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	Director Liaison		Committee Vice Chair
	Committee Chair		Committee Recorder

Meeting Details

Meeting Date(s) and Location(s): *List dates of all meetings held in the past year. *500 Character Limit*

Executive Summary

Information contained in this section provides an overall summary of the committee meeting including a judgment of the meeting's success compared to previous meetings. Photos or other additional documents that help convey the work of the committee in this past year should be noted in the text but added to the end of this document as an attachment to the Annual Report PDF.

**3700 Character Limit*



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Director Information Items

*Information in this section should highlight the committee's progress to goals and objectives identified in the Technical Working Committee Charter, identify challenges or risks (perceived or realized) and include any other updates from Midwest state's or relative business discussed. *3600 Character Limit*



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Committee Workgroups
 Identify workgroups that are associated with this TWC. Provide a brief 2-3 sentence summary of work accomplished in the past year. A workgroup is a smaller team that supports the goals and objectives of the TWC and is necessary and needed to help accomplish the work. It may include additional members not in the TWC but must be lead by a member of the TWC.
 *650 Character Limit

Workgroup Name (1)	States Member Lead
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Workgroup Name (2)	States Member Lead
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Requests for Action
 List below any accompanying documents attached to the annual report. Note: All formal requests for action by the MAFWA Board of Directors must complete the appropriate forms with approvals by MAFWA Executive Committee prior to the Annual Board Meeting. Ex. Committee Charter, Request and Risk Assessment. See page 12 of the TWC Guidelines Manual for timelines and details.
 *1300 Character Limit

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Proposed Meeting Dates/Times/Location Dates and times the TWC will meet in the upcoming year.	
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Agenda

*Provide meeting information from the past year in the space below. If additional supporting documents are needed, please combine into a single PDF and use the space below to document what is attached. Before final submission to the MAFWA Executive Secretary. *4000 Character Limit*

Attachment A - Meeting Summaries

MAFWA Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee August 20, 2025 Quarterly Virtual Meeting Summary

Present: Jeb Williams (ND, Director Liaison), Katy Fullin (IA, co-chair), Karen Kinkead (IA, co-chair), Claire Beck (MAFWA), Brian Hess (CT), Kate Parsons (MLI), Owen Boyle (WI), Malissa Briggler (MO), Shelby Timm (MO), Leon Hinz (IL), Patrick Isakson (ND), Erin Hazelton (OH), John Navarro (OH), Jess Piispanen (FWS- Region 3 OCI), Tony Henehan (MI), Jonathan Soper (NE), Alison Cariveau (MN), Chelsey Pasbrig (SD), Mandy Pearson (SD), Hugh Ratcliffe (MW CASC), Lindsey Kemp (MN).

Agenda & Notes

1. MLI Updates - Claire Beck, MAFWA
 - With federal changes, MLI staff have moved to different programs and have reduced capacity, however, they are still around and working on MLI.
 - MLI Retreat is coming up next week. MLI is in the process of updating its Vision and Mission statements
 - **Habitat Inventory & Assessment Working Group's Midwest Conservation Blueprint** - is updated every year to remain responsive to feedback. The at-risk species data layer included critical habitat and COAs, but no SGCN info. Now it will be including a rarity-weighted richness RSGCN layer for vertebrate species, based on 2016 GAP models for RSGCN. There is another layer too that's based on waterfowl modelling. Also the team is working on expanding the blueprint to the near-shore waters of the Great Lakes.
 - **At-Risk Species Working Group** will be having an ideation work group facilitated by Michelle Wilson.
 - **SWAPs and Landscapes Team** - has worked on resources to be useful for revision process. The plan is to re-activate the group in January once the bulk of the SWAP updates are done.
 - **SWAPs Database Team** - this has been part of a national discussion, using Microsoft Power BI. Discussing what a regional SWAP database would look like for the Midwest. Have spoken with the Northeast region. They want to start finding out whether there is an appetite for this in the Midwest, because we will need to seek funding (SWG-C?). Therefore, she invited Brian Hess from the NEAFWA Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee
2. NEAFWA SWAP Database - Brian Hess, CT DEEP - WDPM and SWAP Coordinator for CT, and current chair of the NEAFWA WDTC for the next few weeks
 - Northeast put together a Lexicon and updated it in 2022. Most states follow these to some degree. This will be hosted at Northeastwildlifediversity.org (NEAFWA's WD TC has their own webpage)
 - They identified the need to update and modernize the Database.
 - Benefits:
 - Regional Context
 - Plan and work at a larger scale
 - Add capacity for partners with fewer resources
 - One-stop-show for state supplied SWAP info
 - They expect this to be launched and start training in Spring 2026 or possibly later.
 - 6 of NE states have applied for extensions on SWAP submission.
 - State Responsibilities
 - Steering Committee with monthly meetings - data specialists, SWAP coordinators, etc.

