



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.

Engagement Opportunities

Support federal funding for critical conservation programs – TWS recently distributed resources for unit engagement with FY25 programmatic request submissions within the U.S. congressional appropriations process. Programmatic requests from locally-based organizations like TWS units are powerful tools for securing funding for federal conservation programs. This year, we've developed programmatic request language to support the National Wildlife Refuge System, State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program, U.S. Geological Survey Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units, the USDA APHIS Wildlife Services program, and Research and Development programs within the U.S. Forest Service. There are still opportunities for your unit to submit programmatic requests to your members of Congress, but **deadlines are approaching quickly!** Take advantage of the resources below, and let staff know when you've submitted your request(s) using [this form](#).

- A [short video](#) explaining where to find appropriations request forms for your congressional delegation and how to complete and submit forms. *This video was produced during FY24 and references the previous fiscal year, but all of the information provided is still relevant for FY25.*
- A [guidance document](#) with detailed instructions and recommended language to use in your programmatic requests for the programs referenced above.
- A [crowdsource spreadsheet](#) with links to request forms for many congressional offices in both the House and Senate and associated deadlines for submission to those offices.

Staff contact: [Kelly O'Connor](#)

Urge your representative in the House to join the bipartisan Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus – The Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus was recently registered in the House of Representatives by Congressman Mike Thompson (CA). Participation in the Caucus offers representatives an avenue for promoting beneficial legislation to address the challenges facing the USFWS National Wildlife Refuge System.

- If your representative is already a member of the caucus, consider sending them a thank you letter using this [TWS template](#).
- If your representative has not already joined the caucus, you can use this [TWS template](#) to request their consideration.

Staff contact: [Kelly O'Connor](#)

Increasing the Society's effectiveness through communication and collaboration

On the Horizon

TWS preparing testimony to relevant U.S. House and Senate appropriations

subcommittees – TWS policy staff are in the process of drafting appropriations testimony for FY25 in support of funding for conservation programs in the U.S. Department of the Interior and Department of Agriculture. You can see testimony submitted in previous years in the [TWS Policy Library](#) and learn more about our appropriations engagement by visiting our [U.S. Congressional Appropriations Action Center](#). We intend to circulate testimony via the CAN to support unit-led submission of appropriations testimony. Staff are available to provide assistance to any units interested in engaging with the U.S. congressional appropriations process. *Staff contact:* [Kelly O'Connor](#)

CAC Activities

Leadership opportunities across Section Conservation Affairs Committees – There are currently vacancies for the role of Section Conservation Affairs Committee (CAC) Chair in the **Southwest, Northwest, Southeastern, and Canadian sections**. Section Chairs communicate policy engagement activities and issues of interest from across the section's jurisdiction to the section's board, provide coordination and support to chapter CACs, and meet every other month with TWS staff and other section CAC Chairs to coordinate on regional and national policy issues. Please reach out to Kelly if you have any questions about these opportunities or are interested in serving as a Section Chair. *Staff contact:* [Kelly O'Connor](#)

Alabama Chapter continues RAWA engagement with U.S. Senate offices – Following a successful virtual meeting with staff from Senator Britt's office (R-AL), [The Alabama Chapter of the Wildlife Society](#) sent [written correspondence](#) to the Senator emphasizing the need for passage of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act and the impacts the bill would have on wildlife in Alabama. *CAC contact:* [Ray Metzler](#)

Nebraska Chapter engages with legislation impacting protections for state-listed species – [The Nebraska Chapter of The Wildlife Society](#) submitted comments concerning [LB1335](#) to the Nebraska State Legislature. The bill would exempt the Nebraska Department of Transportation from complying with protections for species listed as threatened and endangered in the Nebraska Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act (NESCA) when those species are found in right-of-ways during road maintenance and construction. The Chapter joined with other conservation organizations in the state to oppose the bill and a subsequent amendment, highlighting a number of state-listed species known to use and occupy habitat along state and county roads. The bill will go through its second round of debate in the Legislature in the near future. *CAC contact:* [Eric Zach](#)

Federal Updates

African elephants gain new U.S. Endangered Species Act protections – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has published [final rule language](#) strengthening protections for the African elephant in the [U.S. Endangered Species Act](#) (ESA). Following an extensive review of over 130,000 public comments, the agency announced revisions to regulations issued under

[section 4\(d\) of the ESA](#) affecting trophy hunters, U.S. zoos, and African nations. Key provisions of the revised regulations include stricter permit requirements for international trade in live elephants and requirements ensuring that recipients of African elephants are suitably equipped to house and care for them. Additionally, the regulations now impose additional reporting requirements by African countries regarding the status and management of elephant populations. TWS has previously [supported](#) the USFWS in their science-based review of management plans for the species.

