

SOUTHEASTERN ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES

Wildlife Resources Committee Report Chair- Billy Dukes (SC) Meeting of October 26, 2020 Springfield, MO (virtual on Zoom)

Meeting convened – 1:00 p.m. CDT

Chaired by: Billy Dukes (SC)

Committee Members Attending: Keith Gauldin (AL), Brad Carner (AR), George Warthen (FL), Tina Johannsen (GA), Chris Garland (KY), Kenny Ribbeck (LA), Russ Walsh (MS), Joel Porath (MO), Brad Howard (NC), Bill Dinkines (OK), Billy Dukes (SC), Joe Benedict (TN), John Silovsky (TX), Cale Godfrey (VA), Gary Foster (WV), Jon Gassett (WMI), Dave Stallknecht (SCWDS).

Scheduled Discussion Items:

Large Carnivore Working Group Report - Dan Gibbs (Chair)

- Received phone call from WMI, Patty Swoca, about Black bear testing program document being produced and will send to Gibbs for review. Been hired by WMI to oversee the project and working on a guide for product testers to utilize to send to LCWG for review.
- Funding regarding bear resistant info on the BearWise website, understanding that WMI would include the cost for anything from the testing would be included in that amount.
- Contact person needed to represent SEAFWA as contact for BearWise. Billy Dukes appointed Dan Gibbs to be the point of contact for the LCWG and WRC for products testing and apprise the WRC of the status.
- BearWise accomplishments and update over past year, Bearwise store launched and stickers and other material produced sales exceeded over 10K.
- \$1,200 earned so far in royalties. Subcommittee for Bearwise desires to use funding for overage from previous year to offset costs for current year
- Created usage guidelines for BearWise logo and information, trademarked and need to protect it.

- 14 bear alerts were written, average of 50% open rate which is considered high in the industry.
- Louisiana, North Carolina, Florida and Tennessee put up money to look at pilot social media project. Info in handout.
- Working with AFWA leadership to transition the program to AFWA.
- Questions regarding transition of BearWise from Southeast program to national in scope:
 - *NC: What AFWA Committee will be charged with BearWise?*
 - *GA: What species will be incorporated? – brown bears*
 - *GA: Why is SEAFWA being given less representation on oversight committee?*
- Requested BearWise budget for 2021 is \$42,000K budget, up from \$29,000 in 2020.

Wild Hog Working Group – Matt Chopp (Chair)

- Virtual meeting held this summer due to cancellation of IWPC. Almost 100% attendance on virtual meeting.
- New chair for upcoming year is Tennessee’s Kevin Lowery and co-chair is Kentucky’s Terri Brunges.
- Wild hog toxicant feeder testing program underway with WMI
- Wild hog trapping BMPs – should it be pursued? Chose not to pursue because southeastern states already have them.
- APHIS aerial gunning available to state wildlife agencies with new safety measures.
- Sodium nitrite field trials were successful in TX with lower dose. Complete mortality on hogs. Spring 2021 trials will commence. Could be registered as early as 2023.
- CWD transmission testing – Directors will be notified first of any results.
- 2021 - will request letter of support for toxicants.

Furbearer Working Group – Rich Rogers (Chair)

- Held virtual meeting in summer

- Multi-state funding proposal for regional muskrat study, NC and WV collecting carcasses for toxins and disease analysis.
- Voted to develop position statement to promote Trapper Ed programs, encouraging states to incorporate key messages developed by AFWA into courses.
- Encourage certification program for nuisance wildlife operators
- Emerging issues
 - TWS trapping position statement available on The Wildlife Society's website
 - Humane dispatch
 - Predator hunting contests conveying poor image
- Action items (for WRC):
 - Proceed with position statement for trapper ed programs – approved by WRC
 - FWG operational guidelines – approved by WRC (FWG will accept modifications)
 - Coyote synthesis document – approved by WRC (as presented) – will be reviewed every 5 years and updated as needed.

Cervid Working Group – Jason Isabelle (Vice-Chair)

- Virtual meeting held in July 2020
- Charles Ruth will be new chair and Jason Isabelle will be co-chair.
- Consistent messaging needed for CWD management
- Endorsed formation of the SE Deer Partnership
- QDMA and NDA will host a virtual SE Deer Study Group meeting on Feb 23-24
- SE Deer Partnership phases:
 1. Obtain and analyze data on value (economical/social) of deer hunting across the SE
 2. Develop a facts-based communication plan based on data obtained in phase 1.
 3. Implement messaging on regional and local scales

- Recommendation will be presented to Directors to fund SE Deer Partnership (3 years at \$20,000 each)
- Ohio has offered to have joint meeting with Northwest folks for next year. If they are unable to do so, South Carolina DNR will take over.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on processors and created a shortage this year, working to be proactive in making hunters aware of this prior to the start of deer season.

Wild Turkey Working Group – Zak Danks (Chair)

- Virtual meeting held in September, replacing original meeting scheduled for June.
- NWTF took financial hit with loss of banquet fundraisers.
- SCWDS provided information on recent and ongoing disease surveillance and diagnostic testing and research for turkeys and game birds.
- Turkey populations affected by increased hunting in the Southeast due to COVID-19.
- June 7-10, 2021 – National Wild Turkey Symposium in Asheville, North Carolina.
- Working group will meet day before (travel day)
- 2022 – hope to resume in-person WTWG meeting in Oklahoma
- Impacts of Rx fire on turkeys in coastal plain – manuscript from GA adopted and published

Alligator Working Group – (Billy Dukes reporting for Jeb Linscombe-Chair)

- AWG tentatively scheduled to meet in April in TX.
- Virtual meeting held in June, discussed CITES tags
- According to state's reports, in general, adult and egg harvests are trending down due to hurricanes and COVID-19. There are currently increased demands for recreational alligator hunting opportunities.

