



# The Wildlife Society's Conservation Affairs Network

October 2020, Volume 6, Issue 10

## On the Horizon

**ESA regulatory decisions expected by end of year** – The Trump Administration is expected to move quickly on several [Endangered Species Act](#) implementation and listing decisions before the end of the year, or of their first term in January. A proposed [rule](#) currently under consideration would alter what information can be considered during an “exclusion analysis” – a process for determining when potentially viable areas are not designated as critical habitat for economic, national security, or other considerations. The proposal’s [comment deadline](#) is Thursday, October 8, and we expect the final rule will be issued shortly after.

A separate [proposal](#) to codify a definition of “habitat” under the ESA to inform critical habitat decisions is also expected to be finalized before January.

Several listing decisions on controversial species are expected imminently, including a delisting decision on the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), a listing decision on the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) and a listing decision on the wolverine (*Gulo gulo*). The FWS recently proposed [downlisting](#) the red-cockaded woodpecker (*Leuconotopicus borealis*). Staff contact: [Caroline Murphy](#)

## Resources

**NWF releases new Recovering fact sheets** –The National Wildlife Federation released a new [brief](#) detailing case studies that build support for the [Recovering America’s Wildlife Act](#). This brief can be distributed to organization unit members, partners, and decision makers to encourage and build support for this legislation.

The Wildlife Society and partners are striving for 200 co-sponsors in the U.S. House of Representatives to be on the record in support of the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act before the end of this Congress in January. Your unit and its members can help achieve this goal – consider sending a request for support to your congressional delegation and distribute [TWS’ action alert system](#) to your membership. TWS staff is available as a resource to determine appropriate points of contact in congressional offices. Staff contact: [Caroline Murphy](#)

**Resources from TWS’ virtual conference** – Thank you to those that were able to attend TWS’ first-ever virtual conference. For those that were unable to make Monday’s CAN meeting or want to relive the excitement, please see [here](#) for a recording of the proceedings. Minutes from the meeting, as well as resources from Tuesday’s CAN training session, will be made available later this month. You can also check out a [short recording](#) provided by TWS’ Government Relations Manager Caroline Murphy to all

conference attendees on the status of current federal policies and regulations impacting wildlife professionals. *Staff contact:* [Caroline Murphy](#)

## CAC Activities

**Alberta Chapter engages in various policy issues** – The [Alberta Chapter of The Wildlife Society](#) submitted the following three letters between July 20 and September 7:

- [Ecological Impacts Associated with Rescinding Alberta's 1976 Coal Policy](#) (sent jointly with the [Canadian Section of The Wildlife Society](#))
- [Response to increasing the Annual Allowable Cut](#)
- [Grassy Mountain Coal Mine Proposed by Benga Mining Ltd. Application # 1844520 – Canadian Impact Registry 80101](#)

*CAC contact:* [Mark Boyce](#)

**TWS, Western Section, SFBA Chapter, and South Dakota Chapter submit comments to Administration on habitat definition** – The Wildlife Society and several organization units [submitted](#) comments to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service on their proposal to codify a definition of “habitat” under the Endangered Species Act.

This proposal was brought on as a result of a Supreme Court decision, which concluded that in order for an area to be designated as “critical habitat” under the ESA, it must first be determined to be “habitat”. As no definition for “habitat” presently exists in regulation, rulemaking ensued. Comments from TWS and TWS organization units emphasize that the proposed definition is too narrow and could likely result in restrictions to the implementation of the designation of critical habitat and the recovery of species. You can find the links for all TWS and unit comments submitted below:

- [TWS Headquarters](#) – *Staff Contact:* [Caroline Murphy](#)
- [Western Section](#) – *CAC Contact:* [Kelly Holland](#)
- [South Dakota Chapter](#) – *CAC Contact:* [Mark Norton](#)
- [San Francisco Bay Area Chapter](#) – *CAC Contact:* [Patricia Valcarcel](#)

**SFBA Chapter comments on draft revisions to the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Resource Management Plan and EA** – The [San Francisco Bay Area Chapter of The Wildlife Society](#) wrote a [letter](#) to the Superintendent of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary on September 4 to express concern about the scope of analysis in the Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA) for the draft Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Management Plan. The Chapter felt that the DEA does not provide adequate analysis on five key points of the Draft Plan.

*CAC contact:* [Patricia Valcarcel](#)

## Federal Updates

**Continuing Resolution funds U.S. government until December; shimmers of hope for stimulus** – The President signed into law a continuing resolution that will [fund the federal government](#) at fiscal year 2020 levels until December 11. This move by Congress and the White House averts a government shutdown that would have begun on October 1 with the start of FY 2021.

With the pressing issue of government funding squared away for now, the November election approaching, and Supreme Court confirmation hearings imminent, a very narrow window of opportunity has opened for the passage of a second COVID-19 stimulus package. With the President now infected with the virus and thousands of airline employees expected to be let go without another aid package, new pressure and opportunity has been placed on both sides of the aisle to get a deal done in the coming days. In May, TWS provided a set of wildlife conservation and disease-associated [recommendations](#) to Congress, several of which were included in the House-passed HEROES Act stimulus package earlier this year. That legislation was never taken up by the Senate. It is unclear what conservation-associated provisions are being considered in any deal that may come together this time around. *Staff contact:* [Caroline Murphy](#)

**ESA overhaul and reauthorization bill released** – Senator Barrasso (R-WY) recently proposed [legislation](#) to overhaul the Endangered Species Act. Among other provisions, the bill would increase the role of states in endangered species recovery by providing them an opportunity to lead recovery planning and implementation. The bill would also reauthorize the ESA, an action that Congress has not taken since its authorization ran out in 1992. The legislation is largely seen as a marker bill, and action on it is very unlikely before the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress concludes in January. *Staff contact:* [Caroline Murphy](#)

**USGS names new Chief of the Cooperative Research Units** – Dr. Jonathan Mawdsley, former science advisor to the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, recently became the new chief of the U.S. Geological Survey's Cooperative Research Units program. This program is part of the USGS Ecosystems mission area, and is a cooperative arrangement between USGS scientists, land grant universities, and state agencies. By placing USGS scientists in the university setting, the program works to educate the next generation of wildlife professionals and produce actionable science. Dr. Mawdsley fills this position after more than a year and a half in which the program went without a permanent chief. *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](mailto: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](mailto:MSimmons@wildlife.org).