Biden-Harris administration finalizes suite of U.S. Endangered Species Act rulemaking –

The Biden-Harris administration has [finalized](#) three rules aimed at strengthening the implementation of protections for threatened and endangered species and their habitats under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA). TWS [supported](#) the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) proposed revisions to regulations implementing sections 4 and 7 of the ESA during last year's public comment period. Detailed coverage of the final rule language will be featured in a future TWS web article.

Wild horse and burro populations decline, but overpopulation persists – The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) reports a continued decline in the population of wild horses and burros on federal lands, with an [estimated 73,520 animals](#) as of March 1. This marks the third consecutive year of population decrease since 2020. Despite this reduction, numbers of horses and burros remain nearly three times greater than [what scientists deem sustainable for public lands](#). [BLM's FY24 plans](#) include further removals, fertility control treatments, and efforts to place animals into private care through adoptions and sales. TWS regularly engages with policies affecting wild horse and burro population control, including providing [testimony](#) to the National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board and [advocacy for BLM's Wildlife Habitat Management program](#) during the U.S. congressional appropriations process.

BLM issues draft resource management plan amendments for greater sage-grouse – The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has [released](#) its Draft Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Greater Sage-Grouse (GRSG) Rangewide Planning. The proposal aims to address the sharp decline in sage-grouse populations witnessed over the past decade, and will affect management of GRSG across 10 western states. The RMPA and EIS offer a suite of options for changes to GRSG protections, from leaving current protections in place to banning new resource extractions permits and leases in sage-grouse habitat. The proposal will undergo a [90-day public comment period](#). TWS policy staff will be coordinating on commenting efforts with relevant Working Groups, Sections, and Chapters in the near future.

TWS supports USFWS proposal for biodiversity-oriented refuge management – TWS recently [submitted comments](#) on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) [proposed policy revisions and new regulations](#) aimed at maintaining, restoring and enhancing the biological integrity, diversity and environmental health—or BIDEH—within the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS). The letter detailed support for revisions that acknowledge climate change and habitat loss as pivotal factors in refuge management. TWS also recommended modifications to

the rulemaking, urging clearer definitions for terms like "predator" and "native". The public comment period for this rulemaking is open until May 6, 2024; units interested in submitting their own comments should reach out to TWS policy staff for assistance.

Conservation organizations advocate for funding to modernize USGS National Wildlife Health Center – The Wildlife Society has signed onto a [letter](#) urging Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations subcommittees in the U.S. House and Senate to fund ongoing efforts to modernize the US Geological Survey's [National Wildlife Health Center](#) (NWHC) in Madison, Wisconsin. The letter requests at least \$66 million for FY25 for the NWHC, which plays a vital role in wildlife disease detection, control, and prevention, addressing emerging diseases such as avian influenza and COVID-19 that threaten human, animal, and environmental health.

Questions on any items covered in this month's Federal Updates can be sent to [Kelly O'Connor](#)

Updates from Headquarters

Final approved TWS strategic plan emphasizes the importance of policy engagement – TWS' council has approved a new strategic plan for 2024-2028. Policy engagement is highlighted as a high priority and a key component of TWS throughout the plan based on member feedback. The new strategic plan will go into effect in July.

Nominations period for TWS awards continues – The Wildlife Society's [Awards Program](#) annually honors professional excellence, recognizes outstanding achievement and highlights contributions to wildlife science and management. Nominators should refer to the individual awards to be sure they have the criteria needed for submission. [Nomination materials](#) for all awards, except Wildlife Publication Awards, must be submitted by May 1. Incomplete nomination packets will not be considered. Contact: awards@wildlife.org

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 koconnor@wildlife.org