Wetlands Wildlife Committee (no report)

- Canceled meeting for SEAFWA 2020. Attendance at meetings has been poor for past few meetings.
- No future meeting currently scheduled.

WSFR Update – Billy Dukes

- Paul Wilkes named as new WSFR Chief (replacing Mike Piccirilli)
- Grant Solutions and TRACS will be used for grants/reporting management

CWD Multi-State Conservation Grant – John Fischer

- **Titled “National Coordination in Technical Assistance for Prevention, Surveillance, and Management of Chronic Wasting Disease”**
- WMI was grantee
- Conducted survey of wildlife agencies to understand non-fiscal CWD needs
 - Geospatial needs were primary among states
 - Communication of password protected “backside” portal with information was needed for agencies (available on CWD Alliance website)
- APHIS providing \$2.8 million for 17 states to address CWD management, research, and response activities
- Workshop available this fall for identifying scientific and societal needs created by CWD

WMI – John Gassett

- Hog toxicant/container testing results will be forthcoming

SCWDS – Dave Stallnecht

- Rabbit hemorrhagic virus disease II
 - Could be problematic with the large volume of domestic/pet rabbits
 - High mortality rate
 - No outbreaks of RHVD in SE thus far
 - Working to better understand risk factors
- EHD in cervids
 - Busy year of EHD in 2020
 - No major outbreaks, mostly scattered in NW United States
 - Annual survey – 2019 was 40th year anniversary of survey
 - Looking into spatial distribution of an outbreak
 - Studying drivers of EHD in Great Plains
- Studying in-utero transmission of CWD in WTD
 - Collected samples from 3 CWD-positive states (AR, TN, WV)
 - Will be able to determine with current samples

- Studying if COVID-19 will be an issue with transmission to wildlife
 - No confirmed cases in wildlife at this time
 - Used raccoons and skunks for test subjects
 - Raccoons appear to not be susceptible, but skunks do. (This does not indicate any impacts on population.)
- Sarcoptic mange in black bears
 - Mainly in Pennsylvania
 - Widely reported in VA this past year
 - Keeping track across SE
 - Significant issue in some states
 - Send samples to SCWDS as encountered
 - Sample submission protocol will be forwarded to WRC

Multi-State Grouse Meeting/Initiative – Mark Scott/Lisa Williams

- Grouse have witnessed a sharp decline across eastern range in past 20 years.
 - Southeast-71% decline
- 1980-2000 exhibited stable population (with typical boom/bust cycle).
- Flush rates have sharply declined since 2000 (presence of West Nile).
- 4% decline per year in good habitat areas as opposed to previous 1%
- Populations are not sustainable as a game bird if trend continues.
- Restoration Initiative
 - Research disease dynamics (WNV)
 - Public outreach
 - Make efforts to educate those not involved in hunting
 - Aggressive habitat management
 - Habitat planning tools
 - WNV risks are most often associated with elevation and soil drainage issues, therefore “high and dry” is best to eliminate mosquitos

- How can SEAFWA assist?
 - Approval to pursue initiative
 - Time to work on initiative
 - Volunteers needed to serve on steering committee
 - Brief Directors and colleagues with updates
- Future Steps
 - Agency commitments, regardless of current populations
 - Develop Eastern State Strategic plan that provides consistency for state operations
 - Plans for another meeting for Spring 2021
 - Continued discussions with biologists from states with grouse
 - “Seed” funding needed to begin initiative (messaging and habitat planning tools)
 - Explore possibility of receiving funding (up to \$10,000) from Directors to assist with efforts
 - Contact NFS, NPS, and other partners for possible assistance and guidance
 - Integrate with regional initiatives and take advantage of those resources

New Business

- Wildlife damage link on SEAFWA website only directs to APHIS.
- What can SEAFWA do to provide better information to public?
- Could states provide links to their info?
- Charge working groups with developing/recommending information that needs to be available to public.
- Working groups can provide input when SEAFWA website is updated (near future).

Other Discussion Items: NA

Action Items and Recommendations (to Directors):

- 3 action items (from Large Carnivore Working Group)

- *Utilize \$1,200 from product sales to defray cost of overage on BearWise budget for 2020 – approved by WRC vote*
- *Recommendation to Directors for \$42K for BearWise budget through December 2021 – approved by WRC vote. \$13,000 increase would cover the following: \$7,200 – social media; \$2,400-overage from 2020; any other costs related to transition.*
- *Recommendation to Directors to seek transition of BearWise from SEAFWA to AFWA – approved by WRC vote*

Committee Recommendation for Chair: Billy Dukes (SC)

Meeting adjourned: 4:30 p.m. CDT

List of current committee members and contact information: See attached

List of interested participants and contact information: NA due to virtual format.

List and description of active committee members: (describe)

Submitted by: Billy Dukes-Chair, with appreciation to Keith Gauldin (AL) and Russ Walsh (MS) for taking minutes.