



Excellence in Wildlife Stewardship Through Science and Education

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Week of Friday, March 29th 2013

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<https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Wildlife-Society-New-Mexico-Chapter/122478411098284>

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1. New Research from the *Journal of Wildlife Diseases*

March 23, 2013

Published by the Wildlife Disease Association, a partner organization of The Wildlife Society

Snowshoe Hare Density Influences Toxoplasma Infection in Canadian Lynx

A team of researchers led by Audrey Simon at the University of Montreal investigated factors that may have caused a significant drop in toxoplasma infection of lynx in Western Quebec, Canada. The team measured antibody prevalence in a group of 84 lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) during the winter of 2009-2010 and compared it to the same number of individuals tested in 1997-1998. Toxoplasma infection fell from 36 percent to 14 percent between the two years. The results indicate that spatiotemporal dynamics may influence infection rates. The researchers ruled out domestic cat density (using human population density as a proxy), but they did find that during periodic population declines of snowshoe hare — common prey for lynx — both lynx density and infection rate decreased. Other abiotic influences could not be ruled out. [More](#)

American Goldfinches May Speed Conjunctivitis Spread

In 1994, a conjunctivitis epidemic broke out in House Finches (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) around Maryland and Virginia, and it rapidly spread west. Now, researchers at Cornell University have found that the bacterium responsible for the disease — *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* — can be transmitted between House Finches and American Goldfinches (*Spinus tristis*), and that the latter can harbor the disease even when House Finches are absent. *M. gallisepticum* causes swelling of the conjunctiva — the delicate membranes of the eye and eyelid — causing impaired vision, and sometimes respiratory complications. Both symptoms increase predation risk and interfere with a bird's ability to find food. Due to their more migratory behavior, American Goldfinches may play a key role in the speed of spread of the disease. [More](#)

Bd Infection Could Shape Populations

The common coquí (*Eleutherodactylus coqui*), a frog native to Puerto Rico, has declined over the past 10 years due to the pathogenic fungus *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (*Bd*). But researchers hadn't confirmed *Bd* deaths in the field until recently, when a team from Cornell University and the University of Puerto Rico found two dead coquí in El Yunque, Puerto Rico. Many frog populations experience rapid and massive mortality from *Bd*, but the coquí have persisted with low to moderate infection rates and an overall slow but steady population decline. Such a slow decline could increase the chance that the species will develop tolerance or resistance to the fungus. In the meantime, more long-term studies are needed to assess the effect of this decline on coquí population dynamics. [More](#)

Understanding Influenza Infection and Resistance to Treatment

Dabbling ducks are a reservoir for influenza A, a low-pathogenic avian influenza virus that can develop into highly pathogenic strains including ones that can spread to humans. Influenza A viral strains are increasingly resistant to Tamiflu — a widely-used antiviral drug used to combat the virus. A team of Swedish researchers have begun to investigate how the virus responds to exposure to Tamiflu's active metabolite, called oseltamivir carboxylate (OC), and to monitor progression of the disease in infected mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*). Their results showed no difference in the course of infection in mallards that were infected manually versus by close contact with infected individuals, no difference when the mallards were given three different doses of OC, and no difference when infected mallards were left untreated versus when they were treated but were infected with an OC-resistant virus. The researchers suggest that further study into the pathology of viral infection with and without treatment with OC could lead to a better understanding of influenza infections in general. [More](#)

Detecting Avian Influenza

Two common molecular tests for detecting avian influenza (AI), a potentially lethal zoonotic virus, are not equally sensitive. Justin Brown and Dave Stallknecht from the University of Georgia took mallards cloacal swabs that

tested positive for avian influenza by one of two tests, and attempted to infect healthy mallards with the swabs. Of the swabs that tested positive by both tests, only 55 percent infected healthy mallards, indicating that one or both of the tests give positive results even when the bird is not contagious. The researchers then tried to infect healthy mallards with swabs that tested positive by only one of the tests — real-time reverse transcription-PCR (RRT-PCR), and negative by the other — virus isolation from fertilized chicken eggs (VI). None of the mallards in this section of the experiment became infected, indicating that RRT-PCR, not VI, may give a positive result even when birds are not contagious. This suggests that VI is a more sensitive test for identifying mallards that excrete enough AI virus to infect other mallards. The study also showed that field strains of AI can infect mallards at lower virus titers than do many lab-propagated strains, suggesting the need to evaluate the use of less infectious research strains as a proxy for field strains. [More](#)

