



The Wildlife Society's Conservation Affairs Network

March 2020, Volume 6, Issue 3

On the Horizon

TWS council meeting at North American Conference – The [85th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference](#) will take place March 8-13 in Omaha, NE. TWS' Council will meet March 8-9 in conjunction with the conference. The Council has released the meeting [agenda](#). *Staff Contact:* [Keith Norris](#)

Opportunities

Members invited to March 24-25 DC fly-in – TWS headquarters staff invites chapters and sections to engage with their congressional delegation on the importance of the [State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program](#) during a Washington, DC fly-in on March 24 and 25. The Administration requested a cut of over 50% to the program in the next fiscal year. Ensuring members of Congress hear from wildlife professionals about the importance of this funding is critical. Conversations with congressional offices will largely focus on the need for adequate funding for STWG, with talking points also including [Recovering America's Wildlife Act](#) and other TWS funding priorities. TWS headquarters staff is available to provide logistical assistance with scheduling meetings and training for Hill interactions. Attendees are also invited to attend the [DC Bird Bash on March 25](#). This TWS-sponsored event will include a [legislative briefing](#) covering several TWS policy priorities followed by an [evening reception](#). Please contact Caroline if your unit is interested in sending a representative(s) to meet with your congressional delegation during the event. *Staff Contact:* [Caroline Murphy](#)

Engage your representatives in support of State and Tribal Wildlife Grants – The offices of Representatives Don Young (R-AK) and Mike Thompson (D-CA) are circulating a [Dear Colleague Letter](#) in support of robust funding for [State and Tribal Wildlife Grants](#) in Fiscal Year 2021. TWS is reaching out to House offices requesting they sign the letter. We encourage units to reach out to their Congressional representatives to request they sign on before the deadline on **Thursday, March 12**. Use the House contact sheet [here](#) to find your Representative's contact person and to see if they have signed on to this letter in previous years. You can write on behalf of your unit or individually by referencing this [email template](#) and be sure to attach the Dear Colleague Letter to the email. Please email Caroline if you have any questions about outreach. *Staff Contact:* [Caroline Murphy](#)

CAC Activities

Alberta Chapter and Canadian Section submit letter on benefits of grasslands – The [Alberta Chapter of The Wildlife Society](#) and the [Canadian Section of The Wildlife Society](#) sent [a letter](#) (along with [background information](#)) to the Federal Minister of

Environment and Climate Change outlining the significant benefit grasslands provide relative to carbon sequestration and storage. The letter encourages the minister to consider the retention of grasslands as a positive contribution to climate change mitigation and a valuable investment for expenditures of anticipated carbon tax revenues.

CAC Contacts: [Mark Boyce](#) (Alberta Chapter) and [Chris Smith](#) (Canadian Section)

Minnesota Chapter develops forest position statement – The [Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society](#) developed and approved a [position statement](#) on Sustainable Forest Ecosystem Management in February 2020. CAC Contact: [Styron Bell](#)

[Nebraska Chapter](#) engages on three state policies

- Chapter opposes LB126: This bill was amended during the last round of debate and moves forward for a final reading and vote. The amendment requires a \$5 fee for landowner permits valid during a three-day season, Saturday-Monday the week prior to the November rifle deer season. The Chapter encourages its members to contact their state senator to voice their opposition.
- Chapter opposes LB1173: This bill would provide transferable deer, elk, and pronghorn permits to landowners. [The letter](#) was submitted on behalf of the chapter to be included in the hearing testimony. This bill has not been voted out of committee.
- Chapter opposes LB1071: This bill creates the Wildlife Damage Recovery Act. [The letter](#) was submitted on behalf of the chapter to be included in the hearing testimony. The bill's sponsor, Senator Hughes, does not wish to move this bill any further this session and would like to try to work on a solution after the legislative session is over.

CAC Contact: [Eric Zach](#)

San Francisco Bay Area Chapter encourages feedback on western spadefoot – The [San Francisco Bay Area Chapter of The Wildlife Society](#) notified their membership that the US Fish and Wildlife Service is requesting information about the western spadefoot (*Spea hammondi*) for the 12-month finding to determine if to list it under the federal Endangered Species Act. Interested members may send comments to Madeline Drake, USFWS, 2800 Cottage Way, Room W-2605, Sacramento, CA, 95825 or email madeline_drake@fws.gov. CAC Contact: [Patricia Valcarcel](#)

TWS works with Rangeland Wildlife WG to submit grazing comment – For the first time since 2006 the Bureau of Land Management is looking to revise its plans for governing the approximately 155 million acres of public land suitable for livestock grazing. BLM says regulatory updates will improve land use planning and grazing permitting procedures while promoting conservation. TWS headquarters staff worked with the leadership of [TWS' Rangeland Wildlife Working Group](#) to [submit comment](#) to

the BLM in response to the notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement on its proposed revisions. The working group identified [14 issues](#) that should be considered by BLM in analysis of grazing revisions. Among these issues are effects on threatened and endangered species, comingling of livestock and bighorn sheep, and effects on wildlife migration corridors. After the public comment period ends March 6, BLM will use the feedback to create an EIS on its proposed revisions.

