



# Conservation Affairs Network Newsletter

March 2026, Volume 12, Issue 3

*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

**TWS org units invited to participate in State and Tribal Wildlife Grants fly-in** – The National Wildlife Federation and Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies are coordinating a DC fly-in the week of April 20, 2026, to support the [State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program](#). TWS members who are unable to travel to DC are invited to participate in the fly-in virtually. Please fill out [this short form](#) by **April 6, 2026** if you're interested in this engagement opportunity. TWS staff will reach out to connect you with event organizers.

**Questionnaire: Foundational Elements of North American Conservation** – The Wildlife Management Institute is gathering input from conservation partners to help identify the key foundational elements that will guide the future of conservation. Please take a few minutes to complete the [questionnaire](#) and share it widely with your colleagues and networks—preliminary results will be presented at the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference later this month.

## On the Horizon

**Endangered Species Committee to convene over oil and gas exemptions to the Endangered Species Act** – The Secretary of the Interior has [announced](#) the first convening of the Endangered Species Committee in over 30 years. The Committee, which will meet on **March 31, 2026**, has the authority to override the protections established in the Endangered Species Act which are in conflict with U.S. federal activities. This meeting is specifically to examine oil and gas activities in the Gulf of Mexico. [Read more in our coverage](#) and tune in to [the hearing which will be aired on YouTube](#).

## CAC and Working Group Activities

**Oklahoma Chapter joins coalition opposition to chronic wasting disease legislation** – The Oklahoma Chapter of The Wildlife Society signed onto a [coalition letter](#) opposing [House Bill 3270](#). The legislation would shift permitting authority under the state's pilot program "[to enhance the genetic durability of Oklahoma deer against chronic wasting disease](#)" from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) to the Department of Agriculture,



Food and Forestry. Research under that program is currently being conducted by ODWC, but would be cut short under the proposed bill. The coalition's letter focuses on the need for scientific oversight in the management of chronic wasting disease, and supports the role of ODWC in managing the state's wildlife resources. The Wildlife Society also joined this effort as a signatory on the letter. *Chapter contact:* [Colter Chitwood](#)

**Alaska Chapter submits scoping comments on Tongass Land Management Plan revision**

– The Alaska Chapter submitted [comments](#) to the US Forest Service (USFS) as part of the scoping phase of revisions to the [Tongass Land Management Plan](#). The Tongass includes significant fish and wildlife resources and the Alaska Chapter has long contributed its expertise to support informed management of this area. The Chapter's comments were supportive of several of the goals identified by the USFS in revising the plan, like the consideration of indigenous knowledge. They also identified issues like the absence of climate change in any of the aforementioned goals. USFS expects to release a revised plan and associated EIS in the fall of this year. *CAC contacts:* [Tim Fullman](#), [Tom Paragi](#)

**Policy updates from the Texas Chapter** – The Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society's CAC continues to monitor any new developments regarding New World Screwworm (NWS). The USDA is coordinating the dispersal of about 100 million sterile flies per week, including Texas counties bordering Mexico. For the latest developments on NWS, see the [USDA NWS website](#) or the [Screwworm Coalition of Texas website](#).

The March meeting of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) Commission included agenda items on the cultivation of dotted duckweed (an invasive aquatic plant), the 2026–2027 Statewide Hunting and Migratory Game Bird Proclamation, the acquisition of a new 2,850 acre wildlife management area in Stephens County, a briefing on the latest version of the Texas Wildlife Action Plan, and a proposal for the mandatory harvest reporting of mountain lions, to be decided on at the May commission meeting. Chapter members are present at all commission meetings to provide input as needed on these, and any other natural resource agenda items.

On February 14, the Department of Homeland security released an [announcement](#) in the Federal Register waiving certain environmental reviews for a border wall in the Big Bend Sector. Many local businesses and conservation organizations are opposing the construction of a border wall in this region. The Texas Chapter produced a [resolution on this issue in 2017](#), and is currently working with TWS, the Southwest Section and other TWS affiliates to produce a letter to congressional leaders in opposition to a border wall in the Big Bend Sector.



Matt Wagner has been asked to serve on TPWD's CWD Task Force. The first meeting is being planned for April. Recently, the Texas Regulatory Efficiency Office (TREO), created by Senate Bill 14 of the 89th Legislature, has proposed eleven changes to existing CWD rules. Five of these changes would increase the risk of spreading the disease to accommodate reduced costs of testing and fencing requirements for deer breeders.

