

REPORT TO COUNCIL

DATE: 15 January 2020

REPORT TO: TWS Council

FROM: Emily Williams, Chair, Early Career Professional Working Group

SUBJECT: Spring Report of the Early Career Professional Working Group

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

(See details below)

- 1) To reduce confusion and ensure consistency with our working group and that of the Society and to better serve early career members, the Early Career Professional Working Group asks that Council approve changing the name and description of an early career professional on its registration site to match the description the ECPWG has in its charter.
- 2) Request for Council to allocate financial and staff resources for the Mentorship for Life Program (MFL) within the Professional Development program area of TWS for FY 2020-2021 and beyond.

REPORT

Membership

The Early Career Professional Working Group has a membership structure that is different from most other working groups. All New Professional and student members of TWS become automatic members of the working group as opposed to having annual dues; thus, as of December 2019 we have 1577 members. Other TWS members may still join the working group for \$5 if they wish. We would like to reiterate our thanks Ed Thompson and Mariah Simmons for facilitating this membership structure, as we think it will be a huge benefit to TWS, and particularly to new professional members.

2019 Conference Activities and Professional Development Opportunities

This past fall, the ECPWG hosted one professional development opportunity at the annual conference of The Wildlife Society in Reno NV: the WG offered an all-day science communication workshop.

The workshop, "Communicating your science: active communication skills for the future of fish and wildlife conservation," was organized by ECPWG Chair, Emily Williams and Past-Chair, Krysten Zummo. This workshop focused on active

communication skills to provide attendees with hands-on experience in communicating with the lay public. Attendees were introduced to basic aspects of effective communication: knowing your audience, group decision making and its effects on communication, and professional advocacy, with considerations of opinions and objectivity. The second portion of the workshop introduced attendees to communication of science through story. We had 24 registrants to the workshop and it was well received overall.

ECPWG Chair and Co-Chair, Emily Williams and Kristi Confortin, also worked with Jamila Blake on providing an early career professional-themed session for the 2019 Leadership Institute class. This session introduced participants to the WG, and provided resources and information on how to stay engaged and actively involved as an early career professional.

The ECPWG hosted its all-members' meeting at the annual conference in Reno and had 30 people in attendance. The WG and its members developed a list of call to action items the WG plans to work on this year and in future years.

The ECPWG also provided support to the "Out in the Field" event at the Reno meeting by advertising the event on the working group's social media pages, as well as providing a small monetary donation. The WG is in full support of events like these becoming a staple at TWS meetings, and hopes to remain involved by providing financial and administrative (planning) support for future events.

Elections and Charter

Elections for the ECPWG are held every other year; 2020 is an elections year for our working group. The ECPWG will be holding elections for the 2020-2022 board during the summer of 2020. We will remind TWS members of elections and encourage nominations as it gets closer to July 2020.

Communications

This year the ECPWG continued efforts on improving open communication with our members. Our board has been working hard on increasing our social media presence. Over the past year, our outreach on Facebook has increased from occasional posts to daily offerings on jobs, tips, grants and scholarships, training opportunities, member highlights, and more. We also maintain a twitter account, @TWSEarlyCareer, that cross-posts similar content as our facebook account. The WG also released its first newsletter in 2019, and plans to release another newsletter in early 2020. We have also created a Communications Committee to work with our Communications Coordinator in maintaining regular and up-to-date communications.

In Fall 2019, we distributed a survey to our membership and received over 270 respondents. The survey results provided many insights as far as which TWS

members we are reaching, how we can communicate more effectively and reach out to our members, the challenges many ECPs face, and ways we can better serve early career professionals as a whole. We plan to disseminate our results in an article in *The Wildlife Professional*, as well as to other working groups that we plan to work with in reaching our goals to serve these objectives.

BACKGROUND FOR REQUESTS TO COUNCIL

- 1) Request for Council Action – modify title and description of “New Professional” registration option to match that of what the ECPWG defines as an early career professional.

First, we ask that Council consider renaming the “New Professional” membership to “Early Career Professional,” as it is clearer and better links to our working group.

Currently, the description for a “New Professional” registration on the TWS portal indicates:

Graduates of a full-time, college-level wildlife or directly-related curricula and who have less than three years employment experience in the wildlife profession.

We propose a slight change to the wording highlighted in bold below, such that it would read as the following:

*Graduates of a full-time, college-level wildlife or directly-related curricula and who have less than **12 years** employment experience in the wildlife profession **following their terminal degree.***

This definition would then be consistent with the definition the ECPWG uses for what constitutes an early career professional, and in its charter, website, and social media pages.

This change would help to increase consistency across all TWS platforms, reduce confusion to current and potential new members, and reduce the financial burden to early career members who do not realize they qualify (by the current registration definition) as an early career professional.

Through the 2019 survey we distributed to TWS members and via numerous discussions held at annual all-members’ meetings at national conferences, we have learned of this discrepancy and ensuing confusion. We discovered that many individuals registered as a “Regular Member” of TWS because they used the description under the registration option, but then found that definition differed with what we included in the ECPWG charter and on our online description of membership.

Allowing more time in the New Professional designation would also align with other TWS programs, such as the certification program. The AWB certification (and its corresponding +3 year extension) implicitly makes apparent that in the wildlife profession, it often takes more than 10 years to obtain full-time professional status. Requiring members with 3 years or less experience to register as a “Regular Member” is at odds with this, especially given the financial strain many new wildlife professionals endure without having regular, full-time pay. The registration costs of \$83 vs. \$52 is a sizeable difference, especially for financially strapped individuals. Making this change also has the potential for recruiting and retaining new TWS members who may opt to not become a member based on financial constraints.

Making this change would increase consistency across many TWS platforms and reduce confusion to membership status, engage new early career members, and better serve a larger and incoming demographic of TWS membership.

2) At the Fall 2019 annual conference, Council voted to establish the Mentorship for Life Program. We ask for Council to allocate resources to MFL so that staff and TWS members can begin working on Phase One (Establishment Phase) of the MFL Strategic Plan.

In Phase One, the objectives include:

1. Establish MFL program--approve MFL Strategic Plan and allocate a budget
2. Select MFL program personnel--creation of an Ad-hoc committee of Council (or other type of group) with 1+ TWS staff, 1 program chair, 5-7 volunteer TWS members, and 2 Council members
3. Create mentorship resources and content and promote visibility within TWS--creation of a web page, creation of informational handouts and materials, promote use of the TWS Network Online Directory, etc.
4. Engage TWS working groups, communities, and programs to be involved in MFL and promote the program
5. Promote participation in TWS, The Leadership Institute, AWB/CWB, and Professional Development certification programs.
6. Administer questionnaire to determine TWS member needs and wants in a mentorship program.

We believe that some funding will be required to engage experts in mentorship, networking, and skill development to help us create educational content, which could include in-person experiences at future TWS conferences. A planning meeting with Ed Thompson, Jamila Blake, Cameron Kovach, Paul Di Salvo, the MFL ad-hoc committee of Council, and others will occur during Summer 2020 to determine the specific plan for the first year of operations.

The ECPWG greatly appreciates Council's enthusiasm and continued support for the MFL program, as mentorship is a priority need for our working group's

members (as evidenced by the ECPWG 2019 member's survey), as well as all TWS members.