New Virus Targets Kangaroos

For the first time, a herpesvirus that causes disease in eastern gray kangaroos (*Marcopus giganteus*) has been isolated from a wild population. A team from the University of Melbourne, Australia, determined that the new virus is a genetically distinct alphaherpesvirus and is most similar to the macropodid herpesvirus 2, but displays different characteristics when grown in cell culture and also causes respiratory and neurologic disease symptoms. [More](#)

Article link: <http://news.wildlife.org/wildlife-news/new-research-from-the-journal-of-wildlife-diseases/>

##

2. Panel considers Indiana fenced deer hunting sites

By TOM DAVIES, Associated Press
Updated 3:43 pm, Monday, March 25, 2013

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Several private game preserves where hunters pay for a chance to shoot deer kept inside high fences would be legalized under a proposal being considered by state legislators.

Owners of the preserves and some outdoorsmen organizations disagree on whether hunting the farm-raised deer should be allowed. Preserve supporters told an [Indiana House](#) committee Monday that legislation is needed to resolve an eight-year-old lawsuit over whether five existing preserves can stay in business.

Rep. [Matt Ubelhor](#), R-Bloomfield, said the proposal would protect hundreds of thousands of dollars of investments by the preserve owners who started opening

the sites in 1999. The [Indiana Department of Natural Resources](#) ruled in 2005 that fenced hunting was illegal.

Those existing preserves have remained open under a court injunction, and Ubelhor's proposal would only allow permit sites that have operated continuously since 2005.

"This is in no way an expansion of the program," Ubelhor said. "It's simply protecting the operators that are there today."

Leaders of the [Indiana Deer Hunters Association](#), [Indiana Bowhunter Association](#) and [Indiana Wildlife Federation](#) told the [House Natural Resources Committee](#) they were concerned about deer at the preserves spreading other illnesses to the state's wild deer population.

Some preserve owners and farmers who raise deer sold to those sites said Monday they closely monitored their animals for signs of diseases.

Sen. [Michael Crider](#), who was the DNR's law enforcement director when the fenced-hunting ban policy was adopted, said the agency wanted to ensure a healthy wildlife population and that the policy was reasonable. He said he also shared the concerns about the hunting of captive deer.

"The people that run pens are interested in somebody coming there and killing an animal," said Crider, R-Greenfield. "They don't get paid unless someone harvests that deer."

The hunting groups also criticized the preserves, saying it isn't real hunting because the farm-raised deer have less fear of humans than wild deer.

"They are domestically raised just like cattle and pigs are today," said [Herb Higgins](#), an officer of the bowhunter association.

[Rodney Bruce](#), owner of Whitetail Bluff near the southern Indiana town of Corydon, said the preserves didn't offer canned hunting.

"If you have a deer in a room that can't escape or in a pen that can't escape, that's totally unacceptable," Bruce said. "Our places are not like that."

Bruce said his 120-acre business typically has 70-80 deer within its fences and that hunters are still challenged. The preserve's website lists 3-day hunting and lodging packages based on buck size, ranging from \$1,900 to \$7,900.

The [House committee](#) could vote next week on whether to advance the proposal to the full House.

Senate President Pro Tem [David Long](#), R-Fort Wayne, blocked a broader House-approved bill last year that would have legalized the existing fenced-hunting preserves and allowed new ones.

Long said Monday he continued to believe that legislators reached a tacit agreement several years ago not to intercede in the lawsuit and that he hoped the Senate wouldn't have to deal with the issue again this year.

Republican Gov. [Mike Pence](#), who took office in January, is hesitant about expanding high-fenced preserves, but "is keeping an open mind" about proposals to allow the existing preserves to continue operating, spokeswoman [Kara Brooks](#) said.

Ubelhor said he wanted to allow good businesses to stay open.

"This is an opportunity for people to take part in hunting and have a good time doing it," he said. "They're guaranteed a safe place to hunt."

Article link: <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Panel-considers-Indiana-fenced-deer-hunting-sites-4382412.php>

##

3. New Report Identifies Conservation Hotspots For Greater Sage-Grouse

Tuesday, March 26, 2013

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has released a new report detailing what it will take to conserve the imperiled Greater Sage-Grouse. The report maps out the most important areas for the conservation of the declining species, which in 2015 may be added to the list of threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.

