

Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Wildlife Action Plan Working Group Report

Report submitted by Eileen Dowd Stukel, incoming Chair, to Ollie Torgerson on 17 June 2020

Meeting Time and Place -

The working group held quarterly conference calls and one annual meeting over the last year. Conference calls were held on June 5, September 3, and December 3, 2019 and March 3, 2020. The annual, in-person meeting was planned for Columbus, Ohio, in May 2020, but because of the coronavirus pandemic, a Zoom meeting was held instead. See Appendix 1 for the meeting agenda.

Attendance -

Working group members from 12 of the 13 states participated in the meeting. The Wildlife Action Plan Working Group includes State Wildlife Action Plan Coordinators, Wildlife Diversity Coordinators, and Threatened and Endangered Species Coordinators from the MAFWA states (See Appendix 2); all were invited. Additional participants included invited speakers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff, and MAFWA-affiliated leaders.

Director Information Items -

1. State and Tribal Wildlife Grant (STWG) Funding
 - a. STWG funds continue to be the primary source of federal funds for rare and declining species conservation and State Wildlife Action Plan implementation. Efforts continue to assure that these funds are available as a stopgap until permanent, long-term funding can be secured. In FY2020, \$67.7 million was provided through apportionments and competitive grants.
 - b. To commemorate the 20th anniversary of this program, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) is working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to highlight regional, state, and tribal success stories resulting from STWG funding. The completed report should be available for distribution at the September 2020 AFWA meeting.

2. Recovering America's Wildlife Act
 - a. At the time of this report, HR 3742 (Recovering America's Wildlife Act) has 181 cosponsors (136 Democrat, 45 Republicans), but has not yet been brought to the House floor for a vote. A companion Senate bill has not yet been introduced. RAWA will redirect \$1.3 billion per year in existing revenues from the U.S. Treasury to provide federal match funds to help states implement wildlife action plans, deliver environmental education and wildlife-associated recreation programs, and assist tribes with wildlife conservation on their lands.
 - b. The pandemic has affected in-person lobbying opportunities. RAWA advocates are exploring ways to make this funding need relevant at a time when the public has renewed its interest in nature and outdoor activities. For example, a recent letter circulated to House and Senate leadership describes the economic impact of RAWA to states and tribes. Such efforts will continue in the face of legislative strategies focused on pandemic response and economic recovery.

- c. Working Group members appreciate your past support and ask for continued support of the Act. Long-term and stable funding will facilitate improved regional collaboration within MAFWA. Many MAFWA states have passed updated Commission resolutions in support of RAWA, state legislative resolutions on the topic, and state-specific vision documents to encourage support and guide spending priorities.
- 3. State involvement with federal Endangered Species Act activities:
 - a. Following a legal challenge, the northern long-eared bat remains a federal threatened species with a 4(d) rule. The USFWS will review the status of this species during a combined species status assessment (SSA) for 3 bat species – northern long-eared, little brown, and tricolored bats. The SSA should be completed by June 2021, with potential listing determinations approximately 1 year later.
 - b. USFWS Region 3 presented a 5-year review schedule on upcoming listing determinations that is contained in the Working Group’s meeting notes. They provided this website address for viewing species profiles: <https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/>; then search by name.
 - c. MAFWA states continue their interest in being involved in recovery planning in coordination with the USFWS. This is a new effort, with one example – the eastern massasauga rattlesnake. This Working Group will form a small group to further discuss recovery planning and implementation strategies.
- 4. Landscape Scale Conservation and Regional Coordination
 - a. MAFWA’s Midwest Landscape Initiative (MLI) efforts continue to be fleshed out through three Working Groups - At-Risk Species, Habitat Inventory and Assessment, and Wind Energy Development. These and related efforts have allowed improved coordination across state boundaries on shared resource challenges and opportunities that can be further explored in upcoming Wildlife Action Plan revisions. Related efforts are focused on landscape health, climate change, and grasslands.
 - b. MAFWA states have been working on ways to develop and use a regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need list, potentially similar to efforts in the Northeast and Southeast Associations of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. The present direction is to explore options for hiring a consultant able to dedicate the necessary time and expertise to move this forward.
 - c. With the completion of the MAFWA Mid-America Monarch Conservation Strategy and related state plans, MAFWA states are in various stages of monarch and native pollinator planning and implementation. The Monarch CCAA for Energy and Transportation Lands hopes to create more than 2 million acres of habitat and includes commitments from 13 Departments of Transportation and 12 energy companies. The USFWS Region 3 has begun a pollinator effort and reached out to MAFWA states on this topic.

Director Action Item

1. Rename the MAFWA Wildlife Action Plan Working Group to MAFWA Wildlife Diversity Working Group.

The mission of this working group is:

Advance wildlife and fish conservation in the member states of the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA) by providing a forum to facilitate program priorities and common objectives identified in the Wildlife Action Plans, activity that will result in coordinated conservation actions and recommendations to MAFWA on wildlife and fish diversity from the member states.

State representatives on this Working Group have a wide variety of duties and responsibilities, as reflected in the following job titles: wildlife action plan coordinator, threatened and endangered species coordinator, nongame program leader, diversity program leader, aquatic diversity program leader, natural heritage program biologist, conservation biologist, wind energy coordinator, and research chief. Renaming this group as the Wildlife Diversity Working Group (proposed name change approved by the working group at May meeting) will better describe the broad and comprehensive responsibilities associated with staff that help draft, implement, and revise state wildlife action plans in addition to working on broader fish, wildlife, and habitat issues.

