

**MAFWA Public Lands Working Group**  
Respectfully submitted by  
Paul Coughlin, Wildlife Habitat Program Administrator  
South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

**Meeting Time and Place**

The MAFWA Public Lands Working Group met via video-conference on May 7, 2020. The meeting was originally planned for May 11-14, 2020 at Watertown, SD, to be held in conjunction with the MAFWA Private Lands Working Group meeting. Unfortunately, the joint meeting was cancelled due to concerns and restrictions associated with COVID-19.

**Attendance**

In attendance for the video-conference were representatives from Indiana (Brad Feaster), Iowa (Pete Hildreth), Kansas (Dustin Mengarelli), Kentucky (Chris Garland), Michigan (Val Frawley), Nebraska (Pat Molini), Ohio (Michael Ervin), South Dakota (Paul Coughlin), and Wisconsin (Anne Reis). Note: The Public Lands Working Group is in need of a representative from Missouri Department of Conservation.

**Executive Summary**

The 2020 MAFWA Public Lands Working Group meeting, originally planned for early May in conjunction with the MAFWA Private Lands Working Group meeting, was canceled due to COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Working Group met via video-conference call to discuss topics relevant to management of state wildlife lands and consider Action and Information Items for the Directors' attention.

The Working Group spent time discussing impacts of COVID-19 on public land use and management. All agreed that while impacts were being felt regarding normal operations and maintenance activities - including impacts to hiring critical permanent and necessary seasonal staff positions - an interesting situation seems to be occurring with a noticeable increase in public use and visitation to many public lands and waters, including state wildlife areas.

Specific Information Items discussed included several perennial subject matters but supplemented with new and updated information from individual states. For example, the topic of neonicotinoid treated seed use on state wildlife areas and challenges associated with moving away from their use has been discussed for several years. The Working Group learned many states have successfully taken steps to eliminate treated seed use on their lands as challenges such as availability of non-treated seed have diminished due to market supplies and demands.

The Working Group again this year concurred on the importance of continuing as a working group of MAFWA. The annual working group meeting provides a valuable opportunity for state public lands administrators to reconnect with colleagues and encourages and informs peer to peer communications throughout the year amongst Midwest states on common issues, challenges, and innovations in managing state wildlife areas.

## **Director Action Items**

There were no Action Items identified by the Working Group.

## **Director Information Items**

The following Information Items were discussed by the Working Group:

### Opportunity/Issue: Importance of the MAFWA Public Lands Working Group

While still a recognized Working Group through 2022, it is consensus of the participants to continue as a MAFWA Working Group. Further, given its value and importance to the Working Group participants, the members encourage MAFWA directors to continue to support attendance and participation by agency staff in the annual meeting. This event allows a valuable opportunity to reconnect with colleagues and encourages and informs peer to peer communications throughout the year amongst MAFWA states on common issues, challenges, and innovations in managing state wildlife areas.

Action: None

### Opportunity/Issue: Compatible use on state wildlife areas

Compatible use of state wildlife management areas is an annual discussion item for the Working Group. Lands acquired and managed for fish and wildlife production and hunting and fishing opportunities also often provide opportunities for other outdoor related recreation. Direct impacts to fish and wildlife resources and their habitats, along with conflicts between hunters, anglers, and trappers can result from expanded use of state wildlife lands by a wider array of public interests, often presenting interesting challenges for land managers. However, the Working Group understands these non-traditional users also represent a newer and broader-based constituency group whose advocacy for public lands contributes to increased relevancy of state owned and managed wildlife management areas. Previous reports have suggested opportunities to continue education efforts designed to inform all public land users about the various funding sources used to purchase and manage state wildlife areas. Additionally, the Working Group agreed it remains important to clearly specify in acquisition grants (e.g. WSFR) the intended use of newly acquired wildlife management areas, but to make clear that secondary uses are also allowed when they do not conflict with primary uses and purposes. The challenge lies in achieving a balance of serving a broader constituency of outdoor enthusiasts while also acknowledging and maintaining a clear understanding of the primary purposes for which state wildlife areas are acquired and managed.

Action: None

### Opportunity/Issue: Available resources for managing state wildlife lands

Most habitat and public use management activities occurring on state wildlife areas are funded through WSFR with required matching agency funds (75:25). In some MAFWA states, necessary staffing, support funding, and basic operations, maintenance, and development projects can be limited when decision makers do not fully understand or appreciate the funding source or mechanisms by which wildlife management funding is derived. Thus, state wildlife agencies, including wildlife land management programs, are often subject to fiscal limitations

applied to other state agencies receiving general appropriations. Despite availability of both WSFR and license funds to address wildlife habitat and public use needs on state wildlife management areas, imposed financial and human resources limitations often equate to merely lack of available spending authority in management budgets. The Working Group discussed possible approaches to address this, including: (1) the need for enhanced communication with legislators and other elected public officials to better inform these decision makers regarding all aspects of the WSFR program and the direct ties this program has to an agency's spending authority as it relates to responsible management of state wildlife areas; and (2) supporting development of various professional media products at the MAFWA organizational level for distribution to state legislators, elected official, and the public.

Action: None

Opportunity/Issue: Neonicotinoid treated seed use on state wildlife areas

For several years the Working Group has discussed the topic of phasing out neonicotinoid pesticide treated seed use on state wildlife management areas. This topic is of even greater importance with a nation-wide heightened focus on the critical role pollinators play in properly functioning ecosystems. Several Working Group states report success with their efforts to discontinue use of treated seed, giving both assurance and encouragement to other states as they continue their efforts, including addressing challenges such as seed availability and tenant compliance.

Action: None

### **Time and Place of Next Meeting**

Wisconsin; specific details yet to be determined.