"This new U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report provides an important roadmap for land managers that we urge the agencies to follow. It represents a good-faith effort at using the best available science to protect the species," said Steve Holmer, senior policy advisor for American Bird Conservancy, one of the nation's leading bird conservation organizations. "So it is disappointing that we are seeing Bureau of Land Management resource management plans already created without the benefit of this guidance. Those plans appear to fall short of what's needed to conserve the species."

The new Conservation Objectives Report is intended to guide a major regional planning effort now underway to conserve the Greater Sage-Grouse. Following

the completion of seven state-based Environmental Impact Statements, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S.D.A. Forest Service will then amend more than 100 individual management plans across a vast amount (57 million acres) of federal lands.

However, the BLM has already released the final Lander Resource Management plan in Wyoming as well as a draft plan for the Miles City management area in Montana. These plans will determine how sage grouse habitat will be managed and whether protected areas will be established.

“Several BLM management plans are being completed without the benefit of the new Conservation Objectives Report and need strengthening,” said Mr. Holmer. “For example, the Lander Resource Management plan did not designate any significant protected areas for the Greater Sage-Grouse. Conserving the grouse will require improving management and protecting sufficient habitat.”

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Conservation Objectives Report is available [here](#).

Article link: <http://www.chattanooga.com/2013/3/26/247505/New-Report-Identifies-Conservation.aspx>

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4. Wolf hybridization concerns federal wildlife managers

Posted: Tuesday, March 26, 2013 11:00 pm | Updated: 1:12 am, Wed Mar 27, 2013.

MEXICAN WOLF

ALBUQUERQUE — Federal wildlife managers have been working to return the endangered Mexican gray wolf to the American Southwest for the past 15 years. Every now and then, there’s a genetic hiccup.

It happens when a wolf breeds with a domestic dog and produces a litter of hybridized pups.

Just last month, an animal that looked like a wolf was spotted in the mountain community of Reserve near the Arizona-New Mexico border so experts with the wolf management team had to investigate. They determined that the uncollared animal was most likely a pet that showed some signs of northern gray wolf heritage.

While it doesn't happen often, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service spokesman Tom Buckley said Tuesday that hybridization is a concern.

Any mixing of Mexican gray wolves with dogs has the potential to throw a wrench in the federal government's efforts to reintroduce the predators to Arizona and New Mexico. Having a genetically diverse — yet pure — population has been identified as one of the keys to making the effort a success, and biologists have gone to great lengths over the years to pair genetically valuable wolves and to collect semen and eggs from some of the animals for captive breeding and research.

When hybrid wolves are found in the wild, they are removed to protect the genetic pool. For example, wildlife managers in 2011 had to euthanize four wolf-dog pups that belonged to a female Mexican gray wolf that had initially been released into the Gila National Forest with hopes of being a mate for another lone wolf.

Only two other cases have been documented — one in 2002 and another in 2005.

"We've been fortunate because it is important for us that this is a pure Mexican wolf population," said Sherry Barrett, head of the wolf reintroduction program.

Genetics are already a touchy subject when it comes to Mexican wolves. Without a diverse pool of genes, wolf packs become susceptible to inbreeding and that could lead to smaller litters and more pup deaths.

Environmentalists say there's a "genetic crisis" within the wild Mexican wolf population and have been pushing the Fish and Wildlife Service to release some of the nearly 260 wolves that are currently in captivity.

"The fact that there are hybrid animals indicates that the wolves are not finding each other and that there are not enough animals on the ground," said Wendy Keefover of the group WildEarth Guardians.

Federal officials argued that releasing more captive wolves won't solve the problem. They are focusing specifically on those wolves that can diversify the genetic pool.

The Mexican gray wolf population stems from seven wolves that were trapped in Mexico in the late 1970s as part of the effort to save the species through captive breeding. The federal government released the first captive-bred wolves into the wild in 1998. Now, all but one of the wolves on the ground in New Mexico and Arizona are wild-born.

The most recent population count completed at the beginning of the year found at least 75 wolves in the wild. Out of the 13 packs identified, there were only a few breeding pairs.

