

Conservation Affairs Network Policy Toolkit

SECTION 1: CONSERVATION AFFAIRS
NETWORK FRAMEWORK

1.1 CONSERVATION AFFAIRS NETWORK OVERVIEW

Increasing the Society's effectiveness in wildlife conservation policy through communication and collaboration

The [Conservation Affairs Network](#) engages and unifies the efforts of The Wildlife Society, its 200+ units, and more than 15,000 professional wildlife biologists, managers, and educators dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship.

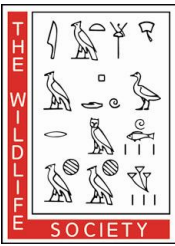
The Network creates a venue for streamlined communication, collaboration, and cooperation on policy matters important to wildlife professionals. This initiative gives wildlife professionals an effective method for bringing their valuable and crucial perspectives into the policy process, to impact decisions made by legislatures and agencies for the betterment of wildlife conservation, the wildlife profession, and TWS members.

The Network operates through Conservation Affairs Committees (CACs) established within TWS Sections and Chapters. These committees are charged with identifying and addressing policy priorities within their region, and communicating their activities and policy needs to other CACs and TWS Staff. CACs and TWS Staff support each other in their policy activities, lending experience and expertise to enhance efforts.

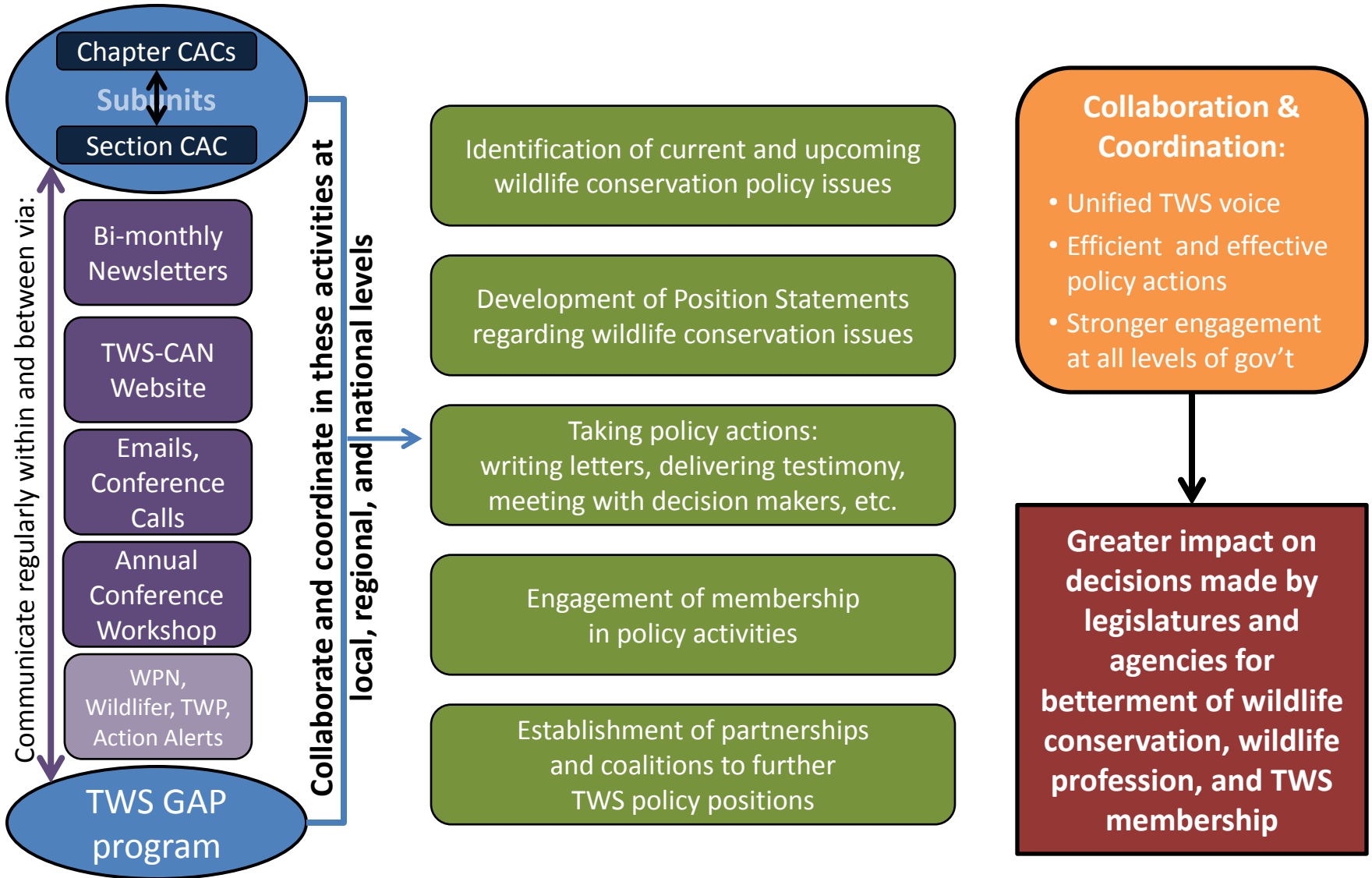
Through the Conservation Affairs Network, you have the strength and support of TWS' entire network of wildlife professionals behind you in order to promote policies that are soundly based in the scientific understandings and principles of wildlife ecology.