CAC members have been making plans to meet with key legislative committee members prior to the 90th legislative session beginning in January 2027. The focus will be on the chairs of the House Culture, Recreation and Tourism Committee and the Senate Ag, Water and Rural affairs committee and their staff. Brief visits have already occurred with Chairman Perry's office. A Legislative Ag Day is being planned by the Texas Agriculture Council in Luling for May. Matt Wagner will attend to network with legislative staff. Another Day at The Capitol for Texas Chapter members will be organized for Spring 2027. CAC contacts: [Matt Wagner](#), [Mary Pearl Meuth](#)

*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

**Conservation community voices continued support for USDA CWD work** – The Wildlife Society joined other conservation organizations [in a sign on letter](#) expressing support for the USDA's work to address chronic wasting disease. The letter urges the timely distribution of congressionally appropriated funds, expanded research focus on applied research in wild cervids, and full implementation of the CWD Herd Certification Program.

**TWS works to inform members of Congress prior to ESA implementation hearing** – The Wildlife Society [submitted questions and priority issues](#) to members of the Senate Environment and Public Works Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, and Water prior to a hearing examining the challenges and opportunities with implementing the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The letter emphasized that effective implementation of the ESA requires science-based decision-making, while cautioning against policies that bypass scientific processes for short-term economic or energy development goals.

**Report highlights accomplishments in US federal invasive species management** – Invasive species are a significant ecological threat, costing the U.S. economy an estimated \$1.22 trillion since the 1960s. A new report released by the Department of Interior describes the new tools and successes in combating this ongoing issue. [Read more in our coverage.](#)



**New numbers on the outdoor recreational economy** – The Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Economic Analysis has released annual economic data that highlights what conservationists and outdoor professionals have long felt: outdoor recreation is a powerful economic engine. The data show that the outdoor recreation industry is a \$1.3 trillion economic driver that has grown by 43% since 2012. [Read more in our coverage.](#)

**Congress examines the effectiveness of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act** – The House Natural Resources Committee Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries convened a hearing earlier this month to examine the current implementation and impacts of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) to address conflicts and consider potential updates to the law. The subcommittee discussed the law’s effectiveness in conserving bird populations in today’s modern world. There was strong support for bipartisan solutions, including targeted management tools, streamlined permitting, and increased funding for conservation and monitoring. [Watch the hearing on YouTube.](#)

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

## Tools and Resources

**2026 Conservation in the West Poll data available** – Colorado College has released the newest data from its [Conservation in the West](#) poll. The poll quantifies voter attitudes toward conservation issues like climate change, public lands management, and funding for conservation across 8 western states.

**Policy office hours for TWS organization unit and working group leaders** – TWS staff are pleased to offer a dedicated space to engage in policy conversations highlighting the incredible policy efforts happening across our organizational units and working groups. **TWS Section, Chapter, and Working Group leaders** are invited to join our first Policy Office Hours on **Monday, April 6 from 2:00–3:00 PM ET.**

Please register for the meeting using the following link:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/k3ydrVk5TIGGRx1QeQEqDQ>

This informal session is designed as a space for you to:

- Bring a policy question
- Share a topic
- Highlight policy efforts in your org unit or working group
- Or simply listen in and learn



If you already have a specific topic or question in mind, feel free to email it to us ahead of time so we can be prepared. The format is come-and-go. You're welcome to join at any point and do not need to stay for the full hour. Our goal is to create an open, supportive environment to discuss policy and showcase the important work being done across TWS.

We hope you'll join us and add your voice to the conversation!

Staff contacts: [Kelly O'Connor](#), [Kristi Confortin](#)

## Updates from Headquarters

**Trailblazer grants open** – The [TWS Trailblazer Grant](#) is open for applications! If you are a student or early-career professional member of TWS in need of field gear, please apply. Sponsors have donated binoculars, backpacks, boots, rain gear and more. Applications are due by April 10.

**TWS Council meeting: join via Zoom webinar** – The Wildlife Society's Spring Council meeting will take place March 29–30, 2026, in Columbus, Ohio and via Zoom video conference. Register for Sunday [here](#) and Monday [here](#). Click [here](#) to view the meeting agenda and reach out to your council representative with any questions or thoughts. Please note, portions of this meeting may go into Executive Session. If that happens, members will be asked to leave the meeting for a period of time while Council deliberates on the topic.