Article link:

http://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local_news/article_b94c372d-f28b-5f98-bb6a-9bd7c33c40fe.html

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5. Why Illinois Is Roaring Mad About Lion Meat

by Lydia Zuraw

March 27, 2013 2:07 PM

When we heard a few weeks ago that Illinois was considering banning lion meat, our first thought was, who's eating lion meat? And why Illinois?

Turns out, lion meat has been gaining traction among adventurous foodies who argue that the meat can be an ethical alternative to factory-farmed animals — if the meat comes from American-raised circus and zoo animals that were sent to the slaughterhouse in their old age.

"People's interest in nonfactory-farmed animals has definitely influenced the interest in adventurous eating," says Curtiss Calleo, co-founder of a club for daring eaters called The Gastronomers, which has hosted a lion meat dinner in New York.

But before even more curious foodies can get a taste of lion, it may be banned by some who consider the culinary flirtation shameful.

Earlier this year, Rep. Luis Arroyo introduced a bill in the Illinois General Assembly that would make it illegal to possess, breed, buy or sell lions for their meat.

"I've always thought of the lion to be the king of the jungle," Arroyo tells The Salt. "I never knew that people were consuming lion meat. I don't know who would want to do that."

Bernard Dehaene, a chef in Baltimore who has served lion, as well as kangaroo and python, says there's nothing to be ashamed of. "We're not here to offend anybody," he says. In 2011, he started an exotic meat club at the restaurant Corner BYOB. "We're here to showcase and do something different and educate people about other foods."

But animal advocacy groups say eating lion meat is hardly harmless.

In the past 20 years, they note, the world's lion population has decreased by about half — which is why wildlife protection and conservation organizations have petitioned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to add lions to its endangered species list.

Currently, the International Union for Conservation of Nature lists African lions as "vulnerable" — meaning they're at high risk of endangerment in the wild — but there are no trade restrictions on them. Lions face a number of threats, including habitat loss, disease, trophy hunting and international trade in their meat.

Born Free USA — one of the organizations that petitioned FWS for the listing — says it worries that increased interest in lion meat in the U.S. might encourage more poaching abroad. If diners knew "the risks facing wild lions, they would surely abstain at every turn," says Adam Roberts, the group's executive vice president.

The FWS says the listing "may be warranted" for lions and began a review of the matter last November, but it could take the agency another year to make a final decision. In the meantime, Born Free USA worked with Arroyo to draft his bill.

Which brings us back to the question: Why Illinois?

Well, a few years ago, Born Free USA investigated the lion meat trade routes after receiving several reports that it was on restaurant menus across the country. "It turns out that Illinois was really the key actor in it all, both in terms of acquisition of lions, slaughter of lions and then, ultimately, the packaging of lion meat," says Roberts.

U.S. retailers that sell lion meat, including ExoticMeatMarket.com, say their meat comes from animals raised on a USDA-inspected lion farm outside Chicago, Gastronomica reported in 2012. And an article in Popular Science claimed that the meat available on the market in the U.S. comes from older animals from circuses, exotic pet enthusiasts and zoos.

"None of the lion meat available in the U.S. comes or came from Africa," Calleo says. "So I'm not exactly sure what banning farming lions or selling old circus and zoo animals for meat has to do with African poachers and conservation."

But Roberts argues that it's impossible to be sure that none of the lion meat on U.S. dinner plates came from Africa. "You really have, in our experience, a situation where the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration are looking at each other saying, 'Lions are not in our arena,' " Roberts tells The Salt. "And I think it's a species for which the flesh trade is falling through the cracks," he says.

And, Roberts says, it's not just about conservation. "There's also a human health and safety issue, in that we don't know what kind of antibiotic residues may remain in these animals, whether these animals are in any way sanitary for human consumption," he says.

Although Born Free USA has heard some stories of lion meat being sourced outside Illinois, Roberts says he thinks a ban there "will dramatically reduce the number of lions being acquired for slaughter, the amount of lion meat being traded, and the demand for lion meat around the country."

Ultimately, if the U.S. lion meat trade is shut down by the FWS or Arroyo's bill, it probably won't be the biggest loss for foodies. Because, as Calleo puts it, "It's not the most exciting meat you'll ever eat. Predators aren't really that tasty."

