



## **Final Notes**

### **NAFSR Board of Directors Zoom Meeting**

### **August 22, 2023**

#### **Attendees**

Board Members - Steve Ellis (Chair), Jim Caswell (Past Chair), Johnny Hodges (Secretary), Rich Stem (R-1), Sharon Friedman (R-2), Lynn Sprague (R-4), Becki Heath (R-6), Marisue Hilliard (R-8), Don Howlett (R-9), Doug Crandall (Congressional Liaison), Rich Guldin (Research), Gene Blakenbaker (National), Nora Rasure (National), Bill Timko (National), Jack Troyer (National), Jeanne Wade Evans (National), Kevin Martin (AWCP Liaison), Ed Shepard (PLF Liaison)

Committee Chairs – Rich Guldin (Climate), Nora Rasure (Recreation)

Staff – Bill Disbrow, Webmaster

Unable to Attend - Jamie Connell (Vice Chair), Greg Griffith (R-3), Mike Rogers (R-5 south), Steve Eubanks (R-5 North), Sandra Holsten (R-10), Ranotta McNair (National), Susan Skalski (National), Jose Linares (Restoration Committee), Phil Aune (Awards Committee), Mike Dudley (Fire Committee)

#### **Welcome – Steve Ellis**

- Our response to the ESA proposed rules are due today.
- Thanks for the work of the Governance Committee. Their document is ready for approval today.
- I was interviewed on NPR on the topic of fire retardant.
- We will discuss our current Board vacancies later in the agenda.

#### **Administrative Report – Johnny Hodges**

- Membership

- Our membership has declined this year from 732 on January 1 to 682 currently. This reduction is primarily a combination of deceased members and members that were purged for not paying their dues. We have gained 16 new members so far this year.
- Finances
  - Our current balances –
    - Cash - \$30,000
    - Investments - \$11,300
    - Total - \$41,300
- This is in line with previous balances for this time of year.
- We will complete an audit of our records from 2022 by the end of September.
- Zoom Meeting
  - We will hold a Zoom Meeting for all NAFSR members on September 13 starting at 2:00 p.m. Mountain Time. Nora and Jamie are working on the topics to be discussed.

### **Congressional Update – Doug Crandall**

- We are in politically uncharted waters with major issues of 2024 Appropriations, Farm Bill, and Disaster Emergency Supplement (FEMA is running out of money). Congress is on track for a collision course in September.
- We expect a Continuing Resolution (CR) to be enacted and extended until the end of the calendar year. Yesterday the Freedom Caucus said they would not support a CR. This would force McCarthy to either shut down the government or ask for Democrats support for which he would probably lose his job as Speaker. There has been discussion of a 1% cut to appropriations with the CR.
- Both the House and Senate have completed drafts of the Farm Bill over the summer recess. The Freedom Caucus does not like the price tag. Options are to let the current Farm Bill expire or push it into the election year. Senator Stabenow's forestry title does not include any forestry management provisions.
- The firefighter pay increase expires at the end of September. Both Houses have bills ready and an extension could be added to a CR or an Emergency Supplement.
- If Senator Manchin leaves the Democrats, it will lead to all kinds of issues.
- The Supreme Court will rule on the Chevron Doctrine. This doctrine currently requires courts to defer to a federal agency's interpretation of a statute it administers when that statute is ambiguous or leaves a gap for the agency to fill.
- Ranotta McNair did great in her Congressional testimony back in May.
- The Nature Conservancy/Aspen group meets monthly with subgroups also meeting monthly. NAFSR will continue to stay engaged with and be part of this wildfire resilience group.
- Becki said there is currently discussion underway about an extension for the Farm Bill.
- Sharon Friedman is working with Joe Carbone on CEQ regulations.
- Rich Guldin said there is a Bill to modify FIA which would add forest carbon to the program. Dave Tenney is behind it. Could it be folded into the Farm Bill?

### **Public Lands Foundation Update (PLF) – Ed Shepard**

- PLF will hold our annual meeting in Cheyenne, WY on September 25 and 26. The theme will be public lands access.
- We have concluded a membership drive. We contacted over 200 potential members and recruited 22 new members and 65 previous members.
- Mary Jo is working with the WO and Director to get more visibility with current employees. They suggested making a video about PLF.
- We awarded a \$5000 scholarship to a natural resource major.
- Conservation Landscape Rule – Some people think this is a solution looking for a problem. It clarifies and supports a multiple use mission with more emphasis on conservation. The conservation leasing program is controversial. There is no deadline, but the goal is to finalize the rule during this administration.
- The new Grazing Rule has been dropped.

