



The Wildlife Society's Conservation Affairs Network

October 2023, Volume 9, Issue 10

The Wildlife Society's Conservation Affairs Network supports communication, collaboration, and coordination on policy engagement across our organization and participating chapters, sections, and working groups. The monthly CAN Newsletter highlights policy issues occurring at local, regional, and national levels, and provides opportunities for wildlife professionals to engage with those issues.

Engagement Opportunities

Senators continue to commit to cosponsoring the Recovering America's Wildlife Act; additional outreach to offices needed – The list of Democratic Senators who have officially committed to joining the cosponsor roster for the Recovering America's Wildlife Act ([S. 1149](#)) continues to grow, bringing new opportunities for units interested in thanking their Senators for their support. Commitment from more Republican Senators is also needed before Senate leadership will bring the bill to the Senate Floor for consideration.

- If your Senator(s) have **already signed-on** as [cosponsors](#), consider sending them a thank-you letter using this [TWS template](#). If you don't see your Senator(s) on the official cosponsor roster, check their level of support on this [targeting spreadsheet](#); for Democratic Senators who have already committed to cosponsoring the legislation, consider sending a letter of thanks for their support.
- If your Senator(s) **have not already cosponsored** the legislation or indicated their commitment to supporting the bill, you can request their cosponsorship using this [TWS template letter](#).
- You can use TWS' updated [social media guidance](#) to post about the current version of the legislation on your unit's social media accounts.

For TWS member engagement:

- Share this [phone call script](#) with unit members and encourage them to call their senators to request cosponsorship of the bill (or thank any senators who have [cosponsored](#) the legislation).
- Encourage members to write to their Senators directly using this [Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife action center](#).

Although we're waiting on bill text in the House, touches to House Republicans to emphasize the importance of this legislation are warranted and valuable. Reach out to Kelly if you're interested in outreach to any House offices.

Staff contact: [Kelly O'Connor](#)

CAC Activities

Thank you to CAN virtual meeting participants – CAC members and officers from TWS Sections and Chapters met on September 19 to discuss CAN operations, current wildlife policy issues, and ideas for future learning opportunities relating to conservation policy and policy engagement. Thank you to all participants for your engagement throughout the meeting. Notes

from the meeting are available [here](#); please reach out to Kelly with any questions or feedback about the meeting. *Staff contact: [Kelly O'Connor](#)*

Federal Updates

President Biden vetoes joint resolutions that would have stripped Endangered Species Act protections from the lesser prairie chicken and northern long-eared bat – President Biden [vetoed two joint resolutions](#) that passed both the House and Senate prior to the August recess. Those resolutions would have removed Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections for the lesser prairie chicken and northern long-eared bat. President Biden promised earlier in the year that he would veto these resolutions. In statements to the Senate for the [lesser prairie chicken](#) and [northern long-eared bat](#), the President cited science-based rulemaking as an important standard for ESA decision-making, which would have been undermined by the resolutions. The veto override attempt failed in the Senate, maintaining ESA protections for the two species for the foreseeable future. TWS opposes legislative action to list/delist species under the [ESA](#). *Staff contact: [Kelly O'Connor](#)*

House and Senate introduce legislation to reverse recent Endangered Species Act rulemaking – Legislation introduced in the Senate ([S. 2811](#)) and House ([H.R. 5504](#)) seeks to undo proposed rulemaking affecting the implementation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In recent comments to the US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service, [TWS supported](#) the proposal to revise rules implementing sections 4, 4(d), and 7 of the ESA. The proposed rulemaking included regulatory language that pertained to economic considerations when listing species, designating critical habitat, and “blanket rule” protections for threatened species. Supporters of the House and Senate Bills include the American Farm Bureau Federation and the National Endangered Species Act Reform Coalition. *Staff contact: [Kelly O'Connor](#)*

US Fish and Wildlife Service designates Colorado’s gray wolves as a nonessential experimental population – In a recently-released [final environmental impact statement](#) (EIS), the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announced their intent to designate a nonessential experimental population (NEP) of gray wolves in Colorado under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The NEP status provides for “allowable, legal, purposeful, and incidental take” of federally listed species, while still allowing for actions to improve their conservation status. With the NEP designation in place, wildlife officers in the state will be able to utilize lethal and nonlethal management techniques to address human-wildlife conflicts with gray wolves on the western slope of Colorado. Ranchers can also administer these methods when a wolf is caught in the act of preying on livestock. The [designation](#) has been welcomed by both wildlife and ranching groups, and comes in advance of the December 31st deadline for Colorado Parks and Wildlife to commence gray wolf reintroduction. *Staff contact: [Kelly O'Connor](#)*