Article link: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thesalt/2013/03/25/175296454/why-illinois-is-roaring-mad-about-lion-meat>

##

6. State Perspectives on the ESA

March 28, 2013

By Elsa M. Haubold and Nick Wiley

A Journey of Conflict and Cooperation

State-federal partnerships under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 are resulting in myriad conservation successes for wildlife species across the nation. Among the most recent: In January, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) announced that it will reclassify the wood stork from endangered to threatened. Likewise, 2013 population numbers for the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker show that several sites in Florida have already met their 2020 recovery goals for the species — seven years ahead of schedule — reflecting one of the best examples of state, federal, and private landowner cooperation in species conservation. Since the inception of the ESA, states have functioned as co-trustees for federally listed species.

State natural resource agencies and their experts in species and habitat management play a vital role in cooperating with federal agencies in managing listed species and working to protect non-listed species to prevent future listings. The Act mandates such cooperation: [Section 6](#), titled "Cooperation with the States," requires the Secretary of the Interior to "cooperate to the maximum extent practicable with the states," including "consultation with the states concerned before acquiring any land or water ... for the purpose of conserving any endangered species or threatened species."

Such cooperation is essential for three main reasons: (1) States have a deep understanding of local values and attitudes toward wildlife conservation, (2) states have principal management authority for resident fish and wildlife, so they are in the best position to assess and meet the conservation needs of at-risk species, and (3) states own and/or manage public lands and provide technical assistance to managers of private lands that contribute to conservation of federally listed species. In Florida, for example, where more than 25 percent of land is publicly owned, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has helped manage more than 5.8 million acres of conservation lands that contribute to the recovery of numerous listed species, including the red-cockaded woodpecker.

Getting into the Weeds

Although there are great examples of federal-state collaboration, the ESA has also created some challenges for the states and their constituents. One element that complicates ESA implementation for some states lies in structural bureaucracy. The Act is administered by two federal agencies: The FWS and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), collectively called the Services. The FWS oversees terrestrial and freshwater species, some marine mammals, and sea turtles when they are on the beach, while NMFS oversees most marine species. Unfortunately, the two Services do not always have a consistent approach to ESA implementation, which causes confusion for state partners trying to understand the implications of species' listings.

For example, there's a significant difference in how the Services handle "candidate" species. For NMFS, candidates are species undergoing an ESA status review, but for FWS, species become candidates only after FWS does a status review and finds that a species warrants listing even though FWS may not have resources to immediately develop a listing plan. While states support the need to federally list species when at risk of extinction, their preference is to "keep common species common" so they don't decline to the point that they require federal protection through listing. When species do reach that point, they generally require a decades-long, arduous, and expensive journey to bring them back to a level where they are no longer endangered (at risk of extinction now) or threatened (at risk of becoming endangered). Among the challenges states face:

Red-tape Blues. ESA listings trigger regulations and requirements that some states find onerous or inefficient. These include requiring the designation of "Critical Habitat" to protect habitat essential to the conservation of the species, and also developing "Habitat Conservation Plans" to secure incidental take permits. Public and private land managers must get incidental take permits for management activities that might cause short-lived harm to a listed species even if the net benefit of the activity outweighs the take. For example, permits are needed when conducting prescribed fire that may kill a few individuals of a listed

species but may benefit the long-term survival of a population by improving habitat.

Excessive Litigation. An important component of the ESA is that it grants the public the ability to petition for species to be listed, and citizens can sue the Services if they do not meet their obligations under the ESA. However, many states feel that petitions and litigation filed by NGOs and others against the Services are increasingly impinging on states' trustee responsibilities. That's particularly true of the increasing number of "mega-petitions" for listing numerous species at one time, such as a 2010 petition to the FWS to list 404 aquatic and aquatic-dependent species primarily occurring across southeastern states, and a 2012 petition for the listing of 53 reptile and amphibian species across the U.S.

