



# The Wildlife Society's Conservation Affairs Network

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*The Wildlife Society's Conservation Affairs Network supports communication, collaboration, and coordination on policy engagement across our organization and participating chapters, sections, and working groups. The monthly CAN Newsletter highlights policy issues occurring at local, regional, and national levels, and provides opportunities for wildlife professionals to engage with those issues.*

## On the Horizon

### **Fiscal Year 2024 U.S. federal budget details, engagement opportunities forthcoming –**

The Biden Administration is poised to release Fiscal Year 2024 funding requests to Congress this **Thursday, March 9**. TWS staff will relay updates to units on the organization's official positioning on FY 24 funding as soon as they are available. Staff is also preparing resources to support units interested in submitting appropriations request forms to their members of Congress. Units can expect distribution of these resources the week of March 13. It should be noted that **deadlines to submit request forms to offices are quickly approaching** in some states, and turnaround time for use of these resources will be limited. *Staff contact:* [Caroline Murphy](#)

## Engagement Opportunities

### **Input requested on USFWS proposed permitting changes under Section 10 of the ESA –**

TWS is seeking feedback from Conservation Affairs Committees, Working Groups, units, and members on a [proposed rule](#) to modify [Section 10\(a\)](#) of the [Endangered Species Act](#) recently published by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The revisions seek to combine Safe Harbor Agreements and Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances, two existing types of voluntary agreements, into a new type called a Conservation Benefit Agreement. The rulemaking would also allow for issuance of incidental take permits for species not listed under the ESA. More information on the proposed rule and its intended effects are provided in this [TWS brief](#). Input to inform TWS' final comments to the Service can be provided via [google form](#) or to [policy@wildlife.org](mailto:policy@wildlife.org) until **March 26**. The public comment period ends April 10, 2023; any comments submitted directly to the Service should be shared with TWS staff for inclusion in the TWS Policy Library and future CAN newsletters. *Staff contact:* [Caroline Murphy](#)

**Advocate for State and Tribal Wildlife Grant funding with your House delegation –** TWS continues to advocate for the [State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program](#) as the appropriations process gets underway. This program, funded at \$73.8 million annually at present, is the only current federal program dedicated to the conservation and monitoring of at-risk species identified by state agencies known as Species of Greatest Conservation Need. TWS alongside the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, National Wildlife Federation, and American Fisheries Society are currently **requesting members of the House of Representatives sign onto a Dear Colleague Letter** in support of robust funding for State and Tribal Wildlife Grants

*Increasing the Society's effectiveness through communication and collaboration*

in FY 2024. We encourage units interested in participating to reach out to members of their U.S. House congressional delegation to request they sign onto this Dear Colleague Letter before the deadline on **Wednesday, March 15 COB**. Check out TWS' [guidance for engagement](#) to take action on this opportunity before the deadline. *Staff contact:* [Caroline Murphy](#)

## CAC Activities

**Canadian Section CAC connects with wildlife directors to promote collaboration on policy initiatives** – Members of [The Canadian Section of The Wildlife Society](#), including members of the Section's Conservation Affairs Committee, met recently with the Canadian Wildlife Directors Committee (CWDC) to provide information on the Section's mission as it relates to ongoing policy engagement efforts in Canada, and to discuss future collaboration on national policy initiatives. Participants relayed that the discussion also reinforced the role of TWS in providing development opportunities for the next generation of wildlife professionals. *CAC contact:* [Jack Dubois](#)

**South Carolina chapter advocates for science-based habitat management and the importance of prescribed burning** – [The South Carolina Chapter of The Wildlife Society](#) wrote a [letter to Horry County Planning Commissioners](#) in response to a proposed rezoning request for the development of medical facilities in Myrtle Beach, SC. The land proposed for rezoning is directly adjacent to the Lewis Ocean Bay Heritage Preserve and the Independent Heritage Preserve Wetland Mitigation Bank, which the Chapter recognizes as “some of the most biologically diverse and ecologically intact properties in South Carolina” in their comments. The Chapter emphasized that the proposed rezoning would impact the ability of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources to effectively manage these properties with prescribed burning, and provided alternatives that still account for the community's need for accessible health care. *CAC contact:* [Lisa Lord](#)