### **American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP) Meeting Report - Kevin Martin**

Kevin attended the AWCP meeting in Big Sky, Montana on August 7-9. He discussed some of the highlights from the meeting. His 5 page report is included at the end of these notes.

### **Mature and Old Growth Rule – Sharon Friedman and Steve Ellis**

We provided a 5-page comment letter on the Mature and Old Growth (MOG) Rule to the Federal Register on June 17. On July 20 we provided a 13-page Addendum to our previous comments. Both documents are posted in the “Advocacy” box on our website.

Some environmental groups continue to advocate for no cutting of mature and old-growth trees. This would make it difficult or impossible for the Forest Service to carry out some fuel treatment projects if thinning were restricted by tree age.

Sharon did most of the work on the supplement with assistance from Rich Guldin.

### **Governance Task Force - Becki Heath**

- The Governance Committee has completed the updated Constitution and By Laws document.
- Susan Skalski and Gene Blakenbaker had extensive comments and they were reviewed by the committee which resulted in some additional edits to the May version of the document.
- Steve had some questions about the financial audit which will be further clarified.
- Nora Rasure moved to accept the document as written pending clarification of the audit wording.
- Jack Troyer seconded the motion.
- The motion passed unanimously.
- A copy of the revised Constitution and By Laws will be shared with all members and replace the current version on our website.

### **Climate Change Committee - Rich Guldin**

- It has been a busy couple of months for the committee.
- Dave Cleaves has put together a 17 page outline for a NAFSR Forest Carbon Science Statement.
- The Board can send comments on the outline to Rich G. by September 8.

- Rich G. will have drafts of our position paper and science paper before the next Board meeting.

#### **Recreation Committee – Nora Rasure**

- Recreation Committee members represented NAFSR during the Forest Service’s 3-day Reimagine Recreation Knowledge Sharing Workshop in July 2023.
- The Zoom workshop was convened by Forest Service staff with support from several co-convening partners.
- The workshop created a space for partners and Forest Service staff to come together, illuminate shared interests, build connections, and provide input critical to the Reimagine Recreation strategic planning effort.
- Over 100 participants representing a diverse set of recreational interests participated in each of the 5 sessions.
- Sessions focused on
  - 1) Elevating the Recreation Workforce
  - 2) Equity and Access
  - 3) Cross-Boundary Collaboration
  - 4) Recreation and Conservation
  - 5) 21st Century Communication
- Input from the workshop will inform the Reimagine Recreation strategy and action plan including identification of an updated vision to guide the Forest Service Recreation Program, strategic priorities and goals, and agency national level actions.

#### **Student Congress – Jim Caswell**

- The 2024 planning team is up and running.
- The topic for the Congress will be Green Energy and what roles public lands play.
- The FS is affected by transmission lines and rare earth minerals.
- BLM lands are impacted by the siting of solar and wind projects.
- The Congress is scheduled for October 7-10, 2024.

#### **Board Vacancies – Steve Ellis**

- Steve reviewed the current vacancies on the Board and Committee Chairs.
  - Board position – Past Chair (vice Jim Caswell). He is stepping down on September 1. This position will not be filled.
  - Board position vacancy – R10 (vice Sandra Holsten). Sandra has agreed to continue on the Board until we can find a replacement.
  - Board position vacancy – At Large (vice Hank Kashdan). Hank has served on the Board for 13 years.
  - Awards Committee Chair (vice Phil Aune). Phil has served as the Committee Chair for 9 years.
  - Restoration Committee Chair (vice Jose Linares). Jose is joining the NW Forest Plan Advisory Committee.
- A task force was formed to work on filling these vacancies. Members are Jeanne Wade Evans, Rich Guldin, Sandra Holsten, Sharon Friedman, and Steve Ellis.

**Next Meeting**

- Our next Board Zoom Meeting is scheduled for November 9, starting at 10:00 a.m. Mountain Time.
- Our next in-person Board meeting will be held in January or February. Johnny will work on potential locations and dates and present options to the Board by October 1.

