



The Wildlife Society's Conservation Affairs Network

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Federal Updates

President Trump States Intent to Reduce Size of Two National Monuments – In a call with Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) in late October, President Trump reportedly relayed his intent to shrink the size of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments within the state of Utah. More details are expected by early December when the President will be travelling to the state to make a formal announcement on plans to redraw boundaries. The White House has also stated that a final report on the National Monuments review, which resulted from an April Executive order calling for the reevaluation of 27 National Monuments designations bestowed since 1996, will be released soon. The review document that is currently floating around is a leaked, draft copy. The [Northeast Section](#) and the [Western Section](#) of TWS both submitted comments on the National Monuments Review, requesting that 26 of the 27 Monuments retain current boundaries. Their comments did not include statements pertaining to Bears Ears National Monument due to a separate comment period timeframe being used for this site. The Idaho Chapter of TWS also recently finalized a [position statement](#) on federal land transfer.

Refuge Legislation Introduced – To correspond with the arrival of National Wildlife Refuge Week in mid-October, Representative Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) and Senator Tom Carper (D-DE) introduced the Keep America's Refuges Operational Act ([H.R. 3979](#)) ([S. 1940](#)). This bipartisan legislation would reauthorize the National Wildlife Refuge System's Volunteer Services, Community Partnerships, and Refuge Education program, thus allowing for funds to be appropriated for volunteer services and activities on refuges. TWS supported the legislation's introduction and sent a [letter](#) alongside partner organizations to the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands requesting a hearing. *Staff Contact:* [Caroline Murphy](#)

Forest Management Reform - The severity of the 2017 wildfire season has once again put forest management and fire funding reform at the center of many discussions on Capitol Hill. Consequently, a number of relevant pieces of legislation are making their way through Congress, though cohesive language that fully addresses both forest management and fire funding to the satisfaction of both chambers has yet to be realized. One piece of legislation is the Resilient Federal Forests Act ([H.R. 2936](#)), which passed the House on November 1. This legislation aims in part to expedite forest management actions by expanding the number of public land acres categorically excluded from certain [National Environmental Policy Act \(NEPA\)](#) reviews – up to 30,000 acres. The bill also includes language that would allow the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture to request a wildfire be declared a major disaster, which would in turn free up additional FEMA funds. In the Senate, Senator Barrasso (R-WY) ([S. 2608](#)) has just introduced

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legislation that would categorically exclude up to 6,000 acres from NEPA review. While S.2608 does not include any revisions to the way the federal government funds wildfire suppression, Senator Barrasso has stated his intent to pair this bill with other fire funding language being discussed among his colleagues.

The most relevant language dealing directly with fire funding reform is the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act ([H.R. 2862](#)) ([S. 1842](#)). This legislation would allow for the 10-year average of catastrophic wildfire costs, a figure that is used to set the Administration's wildfire suppression budget request each year, to be frozen at current levels while also providing the ability to adjust budget caps for more appropriated funds from Congress. This would slow the wildfire suppression account from continuously increasing in size and out-competing other budget line items. TWS along with coalition partners have [supported](#) the legislative fixes provided in the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act. The legislation, however, has not seen much movement in either chamber since introduction.

Fiscal Year 2018 Budget - The House and Senate both agreed to a budget resolution in late October to set the stage for a tax reform package that would require only 51 votes for passage as opposed to the usual 60. As part of the budget resolution, the Senate voted to fast track a process for writing legislation that would permit energy exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee has until November 13 to draft a bill to generate \$1 billion through drilling in ANWR to offset tax cuts.

Appropriations discussions to fund the federal government after the continuing resolution runs out on December 8 continue to be stalled. While the House has adopted a Fiscal Year 2018 omnibus package, the Senate has yet to even introduce its Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies bill. There is already talk around the Capitol of another Fiscal Year 2017 continuing resolution running through early February 2018. *Staff Contact:* [Caroline Murphy](#)

Tools

Alliance for America's Fish & Wildlife Launches Social Media Tools – The Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife, the umbrella coalition pushing for the passage of [Recovering America's Wildlife Act](#), has soft-launched Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr pages as well as a YouTube channel. These methods of mass communication will be employed more broadly to coincide with the pending reintroduction of Recovering America's Wildlife Act; legislation that would dedicate \$1.3 billion annually to state fish and wildlife agencies for the implementation of State Wildlife Action Plans and other agency activities such as law enforcement and conservation education. Check out the Alliance's social media pages below in preparation for the bill's anticipated introduction within the next month:

- Facebook – [Our Nature. Our Nation. Our Future.](#)
- Instagram - [@OurNatureUSA](#)

- YouTube – [Our Nature USA](#)
- Twitter – [@OurNatureUSA](#)
- Tumblr – [@OurNatureUSA](#)

Please also consider requesting your organizational unit sign onto the [letter of support](#) for Recovering America’s Wildlife Act if they have not done so already. TWS as well as other partner organizations involved with the Alliance for America’s Fish & Wildlife are seeking out regional and state sign-on in support of this legislation, which is expected to be introduced within the next couple of weeks. Expect more correspondence from TWS staff to follow shortly after bill introduction. *Staff Contact:* [Keith Norris](#)

Updated Position Statements to be Uploaded to Wildlife.org – TWS’ Executive Committee is in the final stages of reissuing TWS’ position statements on the Endangered Species Act, Lead in Ammunition and Fishing Tackle, Firearms, Livestock Grazing on Rangelands in the Western United States, and Global Climate Change and Wildlife. The updated position statements will be available at wildlife.org/position-statements/ within the next couple of weeks. *Staff Contact:* [Keith Norris](#)

Opportunities

America’s Grasslands Conference – The fourth biennial America’s Grassland Conference will be held in Fort Worth, Texas, November 14-16, 2017. The conference will bring together policy experts, landowners, natural resources professionals, and other stakeholders to discuss current and future management and conservation efforts on America’s grasslands. For additional information and to register for the conference, visit <https://www.nwf.org/grasslandsconference>.

Waters of the United States (WOTUS) Public Comment Sessions – The Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have started soliciting input from various stakeholder groups on their recommendations for replacing the 2015 “Waters of the US” rule. This rule, which would have expanded the types of water bodies covered under the Clean Water Act, has never been implemented due to ongoing litigation. The Wildlife Society [stated support for the 2015](#) rule when it was first being finalized, and the Minnesota Chapter of TWS along with the Wetlands Working Group recently submitted [comments](#) in favor of the 2015 rule as currently written during the first public comment period in summer 2017. The intent of the current revision process is to once again change the definition of Waters of the US, likely to only “relatively permanent waters” and only wetlands with a “continuous surface connection” to such waters, as conveyed in the Federal Register notice. Recommendations pertaining to the definition of WOTUS can be submitted at <https://www.regulations.gov/docket?D=EPA-HQ-OW-2017-0480> until November 28. There are also two more [public teleconferences](#) taking place between now and the end of November that will provide stakeholders the opportunity to speak. The General Public teleconference will be taking place on Tuesday, November 21, from 1 pm – 3 pm eastern.

Request for Submissions

Do you need assistance with a wildlife conservation policy issue? Does your CAC have a success story to tell? Is a new partnership developing at your organizational unit? Send it in! Let the CAN hear about it and help you in your work. *Staff Contact:* [Mariah Simmons](#)

CAC Contact Information

Update TWS HQ on Conservation Affairs Committee Point of Contacts – As your Sections and Chapters have new elections and appointments of officers, board members, and other organizational unit volunteers, be sure to update TWS staff of your new CAC Chairs. Email Mariah Simmons at MSimmons@wildlife.org with the new contact information to ensure continuity of communications in the Network.