You can become involved in the Conservation Affairs Network by contacting your TWS Chapter or Section Conservation Affairs Committee (CAC) or Executive Board. If your unit does not yet have a Conservation Affairs Committee, you can learn more about establishing a new CAC in Section 1.2.





The Wildlife Society's Conservation Affairs Network



1.2 CONSERVATION AFFAIRS COMMITTEES

Conservation Affairs Committees (CACs) within TWS Sections and Chapters help maximize unit members' expertise and efforts when advocating for wildlife policy. The success and effectiveness of the Conservation Affairs Network relies on the integration and activities of Conservation Affairs Committees within TWS Sections and Chapters. The integration of unit CACs into the overall framework of the Conservation Affairs Network allows TWS staff to distribute essential communication and provide coordination assistance on policy issues and activities across North America.

CAC engagement in the Conservation Affairs Network is a mutualistic relationship – an individual CAC benefits from the larger network of support, experience and policy knowledge while also providing support, experience, and knowledge to other CACs. The end result is more effective involvement in wildlife policy topics at all levels of government.

Roles and Responsibilities of a CAC

Conservation Affairs Committees are established by TWS organization units at both the Section and Chapter level. Most CACs are charged with:

- Tracking major policy issues at state/provincial, regional, and national levels
- Advising their local unit's executive committee on recommended policy advocacy actions and/or taking policy actions as directed by the executive committee
- Participating in state/provincial and/or regional level partnerships and coalitions and related advocacy events
- Drafting position statements or resolutions to be approved by their executive committee
- Communicating with and engaging their TWS organization unit membership in policy activities

Establishing a CAC

There are several options available to Sections and Chapters looking to establish a formal CAC as part of their operations. Suggested approaches and relevant template language are included below and in the appendices of the Toolkit. Importantly, the duties, procedures, and framework of CACs are not one size fits all. Members interested in formally establishing a CAC within their local organization unit should consider the needs, interests, and expertise of other unit members. Prior to, or in lieu of, revisions to unit bylaws, a CAC may also be established as an ad-hoc committee or group within the unit. Under these scenarios the CAC will still benefit from a clear framework (e.g. a terms of reference document) to guide policy activities.

Incorporating a CAC into Unit Bylaws

If your unit's officers would like to create a CAC within unit bylaws:

1. Prepare a copy of your unit bylaws with proposed changes to create your CAC included in track changes (see suggested template language below).
2. Send Mariah Byers (msimmons@wildlife.org) a copy of your proposed revisions to your bylaws to ensure they're in compliance with the [model bylaws](#) approved by TWS Council.



3. Notify unit members of the proposed changes to bylaws at least 30 days prior to voting on the bylaws.
4. After voting, if changes to the bylaws are approved, send them to Mariah to issue an approval letter on behalf of TWS Council. Revisions to bylaws must be approved by the Society before becoming effective.

Template bylaws language to create a Conservation Affairs Committee:

Article VII: Committees
 Section 2: Duties of Standing Committees
 Clause AA: Conservation Affairs Committee – This Committee reviews legislative proposals, administrative regulations, environmental assessments, impact statements, and other subjects or issues affecting wildlife, wildlife habitat, and wildlife professionals within the organizational areas of the [Section/Chapter], and makes recommendations to the Executive Board for any action that should be taken by the [Section/Chapter].

CAC Terms of Reference

You may choose to develop a Terms of Reference document to better define the duties, objectives, and procedures relevant to your organization unit's CAC. This type of document allows for more detailed information on a CAC's background and operations than is typically included in a unit's Bylaws or Operations Manual, and ensures that CAC objectives and priorities remain consistent over time. A template Terms of Reference is included in Appendix A, and can be modified as needed to meet the needs of individual CACs and their respective organization units.