Staff Contact: [Keith Norris](#)

Units join TWS on letters in support of Recovering, MBPA – Over 20 TWS units joined TWS headquarters on a [letter to House leadership](#) asking for advancement of the [Recovering America's Wildlife Act \(H.R. 3742\)](#) to the House floor for a vote. Several TWS units also signed a [letter](#) requesting congressional support for the Migratory Bird Protection Act. This bill recently [passed](#) the House Natural Resources Committee. It would prohibit incidental take of migratory bird species for actions not covered under an incidental take permit. *Staff Contact:* [Caroline Murphy](#)

Virginia Chapter facilitates discussion and member action on waterbird breeding colony and bridge tunnel – The [Virginia Chapter of The Wildlife Society](#) followed-up on their annual meeting with a discussion among members related to the Norfolk District Corp of Engineers' request for comments on permits requested by the Hampton Roads Connector Partners for expansion of the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel. Member James Fraser led the discussion and [sent a letter](#) (along with [background information](#) and an [addendum](#)) to the Corps and the Chapter encouraged other members to do the same. Following public input, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam has recently [released a plan](#) to protect migratory birds whose nesting habitat will be affected by the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel expansion project. More information is also included on the American Bird Conservancy's [webpage](#) and the [Save the Birds at HRBT Facebook page](#). *CAC Contact:* [Scott Klopfer](#)

Virginia Chapter opposes TNR legislation – The [Virginia Chapter of The Wildlife Society](#) sent [an email](#) to the House Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources Committee requesting that they vote no on [HB 1727](#). The Chapter emphasized the negative impact feral cats have on native wildlife species through direct predation and transmission of disease. The Chapter's quick response was helpful in ending the bill's progress in this session. The Chapter will be working with others in the state to develop proactive materials to help address the bill if it comes up in the future. Tamara Johnstone-Yellin, Chapter Past President, was also present at the committee meeting and ready to speak on behalf of the Chapter. *CAC Contact:* [Scott Klopfer](#)

Federal Updates

President's budget has cuts for wildlife – On February 10, the White House released its [proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2021](#), kicking off the [annual appropriations process](#). The budget proposes a variety of cuts in domestic spending, including 13.4% and 8.2% cuts for Interior and Agriculture, respectively. Cuts include a reduced level of funding for [State and Tribal Wildlife Grants](#) – just \$31.3 million compared to \$67.6 million enacted in FY 2020. The budget also proposes eliminating USGS cooperative fish and wildlife research units. [Title II Conservation Programs in the Farm Bill](#) are among the [proposed cuts in Agriculture](#). This includes the elimination of the Conservation Stewardship Program and funding reductions for the Conservation Reserve Program. Congress will likely ignore the proposed cuts from the President and instead write their own appropriations bills based on funding levels approved last year. TWS will submit written testimony to relevant House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees to communicate the importance of different wildlife programs and advocate for robust funding for the wildlife profession. *Staff Contact:* [Caroline Murphy](#)

US Fish & Wildlife Service releases new Migratory Bird Treaty Act regulations – On February 3 the [US Fish and Wildlife Service proposed new regulations](#) that would codify existing enforcement under the [Migratory Bird Treaty Act](#). Under the new regulations, the prohibition on taking migratory birds would only apply to purposeful actions directed at migratory birds. Thus, incidental take or harming of species would no longer be prohibited. This new regulation comes after a [December 2017 Interior Solicitor opinion](#) that argued the MBTA does not prohibit incidental take. Meanwhile, the [Migratory Bird Protection Act \(H.R. 5552\)](#), which recently passed the House Natural Resources Committee, would work against this proposal by prohibiting the incidental take of species for actions not covered under an incidental take permit. TWS staff are reviewing the proposed rule. Regulatory comments are due to USFWS by March 19. *Staff Contact:* [Caroline Murphy](#)

Saga continues on BLM's revisions to sage grouse management plans – In February, the [Bureau of Land Management published](#) new draft environmental impact statements for greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) management in [Nevada and Northeast California](#), [Idaho](#), [Wyoming](#), [Utah](#), [Oregon](#), and [Northwest Colorado](#). These EISs are meant to provide support for the [BLM's March 2019 revisions](#) to the 2015 [sage grouse plans](#). In October 2019, a federal judge issued a [preliminary injunction](#) to block the new revisions. The judge ruled that the reduced protections for sage grouse – meant to align federal policy more closely with state plans - did not take a “hard look” at environmental impacts, as is required by the [National Environmental Policy Act](#). The new documents seek to show how BLM used best available science to create the revised regulations. Comments on the new proposals are due April 6. *Staff Contact:* [Caroline Murphy](#)

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 policy@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 Mariah Simmons at MSimmons@wildlife.org.