Final Notes by Johnny Hodges  
August 28, 2023

**2023 AWCP Summer Meeting**  
**Monday, August 7 – Wednesday, August 9**

This semi-annual meeting was held in Big Sky, Montana on August 7-9, 2023. This was the summer meeting. There is a winter meeting that is held in conjunction with the North American Wildlife and Natural Resource Conference. We were not able to attend the winter meeting. NAFSR has been an AWCP partner for many years. Kevin Martin attended this meeting for NAFSR.

First, I'll start with a little background information about the AWCP: In 2000 the Boone and Crockett Club organized an historical conservation summit that has had a profound impact on the future of wildlife. This meeting resulted in the creation of the American Wildlife Conservation Partners – a coalition of 35 wildlife organizations. Today, AWCP has grown to over 50 organizations that represent the interests of America's millions of hunter-conservationists, professional wildlife and natural resource managers, outdoor recreation users, conservation educators, and wildlife scientists.

Individual organizations each have their areas of interest, collectively all are dedicated to ensuring the vitality of our wildlife resources, providing sustainable public use and enjoyment of those resources under science-based management of the state and federal fish and wildlife agencies, in cooperation with habitat and land management by federal, state, county, and local governments.

Many of these are our (USFS) long-time partners, who have been working with the agency on planning and implementing, including bringing resources, expertise, and funding to the table. These organizations look on the agencies as partners and are willing to support us with Congress and Administrations to assure wildlife interests are being met and a priority.

The meeting itself was well attended. Representatives were there from the many wildlife and sportsmen/women organizations as well as several agencies. The summer meetings are much shorter and focused more on AWCP working groups and actions and are not tied to the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, and so are less attended by agency and administration representatives.

The Biden Administration representative was USFWS Director Martha Williams and some of her staff. She spent quite a bit of time with the group. She emphasized landscape resiliency, climate change, lead concerns, and partnerships. There was discussion around funding and agency capacity, worry about the pipeline of new professionals and lack of applicants for advertised positions. She was aware of many of the concerns of the group and was interested in working directly with organizations on issues. She has an emphasis on direct, open, and often communications. She understood the issues and wanted to find ways to address them together.

We spent most of the meeting working on the AWCP's identified Legislative Priorities, each of which was covered in detail, with identified lead organizations covering the topic and taking suggestions and questions from the larger group.

Recovering America's Wildlife Act (NWF, CSF, AFWA, DU, B&C) - the desire is for dedicated funding. This Act is to get ahead of the Federal listing process by providing the States

resources. Chairman Westerman is working on a draft house bill, with the Senate expected to be much the same. There is a lot of good communication on this potential bill.

2023 Farm Bill – they are not expecting this to be completed and passed by October 1, expecting an extension. The House side is looking to revamp/retool the CRP program, with less emphasis on wildlife and soil benefits. There was discussion that due to so many new members who have never worked on or passed a Farm Bill, this increased unknowns and uncertainty.

There was a lot of discussion and support for forest management in the Farm Bill. This would include both private and public lands. They discussed the forest conservation easement program (FCEP) was introduced into the House in May and into the Senate two weeks ago. The purpose is to keep private forest lands in forest use through conservation easements. The largest issue in Congress appears to be either mandatory or appropriated funding. Some concerns if this would be used to supplement Forest Legacy, which is a Forest Service program. It was determined this was a distinct program for private land and not public lands.

There continued to be interest in enhancing the Good Neighbor authority, adding Tribes and NGOS with the States. High support in the House.

Cottonwood fix – the House and the Senate has passed bills out of committee and are trying to get to the floor for a vote. The environmental community has been pushing back. This is important to get completed as to the continuing risk of additional litigation. This needs to happen this session as the partial fix has expired. The Western Governors Association is supportive and pushing as well.

Save the Sequoias – this is important to now get across the finish line.

Regulatory Reform/Permit Reform for Conservation Restoration Projects – permits and regulations are getting in the way of restoration projects on the ground. This will be tricky to move forward so as not to cause additional unforeseen issues.

America's Outdoor Recreation Act - little movement though the Senate Committee. Is this going to be part of a larger lands bill, which may move first? The Outdoor Recreation Bill currently includes a provision that "each BLM and FS jurisdiction" would provide a shooting range "Range Access Act". No funding is included to manage these.