Federalization. Many petitioned species and candidate species are state trust species, meaning the state has full regulatory authority over their management and take. These fish and wildlife resources are publicly owned and entrusted to the state for management on behalf of its citizens. Many states maintain their own lists of state endangered or threatened species, which can include federal trust species (generally migratory or federally listed species) or species at risk in that state, or both. Federalization occurs when a state trust species is brought under the regulatory authority of one of the Services through an ESA listing. In such cases, state authority is essentially abrogated or becomes secondary to federal authority, ESA requirements, and federal policy. Recent mega-petitions litigated and settled through court action are pushing an unprecedented number of state trust species toward federalization. This is especially troubling from a state perspective because the litigation process offers few opportunities for states to engage in or influence the outcomes. As a result, outside interests determine management and regulation of species that were previously under state authority, yet state fish and wildlife agencies remain on the front lines of implementing and enforcing these measures

Limited Capacity. State fish and wildlife agencies are facing steadily increasing workloads with decreasing funding and staffing capacity. Activities associated with ESA listings not only affect state workloads but also cause states to re-prioritize activities and shift emphasis away from other species that may be more in need of conservation attention from a state's perspective. For example, in Florida, for the past year we have allocated one staff member's time to serve as a liaison for federal issues, including addressing petitioned and candidate species. This individual would normally work on other conservation priorities for the state.

Public Perception. Concerns about federal regulations and litigation regarding federal listings can drive public opinion against the ESA with the unintentional consequence of harming species conservation efforts. In Florida, for example, one manager of a large plantation did not want red-cockaded woodpeckers on his land because of land-use restrictions the ESA would impose. However, tools

are available under the ESA to help address such concerns. That land manager, for example, ultimately signed on to FWS's "Safe Harbor" program, which assures landowners that if they agree to support a listed species on their land, they will only be accountable for the number of individuals that existed when they entered the agreement. With that assurance, the landowner became willing to actively manage for and even encourage the birds to take up residence on the property.

An Ounce of Prevention ...

The ESA does drive positive conservation efforts that can only be successful and durable when states and federal agencies work collaboratively to become less reactive and more proactive in imperiled species conservation efforts. Fortunately, many states have been actively working toward this end with the Services. For example, after the 2010 petition to list 404 aquatic and aquatic-dependent species, the Wildlife Diversity Committee of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies ([SEAFWA](#)) — which represents 15 southeastern states and FWS — began developing an action plan to implement coordinated survey and monitoring measures for those species. The goal is to provide landscape level cooperation that delivers effective conservation for these and other species. Of the 404 petitioned species, 374 will undergo status reviews by the FWS in the future, and the committee plans to provide important data to contribute to many of these reviews.

In 2000, states gained a valuable new tool in their efforts to prevent federal listing when the federal State Wildlife Grants ([SWG](#)) program enabled all states to develop State Wildlife Action Plans ([SWAPs](#)), a historic first for most states. "By laying out conservation actions needed to conserve at-risk species, State Wildlife Action Plans are our best line of defense for preventing more endangered species listings," says Mark Humpert, Wildlife Diversity Director for the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies ([AFWA](#)). The SWG program provides funding for states to conserve the rare and declining species identified in their SWAPs.

Unfortunately, that funding safety net is thin at best: most states receive less than \$1 million per year from SWG funding — which ranged from as little as \$478,601 for small states like Connecticut up to about \$2.4 million for Alaska. That's vastly below the estimated \$900 million annually needed to fully implement the SWAPs and conserve the more than 12,000 species nationwide that have been identified as at-risk ([AFWA 2011](#)). Humpert has been active in influencing Congress to ensure that SWG program funding continues, arguing that SWAPs have been instrumental in facilitating states' abilities to develop partnerships for conserving nonlisted species. Yet year after year the SWG program is threatened by cuts, surviving elimination by HR1 in FY2011 but resulting in funding of \$64 million, a 31 percent cut and the lowest allocation since the program's inception.

Case in point: In the Northeast, the New England cottontail (*Sylvilagus transitionalis*) is a priority species in all seven SWAPs in the species' range, state listed as endangered in Maine and New Hampshire, and a FWS candidate species. Hoping to prevent federal listing, states in the cottontail's range are partnering with FWS, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Wildlife Management Institute to try to reverse habitat and population declines. With a steering committee that meets quarterly, the partners are cooperating to conduct restoration on state lands, target grants to key landowners for private-lands conservation, and commit millions of dollars for restoration on private lands by NRCS. In 2015, the FWS will determine if listing is warranted. Even if that happens, the cooperative framework is already in place so recovery activities can flow from the existing partnership.

