gov	402-471-5415
Nebraska	Pat Molini	pat.molini@nebraska.gov	402-471-5434
North Dakota	Kent Luttschwager	kluttschwager@nd.gov	701-774-4320
North Dakota	Bill Haase	bhaase@nd.gov	701-220-1020
Ohio	Mike Ervin	mike.ervin@dnr.state.oh.us	740-362-2410
South Dakota	Paul Coughlin	paul.coughlin@state.sd.us	605-773-4194
USFWS	Paul Glander	paul_glander@fws.gov	605-773-4194

Appendix 5a. Letter to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack Regarding General CRP Sign Up

June 5, 2015

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

The Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA) would like to thank you for your recent announcement of a general Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) signup in December of 2015, marking the 30th anniversary of the program. The CRP has provided more soil, water, and wildlife benefits than any other conservation program in USDA history. The additional announcement of 800,000 acres for continuous CRP practices benefitting state wildlife priorities, pollinators, wetlands, and water quality will give producers the additional flexibility to choose programs and practices that best fit their operation.

MAFWA has had a long working relationship with USDA. Our state fish and wildlife staffs work with USDA offices hand in hand. The success of Midwest states enrolling landowners in conservation buffers, farmable wetlands, SAFE and general CRP are examples of what great partnerships can accomplish. This advanced announcement also provides ample time for USDA staff and partners like us to prepare for a successful signup. With a smaller program, every acre is critical to maintaining conservation benefits of the program.

In conclusion, we thank you for your efforts to ensure CRP remains a viable option for producers. Our state fish and wildlife agency staff look forward to working with USDA staff in coming months to implement these provisions. Please feel free to contact the Midwest Directors for assistance.

Sincerely,

President, Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

cc: Val Dolcini, FSA Administrator
Mike Schmidt, FSA Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs

trb

Appendix 5b. CRP 30 Year Anniversary Resolution

RESOLUTION

Recognizing the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Conservation Reserve Program

WHEREAS, The member states of the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies are pleased to extend special recognition to the United States Department of Agriculture on the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Conservation Reserve Program; and

WHEREAS, The Conservation Reserve Program has been the cornerstone of all conservation programs administered by the United States Department of Agriculture by providing critical wildlife habitat, improving the water quality, and protecting soil and forest resources across America; and

WHEREAS, In addition to the enhancement and protection our natural resources, the Conservation Reserve Program has been a wise investment of taxpayer funds by promoting balanced ecosystems addressing declining populations of threatened and endangered species while providing significant nesting and brooding habitat for millions of waterfowl, pheasants, quail, and neo-tropical species of birds. Over the years, the Conservation Reserve Program has also provided recreational opportunities to hunters, anglers, and wildlife enthusiasts, contributed millions of dollars in outdoor related expenditures to rural economies and private landowners, addressed essential pollinator habitat, and sequestered millions of tons of carbon; and

WHEREAS, The many individuals, both past and present, who have been involved with the work of the United States Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service are to be commended for their tremendous efforts in administering the Conservation Reserve Program over the past thirty years. It is certain that the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies vows to work closely with these federal agencies to ensure that the opportunities to improve upon the Conservation Reserve Program will continue for many years to come.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, in adopting this Resolution, pay tribute to the Conservation Reserve Program on its thirtieth anniversary and extend congratulations to the United States Department of Agriculture for its efforts during those years.

Appendix 5c. Cover Crop Research Recommendations

Incorporating cover crops into agriculture operations is becoming more frequent in many mid-west states. Research has indicated cover crops can significantly lessen soil erosion, increase soil organic matter, improve soil moisture use efficiency and improve water quality. While the benefits to aquatic wildlife are clear, little research evaluating the impacts of cover crops on terrestrial wildlife has been completed. Cover crops have the potential to impact thousands of acres of land in a short amount of time as the rate of adoption increases rapidly among producers.

To better evaluate this potential large-scale landscape change we encourage the MAFWA to prioritize researching impacts of cover crops on terrestrial wildlife. Specifically, additional information is needed to ensure:

1. Cover crops are not acting as ecological sinks for ground nesting birds or pollinators.
2. Development of appropriate cover crop seed mixes that do not include invasive or aggressive species with potential to escape cultivation and negatively impact wildlife habitat.

Cover crops have great potential to improve wildlife habitat by providing cover and forage habitat, however research is needed to make certain cover crops are implemented using processes that provide benefits to terrestrial wildlife.

Appendix 6

State Reports Private Lands Working Group Meeting Minnesota 2015

State Reports
Public Lands Working Group Meeting
Minnesota 2015