CAC Framework and Member Roles

Suggested CAC positions and their associated duties are provided here, but CACs should feel free to customize their committee structure to fit the needs of their unit members. For some organization units, a single member willing to serve as CAC Chair may be sufficient. Other organization units will benefit from a team of members with specific expertise in a given geographic area or policy issue. Most importantly, you do not need to be a policy expert to play a role in your unit's CAC! Your expertise as a wildlife professional and your interest in advocating for wildlife conservation policy issues make you a valuable member of the Conservation Affairs Network. TWS staff are available to assist in determining the appropriate structure for your CAC.

Section CACs

Section CACs are typically led by a Chair and Vice Chair, and are composed of Chapter CAC Chairs and other members and topical experts interested in organizing on their region's policy issues. Section CAC Chairs (or Co-Chairs) serve as the liaison between Chapter CAC representatives and the executive officers of the Section. Regular duties of a Section CAC Chair include:

- Facilitating regular meetings and regular communications with Chapter CAC representatives
- Attending regular meetings with TWS staff to provide updates on policy issues/actions from across the Section, and conveying updates from TWS staff on national policy issues to Chapter CAC representatives
- Tracking priority policy issues within the defined scope of the Section



- Overseeing the process of creating and distributing comments, statements, policies, etc. in accordance with the bylaws and operations standards of the Section

The Section CAC's Vice Chair (or Co-Chair) assists the Chair in the operations of the CAC. They may serve in the Chair's capacity during meetings with Chapter CACs and/or TWS staff if the Chair is unavailable. Depending on the unit bylaws and/or Terms of Reference governing the CAC, the Vice Chair may be the immediate successor of the Chair. A Vice Chair or Co-Chair is not required for Section-level operations, but can be extremely beneficial in divisions of work load and ensuring adequate regional coverage.

Chapter representatives to the Section CAC are often the Chair of their Chapter's CAC, but may also be a member of the Chapter's Executive Board or another designee. They are expected to engage regularly with the Section CAC to provide updates on locally-relevant policy issues.

Chapter CACs

Chapter CACs are typically led by a Chair and are composed of topical and/or geographical area representatives and other interested members. The Chapters CAC's Chair (or Co-Chair) may be appointed by the Chapter's Executive Board or be a designated member of the Executive Board. Regular duties of the Chapter CAC Chair include:

- Serving as a liaison between the Chapter's Executive Board and the Section CAC on relevant policy issues and actions
- Participating in regular meetings of the Section CAC
- Maintaining regular communication with Chapter CAC members/representatives
- Tracking priority policy issues within the defined scope of the Chapter
- Overseeing the process of creating and distributing comments, statements, policies, etc. in accordance with the bylaws and operations standards of the Chapter

Chapters which support members from a large geographic area may consider a CAC structure that incorporates area representatives (e.g. a Rhode Island Representative to the New England Chapter). These representatives are responsible for keeping the Chapter CAC informed on policy issues within their geographic area and helping to identify subject matter experts within that area as needed. They should also serve as a lead when developing comments/statements/letters affecting their geographic area.

For Chapters with explicit policy priorities (see Section 2 for information on defining policy priorities), the CAC may also include designated topical representatives. These members are responsible for monitoring a specific policy issue that fits within the Chapter's policy priorities and keeping the Chapter CAC Chair updates on these issues. They should also serve as a lead when developing comments/statements/letters pertaining to their designated policy issue. A mix of geographic and topical representatives may also suit the needs of some Chapter CACs.



1.3 ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR CONSERVATION AFFAIRS COMMITTEES

Communicating Within and Among CACs

Communication is key to the strength of the Conservation Affairs Network and is what makes this initiative effective. Through regular communication, we are able to leverage the strength, expert knowledge, and policy experiences of other CACs and wildlife professionals across the entire TWS membership.

It is recommended that both Chapter and Section CACs have regular (monthly or bi-monthly) conference calls in order to coordinate policy activities and alert each other to policy actions. Regular email communication is also encouraged; you might consider establishing an email listserv or using digital messaging platforms such as Slack, Discord, or WhatsApp in order to facilitate quick communication among your committee.