Such collaboration among state agencies is not new. States often work together to conduct coordinated surveys and monitoring to fill data gaps and thereby prevent the need for federal listing of species. One iconic case in point involves the black-tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*). In 1998, an NGO petitioned FWS to emergency list the species as threatened. That triggered a massive effort among states, management agencies, and tribal entities across the western range of the species to assess its conservation needs and work proactively to prevent listing. In 1999, those groups produced a comprehensive conservation assessment and strategy that assessed risks to prairie dogs — such as plague, grazing competition, recreational shooting, and land conversion — and outlined steps to begin to protect prairie dogs and their habitat ([Van Pelt 1999](#)).

In 2000, FWS named the species a “candidate” for listing. That designation gave the states time to implement a coordinated range-wide survey using similar methods in each state. This unprecedented cooperative effort yielded data that resulted in two subsequent findings that the prairie dog did *not* meet any of the five listing factors, which are (1) damage to or destruction of a species habitat; (2) overutilization of the species for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes; existing protection; and (5) other natural or man-made factors that affect the continued existence of the species. Today, black-tailed prairie dogs are estimated to number around 24 million and occupy 2.4 million acres ([FWS](#)).

Finding a Better Way

In spite of the challenges, the ESA is an effective tool for wildlife conservation. Given the pressures on wildlife and habitats, however, it's clear that stronger collaboration among the states and the Services is the only way forward. Recognizing this need, states and the Services in 2010 formed the Joint Federal/State Task Force on Endangered Species Act Policy (ESA JTF). Designed as an executive-level forum for discussion among the state and federal fish and wildlife agencies, it comprises eight state fish and wildlife agency directors and four representatives from each of the Services. Its purpose is to

provide a process to cooperatively identify and address issues of national significance and to jointly develop recommendations concerning those issues.

The ESA JTF has outlined several priorities. Top priorities include: (1) to define the role of states in listing-petition reviews and status reviews of species so states can ensure that their species data and staff expertise are available to the Services when they evaluate species for listing; (2) to clarify the authority conveyed by the Section 6 Cooperative Agreements that each state enters into with one or both Services; and (3) to increase state involvement in federal recovery planning, critical habitat designations, and implementation of the ESA's mandate for "Interagency Cooperation" ([Section 7](#)).

Though still in its nascent stages, the ESA JTF has seen some near-term returns. For example, communication between the states and the Services has improved by providing a forum for agency directors to discuss and work together on issues. A better understanding of the differences in implementation by the two Services exists, and the Services have taken several steps to eliminate some of the differences, such as the FWS revising its policy on timing of impact analysis in designating critical habitat to align with the policy of NMFS so that economic analyses are done when the proposed rule is announced.

More recently, the ESA JTF asked all state fish and wildlife agencies to meet with their federal counterparts to discuss how well they are cooperating on implementing the ESA at the state level. Forty-nine states and territories submitted a report about their meetings to the ESA JTF. Most agreed that while communication and collaboration are better, there is still room for improvement. These reports about the state meetings affirmed the top priorities already identified by the ESA JTF and stressed the importance of developing incentives to enlist private landowners in conservation. The ESA JTF will continue to work on these priorities over the next few years. "Only by envisioning conservation approaches that empower and foster constructive integration of state, federal, and non-governmental conservation machines can we begin to imagine that the great conservation success stories of the 20th century will continue through the 21st century," says Task Force member Larry Voyles, Director of the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

For the ESA to have continued success over the next 40 years and beyond, numerous challenges to implementation will have to be overcome. These are adaptive problems, and the co-trustees — states and federal agencies — will have to work together with other partners to chart the course. Some cultural differences between agencies will need to be sorted out to allow innovative solutions and to break down barriers to partnerships among the public and private sectors. The ESA JTF offers a strong start, for the first time providing an ongoing forum for the federal and state agencies to have meaningful dialogue and roll up their sleeves together to more effectively conserve our precious fish

and wildlife resources — both before and after they require the protection of the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

Author Bios

Elsa M. Haubold, Ph.D., is a biological administrator working on Endangered Species Act issues and Gulf restoration with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and is a National Conservation Leadership Institute Fellow.

Nick Wiley, CWB, is Executive Director of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Co-chair of the Endangered Species Act Joint Task Force, Chair of AFWA's Threatened and Endangered Species Committee, and a National Conservation Leadership Institute Fellow.

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