EPA looks to empower states following revised WOTUS definition – The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released a [final rule](#) under the Clean Water Act reversing Trump-era limitations on the authorities granted to states, tribes, and territories for permitting water

resource projects. The rule is intended to strengthen state and tribal capacity to protect local water resources, restoring oversight powers and reinstating the ability for states and tribes to determine the duration of federal review processes. This rulemaking follows the release of final rule language in August 2023 [revising the definition of “waters of the United States”](#) (WOTUS). The final rule will be effective on November 27, 2023. Any TWS units interested in assisting in the development of a policy brief focusing on state-level impacts of WOTUS and associated rulemaking should reach out to TWS staff. *Staff contact:* [Kelly O'Connor](#)

Government shutdown averted – Congress and the President passed a continuing resolution ([H.R. 5860](#)) on September 30th, keeping the government open until November 17th and temporarily preventing a harmful government shutdown. The continuing resolution included disaster funding for wildlife and other natural disasters, a topic that has proven contentious throughout this appropriations cycle. The House and Senate will need to resolve drastically-different [spending bills](#) appropriating funds to the Department of Interior and related agencies for Fiscal Year 2024. For example, in response to the administration’s \$625 million request for the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), the House has appropriated \$487 million and the Senate \$539 million. [TWS requested](#) \$712 million for the NWRS in appropriations testimony submitted earlier in the year. TWS staff continue to monitor the appropriations process as both chambers work to finalize a budget for the federal government. *Staff contact:* [Kelly O'Connor](#)

US Fish and Wildlife Service announces updated planning policies for National Wildlife Refuges – The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) released [proposed policy updates](#) intended to modernize management of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS). The updated policies emphasize considerations for climate change and collaboration with partners in NWRS planning processes. The policy updates also address landscape-level planning and habitat connectivity, climate adaptation and resilience, planning for land protection and acquisition, coordination with partners, and modifications to refuge boundaries. USFWS will update its Comprehensive Conservation Planning policy ([602 FW 3](#)), which includes language on requirements for developing comprehensive conservation plans (CCPs) (including CCPs for new refuges), their scope, their required content, and coordination with partners. This group of updated policies also includes the USFWS Step-down Planning policy ([602 FW 4](#)) which establishes requirements for developing step-down plans, including CCP integration, National Environmental Policy Act considerations, and partner coordination efforts. Comments on the proposed policy updates are being solicited until October 16th. TWS staff is in the process of evaluating the proposed updates and developing comments for submission to the USFWS. *Staff Contact:* [Kelly O'Connor](#)

BLM concludes public comment period for proposed rulemaking to update oil and gas leasing regulations – The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) concluded its [solicitation of public comments](#) on proposed rulemaking to revise its oil and gas leasing regulations. The [proposed rule language](#) stresses the importance of avoiding conflict with wildlife habitat, including wetlands and connectivity areas, when leasing public lands for oil and gas development. The rule aims to preferentially grant leases on lands adjacent to existing oil and

gas development to avoid degradation of wildlife habitat and elimination of habitat connectivity. The proposed rule also prohibits oil and gas development on any National Wildlife Refuges.

Staff Contact: [Kelly O'Connor](#)

TWS provides comments to the Council on Environmental Quality on rulemaking to update regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act – TWS submitted [comments](#) to the U.S. Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regarding updates to regulations implementing the [National Environmental Policy Act](#) (NEPA). Much of the rulemaking focused on rescission of changes to these regulations in 2020. TWS has [supported](#) other recent NEPA rulemaking to reverse some of the 2020 regulatory changes, and this current set of comments provided support for efforts to expand public engagement with NEPA processes and to incorporate mitigation measures that address environmental justice and human health concerns into NEPA. The current CEQ rulemaking would broaden the scope of proposed actions and alternatives under NEPA to recognize potential contributions of those actions to climate change. TWS supports this explicit inclusion of climate change considerations in NEPA implementing regulations. Comments also encourage CEQ to recognize Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK) as a source of high-quality data to inform decision-making processes under NEPA. Staff contact: [Kelly O'Connor](#)

Updates from Headquarters

Policy engagement opportunities at TWS' 30th annual conference – [Registration is open](#) for TWS' 30th annual conference, November 5-9 in Louisville, Kentucky. Members interested in wildlife conservation policy and strategies for policy engagement can take advantage of several opportunities during the conference. There are still spots available to register for the workshop "Using Your Voice: Policy Engagement Through the Lens of a Wildlifer", which will cover information on relevant legislative and regulatory processes and provide hands-on training on how to engage with decision makers. This year's conference will also feature a Conservation Affairs Network symposium highlighting some of the critical wildlife policy engagement activities being led by participants in the CAN. We hope to see you in Louisville!

CAC Activity and Contact Updates

Policy consultation – Do you want assistance with a wildlife conservation policy issue? Curious as to the various ways your organization unit can support federal efforts by TWS or engage on local level issues? Contact Kelly O'Connor at koconnor@wildlife.org.

Activity updates, success stories, and CAC Contact information – Does your CAC have a success story to tell? Is a new partnership developing at your organization unit? Do you have a new CAC Chair? Send it in! Let the CAN hear about it and help you in your work. Email Kelly O'Connor at koconnor@wildlife.org.