**SOUTHEASTERN ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES**

**WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

 **Working Group Report:** Furbearer Working Group (FWG)

**Chair**: Rich Rogers

**Meeting**:May 11, 2021

Virtual Meeting

**Meeting convened**: 0930

**Chaired by**: Rich Rogers

**Working Group Members Attending:**

1. Rich Rogers (WV, SEAFWA FWG Chair)
2. Blake Sasse (AR, SEAFWA FWG Co-chair)
3. Roger Applegate (TN)
4. Jay Butfiloski (SC)
5. Laura Conlee (MO)
6. Jonah Evans (TX)
7. Mike Fies (VA)
8. Ricky Flynt (MS)
9. Brian Grice (AL)
10. Jennifer Hogue (LA)
11. Colleen Olfenbuttel (NC)
12. Laura Palmer (KY)
13. Emily Rushton (GA)
14. Buddy Welch (FL)
15. Parker Hall (USDA-WS, non-voting)

**Scheduled Discussion Items:**

1. Update from SEAFWA WRC:

FWG submitted action items:

* 1. SE FWG documents, including the recently approved Comprehensive Coyote Literature Review are now on the SEAFWA web site.
	2. Informed WRC that we are awaiting completion of NE FWG statement on humane dispatch before taking any action ourselves.
	3. Informed WRC that SE FWG has issues with language of The Wildlife Society position statement on trapping. We will be drafting and sending comments.
1. Review of the Status of FWG Charges:
	1. Develop regional research project to investigate declines in muskrat populations and coordinate these efforts with northeastern and midwestern states.
		* + SE FWG (Rogers) will be designing protocol for individual state collection of appropriate muskrat biological tissue samples to examine for presence of specific toxins, heavy metals, PFAS, and microplastics. This will require multiple testing facilities and some state funding. Requests for multi-state grant funding have received no responses to date.
			+ SE FWG (Rogers) is continuing collate and summarize muskrat pelt sex/age data from FWG member states.
			+ SE FWG is also awaiting study plans from the MW and NE groups.
	2. Initiate and/or support surveys and research on prevalence and impacts of wildlife disease, especially in fox, coyote, and raccoon populations.
		* + North Carolina and West Virginia are continuing to collect muskrat carcasses for toxin and disease analyses. See previous item for an expansion of this to regional muskrat decline study.
			+ SCWDS will be attending meetings of SE FWG as regular attendees and contributors. They will be studying the following with assistance from SE FWG members:
				- Prevalence of Echinococcus in canids.
				- Sarcoptic mange in furbearers.
				- Susceptibility of skunks and raccoons to SARS CoV2.
				- Assisting SC DNR investigating bobcat deaths as related to rodenticides.
				- Assisting FL with bobcat and panther disease study.
				- Assisting WV with otter and muskrat toxin and disease study.
	3. Continue to support and provide trapper education through educational literature, courses, and workshops. Encourage state agencies and trapper organizations to work together to provide educational opportunities to the public.
		* + Several states that had planned Trapping Matters Workshops for their agency staffs were forced to cancel due to COVID19 lockdowns. They have been rescheduled for 2021 and 2022.
			+ It was suggested to incorporate key messages as developed by AFWA into a trapping module in hunter ed courses. Some states noted poor handling of trapping issues by hunter ed instructors.
			+ FWG voted to develop a position statement encouraging agencies to promote trapper ed programs; include talking points from AFWA trapping communication strategy in the programs; and at least examine the possibility of having a dedicated trapping license or stamp to assist in R3 efforts, trapper surveys, and furbearer data collection.
	4. Encourage increased training opportunities and requirements for nuisance wildlife operators to be licensed/certified to operate.
		* + TN and WV have initiated new state-specific programs in cooperation with the National Wildlife Control Training Program for certification and recertification of all wildlife damage control agents.
			+ SE FWG members (Fies, Grice, Rushton, Sasse) will be expanding current document to include minimum standards for Nuisance Wildlife Control Operator certification.
	5. Emerging issues.
		* + **Humane dispatch document.** The U.S. Furbearer Working Group is discussing creating a document on BMPs for humane dispatch of trapped animals due to confusion regarding misuse or inappropriate use of the word euthanasia as defined by law in some states or by the American Veterinary Medical Association. FWG discussed whether we should develop our own document but voted to table until next year since two other groups are currently working on similar documents.
			+ **Predator hunting as an aid to increasing other game species numbers.** Some states are beginning to receive requests to change traditional furbearer season structure to allow more liberal harvest of mesocarnivores. It is still believed by many hunters that predation is an additive source of mortality for preferred game species. SE FWG will be monitoring requests and challenges to current harvest strategies and may have to initiate collaboration on a fact sheet for distribution. If requests persist, we will take this up at the next meeting.
			+ **Predator hunting contests.** To recap, these contests held by private organizations in numerous states, have resulted in numerous press and social media article photos showing large numbers of dead animals being openly transported on public highways. Although anecdotal, public outcry has been largely negative regarding these articles and contests. SE FWG (Fies, Olfenbuttel) will be developing comments for the SE TWS and SEAFWA WRC regarding TWS Issue Statement on predator hunting contests. A few points in the TWS Issue Statement remain contentious. Additions to the statement will also be recommended.
2. State Status Reports:
	1. Each state provided written status reports and provided highlights from their state.

1. US Furbearer Conservation TWG Update:
	1. BMP trap testing.
		* + Trap testing priorities will continue to be identified (Butfiloski, Olfenbuttel).
	2. CITES.
		* + National non-detriment finding for otter was published in 2021.
	3. Other.
		* + AFWA is developing a document on humane dispatch of wildlife by agency personnel.
			+ AFWA has been working to demonstrate U.S. compliance with the fur industry’s Furmark program which is a protocol for wild fur, to be used to audit and verify the process from trapping to the auction in regards to animal welfare, sustainability and traceability. This will help insure continued marketability of U.S. pelts in international markets.

**Other Discussion Items:**

None outside our agenda

**Action Items and Recommendations:**

 None.

**Working Group Recommendation for Chai**r**:** Rich Rogers

**Meeting adjourned:** 1600

**List of current working group members and contact information:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
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| WV | Richard Rogers | Rich.E.Rogers@wv.gov |
| USDA-WS | Parker Hall (non-voting) | Parker.T.Hall@aphis.usda.gov |

**List of interested participants and contact information:** none

**Submitted by**: Rich Rogers