Migration Corridors Authorization – looking to include more species, summer ranges. The authorizing bill is drafted and in circulation. Some agencies (FS, BLM, and USFWS) were concerned by loss of budget flexibility. The interest is in public, private and Tribal lands. Ongoing conversations are happening with multiple Governors.

2023 Lands Bill:

- Castle Mtns
- Ruby Mtns
- Community Empowerment of the Owyhee

- Protect CA Deserts
- IN Hoosier National Forest
- Greater Grand Canyon – proposed monument – designated this morning.
- Desert National Wildlife Refuge

RETURN Act – all AWCP organizations oppose – a bill from Congressman Clide of the Freedom Caucus.

#### Climate Change -

- o Carbon Credit Assurances – Western Governor Conference supports.
- o Tradeable Tax Credits/45Q for NCS – still on the drawing board

Excise Tax Slippage – unique to fishing and archery industries. Economic issues, folks purchasing online may not be paying tax, which is lost conservation dollars. All US manufacturers must pay. Senator Crapo asked for a study to be completed in 2024 to analyze.

The Grasslands Act aims to stop loss of grasslands. Forty percent of grasslands have been lost in the last thirty years. Senator Wyden had a bill in Senate last year, very large and complex. There is bipartisan support and if starts smaller this is one that likely could get done.

#### Appropriations Requests

- Chronic Wasting Disease – implementation of bill passed with an increase over 2023 funds. State agencies are aware of and applying for funds, including research requests.
- MAPLand – passed last year working on implementation and funding.
- Migration Corridors – in the President’s Budget.
- Feral Horses – \$147 million in 2023 – \$110 million for housing 60,000 animals. Exploring new authorities/options to deal with. There are 89,000 animals on the landscape with an MO of 27,000. The Fish and Wildlife Agencies passed a resolution last month to have the federal agencies deal with the issue.

#### Administrative Priorities -

- Federal Lands Hunting Fishing and Shooting Sports Roundtable - focus on recreational shooting, historical use and lead issues and concerns. My counterpart on the Public Land Foundation is a member and he has asked if I would be interested in participating.
- Bipartisan Safer Communities Act Interpretation – Department of Education and a few States are misinterpreting the bill language. Looking for a legislative fix and the Senate is working on a bill. There is a new letter out from AWCP asking the Secretary of Education to address.
- Hunt Fish Rule/Lead ammunition and tackle; Protecting Access for Hunters & Anglers Act – comment period ends August 22<sup>nd</sup>. Lots of response from hunting and fishing organizations.
- Categorical exclusion for sage-grouse and mule deer habitat – 7500 acres – new letter of support from AWCP is being signed. NAFSR has signed.



- FS Climate Rule – advanced notice – political press around mature and old growth. There is an interest in increasing landscape resiliency from AWCP members by increasing active forest management. There are potential deals ongoing and folks feel something is going to happen on this.
- Working Lands for Wildlife – this will be an Administration focus in the Farm Bill programs. Implementation is difficult for NRCS with capacity is more of an issue than funding.
- BLM Conservation Rule – final rule likely very different due to the comments. Expect something in the spring.
- AK Federal Subsistence Board – proposal to move office from USFW lead to BIA.
- Rangeland Health
  - o Grazing Permit Issues - many overdue/expired, huge backlog – looking for funding to accomplish. BLM is looking at streamlining the process utilizing new technology.

Development of Wildlife for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – update and assign tasks to complete.

#### General Observations:

- These organizations want to work and partner with the agencies.
- They are very interested and supportive of working landscapes, including assuring our National Forests are actively and sustainably managed.
- Most have a lot of political leverage – that spans political parties.
- Many are well funded and willing to provide funding and political support.
- They work hard to assure adequate funding is available for the agencies, particularly associated with projects/legislation they are supporting.
  - o This seems like a discussion item for NAFSR – NAFSR appears to shy away from legislation that contains appropriations.
- These organizations appear good at getting funding resources to agencies, especially tied to legislation. They are quite proud of this.
- They have recognized that adequate funding is just one part of the implementation equation, that agency capacity is also needed for success. Agency capacity is going to be a focus area for AWCP.
- They are going to update “Wildlife for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”. This is the AWCP’s conservation focus and recommendations for the White House and Congress for the coming years.

Kevin Martin  
August 19, 2023