**Montana Chapter and TWS staff host discussion on unit-led policy engagement** – TWS staff collaborated with [The Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society](#) to host a presentation and discussion on unit-led policy engagement at the Chapter's recent annual meeting. The discussion focused on strategies for units to tackle issues like sign-on letters requiring fast action or restrictions around engagement for agency employees. TWS staff also provided background information on policy engagement at TWS HQ, as well as additional resources for unit-led engagement via the Conservation Affairs Network. *CAC contact:* [Andrea Litt](#)

**CACs collaborate with TWS staff to welcome new and returning members of the House Committee on Natural Resources** – To date, 4 TWS chapters and 2 TWS sections have cosigned introductory letters to new and returning members of the House Committee on Natural Resources (HNR). TWS staff will continue to send welcome letters to HNR members and members of other relevant congressional committees and subcommittees listed on [this spreadsheet](#) over the coming weeks; please reach out to Kelly if your unit is interested in cosigning introductory letters to your relevant members of Congress.

If your unit would like to send a letter to an office not listed on our spreadsheet, please feel free to adapt TWS' [template welcome letter](#) to highlight unit-specific resources. Reach out to TWS staff if your unit needs assistance in determining appropriate congressional office contacts. *Staff contact: [Kelly O'Connor](#)*

## Federal Updates

**Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership releases Farm Bill platform** – The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP) recently announced its [“Hunter and Angler Priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill”](#) amidst congressional debates regarding the upcoming legislation. Drafted by TWS staff and other members of TRCP's Agriculture and Wildlife Working Group, the platform recommendations support robust implementation of conservation programs within the 2023 Farm Bill.

In addition to aiding with the creation of the platform, TWS recently joined more than 600 organizations in sending a [letter](#) urging House and Senate Agriculture Committee leadership to protect \$20 billion for climate-smart agriculture and conservation program funding provided in last year's Inflation Reduction Act. The Wildlife Society will be working to highlight these Farm Bill priorities with congressional offices in the year ahead. *Staff contact: [Caroline Murphy](#)*

**National Fish and Wildlife Foundation announces 2023 Request for Proposals for the America the Beautiful Challenge** – The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) recently announced the release of the 2023 [request for proposals](#) for the [America the Beautiful Challenge \(ATBC\)](#). The Challenge increases accessibility to funding by allowing eligible states, Tribes, territories, local groups, NGOs, and others to apply for multiple grant programs through a single application managed by NFWF. Funding for the Challenge is consolidated from multiple federal agencies and private entities to enable applicants to develop large-scale conservation projects that address shared priorities across public and private lands. ATBC pre-proposals are due April 20, 2023.

**TWS signs on to comments in response to BLM's notice to prepare a solar programmatic Environmental Impact Statement** – TWS joined other members of the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership in submitting [comments](#) in response to the BLM's [notice of intent](#) to prepare a programmatic Environmental Impact Statement to evaluate utility-scale solar energy planning and amend resource management plans for renewable energy development. The comments, developed through a collaborative effort by conservation partners, provide several recommendations addressing social, environmental, and economic solar energy development impacts and minimization of those impacts. *Staff contact: [Caroline Murphy](#)*

## Updates from Headquarters

**Final TWS 2023-2024 Policy Priorities** – TWS Council has approved a set of four policy priorities to guide TWS' federal policy engagement in 2023 and 2024. These priorities are:

1. Advance efforts to enact adequate federal funding for U.S. state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies to effectively perform at-risk species conservation work.
2. Support adequate funding for U.S. federal land management efforts, with emphasis placed on operations and maintenance accounts within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wildlife Refuge System.
3. Work to ensure adequate resources and implementation on private lands conservation programs within the 2023 Farm Bill and associated private lands conservation programs in the annual appropriations process.
4. Empower TWS Section, Chapter, and Working Group engagement with renewable energy policy through the development of Conservation Affairs Network resources and communications.

[This letter](#) detailing TWS' 2023-2024 policy priorities was also sent to all CAC contacts, Section and Chapter Presidents, and Working Group Chairs by the Policy Priorities Committee. TWS staff will continue to communicate opportunities to engage with these priorities over the next two years. *Staff contact:* [Kelly O'Connor](#)

## **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 Kelly O'Connor at [koconnor@wildlife.org](mailto:koconnor@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 Kelly O'Connor at [koconnor@wildlife.org](mailto:koconnor@wildlife.org).