

SOUTHEASTERN ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES

Wetlands Wildlife Committee Report Jamie C. Feddersen and Dale James, Committee Co-Chairs Sunday, October 27, 2019 Hilton Head, SC

Meeting convened: 1:00 PM

Chaired by: Jamie C. Feddersen* (TWRA) and Dale James* (DU)

Committee Members* and Guests Attending:

Name	Affiliation
Seth Maddox*	Alabama Dept. Conservation and Natural Resources
Larry Reynolds	Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries
Cody Dunagan	Texas Parks and Wildlife
James Whitaker	Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency
Brian Davis	Mississippi State University
Mike Brasher	Ducks Unlimited
Molly Kneece	South Carolina Dept. of Natural Resources
Paul Schmidt	Nemours Wildlife Foundation
Ernie Wiggers	Nemours Wildlife Foundation
Todd Merendino	Ducks Unlimited
Jerry Holden, Jr.	Ducks Unlimited
Doug Osborne	University of Arkansas
Jen Mock Schaeffer	Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Scheduled Discussion Items:

- The Co-Chairs recognized the retirement of former chair of this committee, Steve Rockwood. Steve served as the chair of the Wetland Wildlife Committee for 18 years. He recently retired from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. He is currently fishing with his family in Texas and will begin working with Ducks Unlimited, based out of Austin, Texas beginning in December 2019..
- Ernie Wiggers reminded the group there is a special session on Tuesday titled 21st Century Waterfowl, Waterbird, and Wetland Science and Conservation. The session was organized by Dr. Rick Kaminski (Clemson University).
- Paul Schmidt provided an update of a multi-state wood duck nest box recruitment study. Last year a pilot study was conducted in South Carolina. The study will be expanded to several southeast states, including North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, Florida, and Louisiana. Delaware and Maryland may also be included in the study. This project was borne out of a meeting of Atlantic Flyway states that developed several

research priorities. The Nemours Research Foundation is proposing a review of that priority list and they are seeking input on a good time and location for a potential review meeting.

- Jamie Feddersen provided an update on the Southeast Region's National Wildlife Refuge Program which is preparing a programmatic environmental assessment (EA) for the use of genetically engineered crops (GECs) on refuges in the southeast. The use of GECs will focus on how essential their use is on the refuge as it pertains to refuge-specific waterfowl objectives. This EA was initiated after the FWS reversed its decision to universally ban the use of GECs and neonicotinoid pesticides that are often used in conjunction with GMO seeds on refuges. The current timeline is to give public notice this winter, conduct public review and commenting in Spring 2020 and prepare for NEPA compliance by Summer 2020. Additionally, several refuge complexes are beginning comprehensive wetland management reviews, in cooperation with adjacent landowners and state wildlife agencies with a goal to better define habitat delivery needs.
- Jen Mock Schaeffer provided a legislative update regarding Farm Bill, North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), and Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) and Waters of the United States (WOTUS).
 - The 2018 Farm Bill has passed and now the rules for how programs will receive and issue funding are being determined.
 - This year marks the 30th Anniversary of NAWCA. NAWCA authorization expired in 2012, and although it continues to receive annual appropriations, it remains vulnerable should serious fiscal matters arise in DC. With regards to reauthorization, bills in both the House (HR 925 – North American Wetlands Conservation Extension Act) and Senate (S 261 – North American Wetlands Conservation Extension Act) were introduced to reauthorize NAWCA for an additional 5 years at \$60M per year. There appears to be substantial support for NAWCA and it is nearly ready to pass in the House and move to the Senate.
 - There have been several revisions to RAWA, including provisions for Tribes, incentives to encourage multi-organization cooperation, reporting requirements, caps on amounts that can be spent on conservation education and recreation, and assigning funding from the US Treasury, rather than specifically from gas and oil revenues. The current version of RAWA would redirect almost \$1.4 billion in existing revenues annually from general treasury funds for the conservation of fish and wildlife species. More sponsors are needed in the House and the bill has not yet been introduced in the Senate.
 - Previously, the Trump administration undertook executive action to 1) formally repeal Obama's WOTUS rule, which represents a conservative approach based on the science report entitled "Connectivity of Streams and Wetlands to Downstream Waters: A Review and Synthesis of the Scientific Evidence" and 2) redefine WOTUS. Currently, WOTUS as defined under the Obama administration is still

in in effect for 22 states. The remaining states have multiple lawsuits against this version of WOTUS. The comment period for the new WOTUS rule closed earlier this year, and, based on the comments received, the new rule is expected to be released later this year or early next year in the form of a Final Registry Notice. States will have an opportunity to send in comments before the final registry is released.

- Although there was not a quorum of Committee members, the group discussed and prepared draft letters supporting the reauthorization of NAWCA and supporting the authorization of RAWA. The Committee Chair indicated he will request the Wildlife Resources Committee ask the SEAFWA Directors and Dale James will request the SE-TWS Executive Committee to submit the letter in support of NAWCA. The RAWA letter was tabled until we receive further guidance from AFWA.
- Jerry Holden provided a Ducks Unlimited Update. Adam Putnam (former Florida Secretary of Agriculture) was named CEO earlier this year and Nick Wiley was named COO. The Southern Regional Office is adding staff and strengthening relationships with southeastern states.
- The group briefly discussed the timing and location of the Wetlands Wildlife Committee meeting. Prior to the meeting, the co-chairs were asked to consider changing future meetings to a day later during the SEAFWA meeting to accommodate folks who may have limited travel budgets and as a potential way to increase attendance and participation in the meeting. The group could not identify a more convenient time, except maybe earlier on Sunday. Due to the paucity of committee members, the topic was tabled and the Chair will poll Committee members after the meeting to determine if there is another acceptable meeting time.
- Jamie Feddersen informed the group of an internet-based company called Public Land Tees. The company donates \$5 of each online purchase to public land conservation. Most recently, the company used proceeds to purchase 100 Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps (Federal Duck Stamp) and dubbed the effort Stamp It Forward. In an Instagram post, the owner encouraged his followers to either buy his products or donate \$25 to him directly so he can purchase additional stamps. The group was encouraged to spread the word on #stampitforward.

Presentations:

- Molly Kneece (SC) provided a presentation on South Carolina's wetland wildlife management efforts.

Action Items and Recommendations: Forward a letter of support to the SE-TWS Executive Committee supporting NAWCA re-authorization and to the Wildlife Resources Committee for recommendation to the SEAFWA Directors supporting NAWCA re-authorization.

Meeting adjourned: 2:45 PM

Submitted by: Jamie C. Feddersen (TN)

Attachments: NAWCA reauthorization letter

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