CACs should also regularly communicate with TWS Government Affairs staff. TWS staff should be made aware of any policy activities that CACs undertake in order to provide assistance when necessary, ensure compliance with TWS policy positions, and share the work of your CAC with other units. TWS staff hosts a bi-monthly conference call between all Section CAC Chairs to facilitate communication and coordinate action between regions. The calls also provide an opportunity for CACs to stay up to date with national policy actions and needs. Policy updates and engagement opportunities are also broadcast across the CAN through a monthly newsletter. TWS staff are available to provide advice and assistance, and help coordinate the involvement of other wildlife experts – use this resource!

Be sure regular communication is a part of your CAC to maximize your efficiency and effectiveness in addressing policy concerns in your area.

Document Sharing and Editing Techniques

Development of position statements, letters, comments, etc. often necessitates rounds of editing by members of the entire committee. Committees need to ensure that each member is working on the most up-to-date version of the document. Several programs are available that assist with document sharing. Below are some ideas to help you organize and coordinate document sharing and editing when using Microsoft Word:

1. Use Track Changes: Microsoft Word allows users to use “track changes” and add comments to the document. This enables changes to be proposed without actually changing the document until they are accepted by the author.
2. Initiate “Track Changes” under the “Review” tab in Microsoft Word.
3. Reply-to-All: When emailing documents, and providing edits or comments, it is important that you choose the “Reply to All” function in your email. This will ensure that all interested parties receive and are aware of the most updated version of the document and will help keep editing and other communications efficient.
4. Naming files as YYYY.MM.DD_TOPIC_DRAFT/FINAL_editorinitials.docx: Saving files with this manner will allow for easy sorting of all editions of the file, and can bring the most up-to-date version to the top of the list.
5. Example: 2014.06.30_CANToolkit_DRAFT_KN.docx



6. This style quickly indicates the most recent date the document was edited, what the document is, whether or not the document is finalized, and who provided the edits.
7. Use a file sharing program: Several programs are available that enable you to seamlessly share files without the need of email. Essentially, these programs create a shared hard drive between all of those users permitted access. When a file is added or updated by one user, it becomes instantly available to other users on the same shared folder.

Suggested software includes:

- Dropbox: operates like any other folder, allows you to share the folder with others. Multiple users can edit files, but only one user can have a file open for editing at any given time. Free, with limited file storage. Available for download: <https://www.dropbox.com>
- Google Drive: operates through a Google account; allows you to upload and share files, or simply create files online. Multiple users can access and edit shared files simultaneously. Free, with limited file storage: <https://www.drive.google.com>
- Microsoft OneDrive: functions in a similar manner to Dropbox. Free standalone access with limited file storage: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/onedrive>
- Microsoft SharePoint: a program that offers a suite of file sharing and group organizing functionality; cost \$5 per user per month: <https://www.office.microsoft.com/en-us/sharepoint>
- Microsoft Teams: combines file sharing with group messaging and video conferencing capabilities. Free, with limited file storage: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software>

Engaging Unit Members in CAC Activities

Conservation Affairs Committees benefit from the engagement and expertise of broader unit membership in policy advocacy activities. Below are ideas and suggestions on how to communicate opportunities to engage with your CAC to TWS organization unit members in your area.

1. Provide a summary of CAC activities for publication in relevant Chapter and Section newsletters. This could include updates on local policy priorities, calls for member action on policy concerns, training opportunities, etc.
2. Host webinars or in-person meetings open to all unit members highlighting policy concerns in your area, or providing training on policy engagement for interested wildlife professionals. TWS staff is available to provide training opportunities for members in subject areas such as communicating with decision makers, engaging in the federal appropriations process, and providing comments on agency rulemaking.
3. Solicit feedback from unit members when composing letters and/or comments on rulemaking and priority policies.
4. Inform unit members of engagement opportunities in [TWS' Action Center](#).

Supporting Student Member and Student Chapter Engagement with CACs

There are over 140 TWS Student Chapters across North America and Europe comprised of student members. Students and early career professionals have unique perspectives to offer on the impacts of policy issues affecting wildlife and wildlife professionals. Student Chapters are also well-



positioned to engage in advocacy for campus-level policies that overlap with TWS' policy priorities (e.g. Lights Out initiatives and bird-safe building design on college and university campuses).

CACs may consider identifying student contacts at the Chapter or Section level to help disseminate information on policy engagement opportunities to other student members. Several TWS Chapters and Sections have a student affairs or relations committee which is responsible for maintaining communications with all Student Chapters in that area. Organization units may also have a Student Chapter representative on their elected board of officers. CACs may consider working with Student Chapter faculty advisors to develop policy engagement opportunities targeting the interests of their Chapter members. A current list of TWS Student Chapters can be found [online](#).