Time and Place of Next Meeting

The working group will continue with quarterly conference calls. The next in-person meeting will be held in the spring of 2021, with the host state to be South Dakota or Wisconsin, pending further discussion.

APPENDICES -

Appendix 1. Meeting Agenda, MAFWA WAP Working Group – May 5-6, 2020

May 5 morning: Making Connections – updates from relevant committees/groups/teams - Kate

Welcome - Chief Kendra Wecker

Introductions – Kate Parsons

Background of this team – Kate Parsons

Regional priorities and status of projects

- Mussels – Tyler Schartel
- Pollinators – Katy Reeder
- Grasslands and Grasslands group update – Nate Muenks
- Herps – Kate Parsons

Monarch CCAA for Energy and Transportation Lands — Iris Caldwell

- Update on MAFWA state participation
- *Background materials:*

- General Monarch CCAA webpage for general information:
<http://rightofway.erc.uic.edu/national-monarch-ccaa/>
- The final CCAA documents and a general FAQ are also available on the USFWS website:
<https://www.fws.gov/savethemonarch/CCAA.html>

Update on Midwest region FWS pollinator effort – Brad Potter

- Transformation of monarch to general pollinator initiative. How is it working to move from monarch to landscape scale?

Climate Change initiatives – Nate Muenks

- MO provide an update on their work then other states can chime in as they wish.

Midwest Landscape Initiative (MLI) Update:

Steering and technical committees – Katy Reeder

Work groups:

At-risk – Kate Parsons

Wind – Erin Hazelton

Landscape health – Nate Muenks

Discussion: does the MAFWA working group feel connected?

Next steps – All

May 5 afternoon: SWAP revision, RAWA - Katy

Recovering America's Wildlife Act – State Agency Planning and Messaging

- [Story Map](#) – Kristin Hall
- Nebraska's approach to planning for Recovering – Melissa Panella

MAFWA Regional SGCN: Review of progress and discussion of potential uses – Katy Reeder, Kate Parsons, Brad Potter

- *Background materials:* The Midwest Landscape Initiative's At-Risk Species Working Group has been in discussions with Terwilliger Consulting Inc. about development of a regional SGCN list and associated information and tools. To be prepared for this discussion, please review the following webinar prior to the meeting:
https://zoom.us/rec/share/-xLEO3N-GFLWLP_yHrGW5QKQoTJaaa82yIP-6ANzRrQEFiesefcbltpke0qFzwn

SWAP revision plans and opportunities for collaboration

- Determine interest in a regional SWAP revision (5-years out) workshop – Jessica Piispanen
- Discussion of best practices – Mark Humpert

Next steps - All

May 6 morning: T&E species and recovery planning - Erin

Federal T&E species updates – Angie Boyer

ESA Legal Challenges Updates – Barb Hosler

- NLEB Decision

- Multi-District Listing Settlement / Listing Workplan lawsuit
- Challenge to SSA process (was dismissed)
- Other relevant updates

Monarch CCA – Phil Delphey

State’s Involvement in Recovery Planning and Implementation – Any communication changes or improvements to report?

- Template for state recovery plans to feed into Recovery Implementation Strategies

Next steps

May 6 afternoon: Discussion of priorities, governance and next steps - Eileen

Future approach for regional priorities?

- Begin with discussion of potential uses of regional priorities

New name for working group?

- Review comparable working group/committee names and charges for other AFWA regional associations

Regional boundaries and states- Region 6 states comment on how they can stay engaged in this group

Director’s Action Items

Next Steps

- Eileen (SD)– Director’s report and presentation
- Eileen (SD) to set quarterly conf calls
- WI next lead (spring 2021)?
- In-person meeting?

Appendix 2. Meeting attendance list

State	Attendee
IA	Kelly Poole
IA	Katy Reeder
IA	Karen Kinkead
IL	Leon Hinz
IL	Joe Kath
IL	Tyler Schartel
IN	Scott Johnson
KS	Daren Riedle
KS	Chris Berens
KS	Megan Rohweder
MI	Scott Hanshue
MI	Amy Derosier
MI	Kevin Wehrly
MN	Kristin Hall
MN	Cynthia Osmundson
MN	Daren Carlson
MN	Alison Cariveau
MO	Kelly Rezac
MO	Nathan Muenks
NE	Melissa Panella
NE	Sarah Nevison
NE	Melissa Marinovich
NE	Caroline Jezierski
ND	Patrick Isakson
ND	Greg Link (MAFWA Director-Liaison)
OH	Kate Parsons
OH	Erin Hazelton
OH	John Navarro
OH	Sarah Stankavich
SD	Eileen Dowd Stukel
WI	Shari Koslowsky
WI	Tara Bergeson
USFWS Region 3	Brad Potter
USFWS Region 3	Jess Piispanen
USFWS Region 3	Angie Boyer
USFWS Region 3	Barb Hosler
USFWS Region 3	Phil Delphey
USFWS Region 3	Patrice Ashfield
AFWA	Mark Humpert
MAFWA - MLI	Ed Boggess
University of Illinois at Chicago	Iris Caldwell