



# Conservation Affairs Network Newsletter

January 2026, Volume 12, Issue 1

*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.*

## Feedback Requested

**CAC resource needs for the new year** – Current CAC Chairs and Co-chairs are invited to fill out [this short survey](#) to help TWS staff identify resource and support needs across the CAN in the coming year. This is a follow-up effort to the CAC Baseline Survey sent to Section and Chapter Presidents in fall 2025. Please submit survey responses by **February 6, 2026**. Staff contact: [Kelly O'Connor](#)

## CAC and Working Group Activities

**Unified engagement around proposed ESA rulemaking** – In December 2025, The Wildlife Society submitted a comments on four proposed rules impacting the implementation of the US Endangered Species Act. This effort was amplified by engagement by the Arizona, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Colorado, and San Francisco Bay Area Chapters, and Western Section of The Wildlife Society. Collectively, comments addressed proposed revisions to: (1) Section 4(d) regulations governing protections for threatened species; (2) listing, delisting, reclassification, and critical habitat designation under Section 4; (3) interagency cooperation and consultation requirements under Section 7; and (4) procedures for excluding areas from critical habitat designation under Section 4(b)(2).

Across all submissions, TWS units emphasized the importance of retaining science-based decision-making, maintaining recovery as a central objective of the ESA, preserving the role of unoccupied and climate-resilient habitat, and ensuring that regulatory changes reflect real-world agency capacity. Commenters also raised concerns about shortened comment periods, increasing reliance on economic considerations, narrowing definitions that could limit consideration of cumulative and long-term impacts, and repeated regulatory reinterpretation in the absence of congressional clarity. Together, these efforts underscored a shared commitment to transparent, durable, and practicable ESA implementation that supports both conservation outcomes and the professionals tasked with carrying them out.

You can read comments submitted by TWS HQ and all participating units [here](#).

**Kansas Chapter opposes Wildlife and Parks Commission regulation** – The Kansas Chapter of The Wildlife Society [wrote](#) in opposition to proposed rule [KAR 115-45-1](#), which



would allow the Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission to draft rules and regulations. Drew Ricketts, current chapter president, also provided testimony to the Commission during a recent public meeting. KSTWS raised concerns that the proposal represents a fundamental shift in Kansas' wildlife governance structure by expanding the Commission's policymaking authority at the expense of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks' legislatively defined role. The chapter emphasized that the change would undermine the North American Model of Wildlife Management by weakening the central role of science, eroding established checks and balances, and increasing vulnerability to political influence. KSTWS also highlighted the absence of clear oversight, scientific capacity, or accountability mechanisms in the proposed framework, warning that it could disrupt long-standing collaboration between KDWP and the Commission and open the door to future abuse of the regulatory process. The chapter urged commissioners to maintain a science-based, professionally informed approach to wildlife management that preserves public trust resources for current and future generations. The regulation passed into promulgation by a 3-2 vote. *Chapter contact:* [Drew Ricketts](#)

*Activity updates, success stories, and contact information – Does your CAC or working group 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](mailto:koconnor@wildlife.org)*

## Federal Updates

**Coalition voices strong support for Conservation Reserve Program in the next U.S. farm bill** – TWS joined 33 other organizations in [urging Congress](#) to support full, long-term reauthorization for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in the next farm bill. A full reauthorization of the CRP program would support voluntary conservation on ranching and farming marginal land, in turn boosting local economies, improving soil health and water quality, and providing habitat for wildlife.

**FY 2026 spending bill for many federal conservation programs passes Congress** – Congress has passed a compromise funding bill that sets annual funding levels for the USFWS, USGS, BLM and other agencies that manage public lands. The bill, Fiscal Year 2026 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, is a mini omnibus that rejects the administrations proposed elimination of funds for several programs, but still includes funding cuts across many agencies. The bill now goes to the President for his signature. Read more in [our coverage](#).

**TWS statement on final NEPA rulemaking** – TWS made an official statement expressing concerns regarding the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) final rule titled "Removal of National Environmental Policy Act Implementing Regulations," which eliminated



long-standing federal regulations that help agencies comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Read more about [our concerns in the press release](#).

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

## Tools and Resources

**Wildlife Connectivity Across Roads in the U.S. in 2026** – Please [join us](#) Thursday, January 29 at 1:00 p.m. ET, for the webinar, "Providing Wildlife Connectivity Across Roads in the U.S. in 2026" where Dr. Patricia Cramer of the Wildlife Connectivity Institute, a national leader on the topic of wildlife crossings and wildlife habitat connectivity, along with the rest of the newly formed Transportation Ecology Working Group will introduce you to this new TWS working group and discuss developments across the U.S. to provide wildlife connectivity amidst our roads and policy, and relevant funding updates for 2026.

## Updates from Headquarters

**New website launching in February** – The Wildlife Society will be launching a new website in early February. Our refreshed design will offer easier navigation, improved accessibility and a more streamlined experience for members and visitors alike. Stay tuned for updates as we get closer to launch.