- Input data through a user interface or using batch spreadsheets
 - Challenges
 - Taxonomy - needed to assign managers of custom TSN IDs (e.g. for species that don't occur in ITIS)
 - Limitations on what could be "mandatory" - most of these have been made optional
 - SWAP coordinator staff. Some NE states (maybe half?) don't have permanent staff to work on SWAPs, especially when SWAP updates aren't in process
 - The NEAFWA WDTC also has a SWAP subcommittee. Brian showed the WDTC the webpage for their TC's website. Right now, they display their RSGCN in an Airtable. The rollup of information is most useful at a broad scale for landscape scale work
 - NEAFWA developed a Landscape Committee made up mostly of Director level folks. There is a work group on which the WDTC has 2 reps. They use the RSGCN to feed priorities up to that committee.
 - Discussion
 - The MLI SWAP Database group has also worked on a draft data framework. This includes space for both state-only framework and a regional framework, it does not dictate to states how to format information.
 - Some states want to invest in their own state's tools for improving serving out data to the public.
 - The national level pilot was just able to complete an example dashboard based on 2015 plans - which should be available soon. No plans right now to continue that national project for the 2025 SWAPs. There is interest, but no solid plan.
3. AFWA Wildlife Diversity Program Visioning Project - Karen Kinkead
- A draft was circulated about a month ago for feedback. Many of the comments indicated that it was too long. So, it's being edited down to maybe about 20 pages, including a resolution. The resolution is to accept the report, to support the implementation of the 3rd generation of SWAPs, and to communicate the importance of SWAPs.
 - They used a survey to get a sense of how agencies are structured in terms of how much access the WDP has to the agency leadership, what the programs are named, etc. In the survey, about 80% of the responses indicated that WDPs use PR/DJ funds in some manner.
 - There will be a link to the survey results in the report. Karen predicts that this effort will continue, and the Wildlife Diversity Program functional model will be updated.
- Next in-person meeting - all
 - Folks don't feel the need to meet with Public and Private Lands Tech Committees in particular, or at least not as much as in recent years.
 - There is interest in meeting with the Climate Change Technical Committee (which has not traditionally held in-person meetings).
 - Also some interest in meeting with the Social Science & Human Dimensions Tech Comm or the Fish & Wildlife Health Tech Comm.
 - We are back to thinking about meeting in April, and using our periodic calls to get ahead of any action items we might plan to ask of the Directors.
4. Other business - all
- We should start planning towards seeking a MAFWA version of the AFWA resolution that will be in the Wildlife Diversity Program Visioning Report. Also, on a related note, Karen would like to plan a national symposium on SWAPs in 2026 at the national conference of

The Wildlife Society, which will be in Des Moines. Part of an effort to keep SWAPs and the need for dedicated funding in front of folks.

5. C-SWG projects recently awarded in MAFWA Region - all
 - MO, IA, NE, & MN – Part two of a Midwest Bumble Bee Atlas to allow states to complete the atlas and synthesize the data, as well as transition to a long-term monitoring program.
 - MI got one to evaluate Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake (EMR) for the Recovery Implementation Strategy (RIS). Includes hibernacula surveys, updating a model, and contracting with dog team to search for hibernacula.
 - IA, IL, and WI got one to work on EMR as well as a few other species. They will also be doing genetics work on IL population of EMR - they have ~25 years of tissue samples. They will all be doing Snake Fungal Disease monitoring as well.
 - MN, WI, & IL are doing a freshwater mussel project, on RSGCN, including a proof of concept component on the use of eDNA.
 - WI and MI doing an oak barrens management project. WI will be funding a Natural Areas crew, and MI will do some Karner Blue Butterfly work and use that to prioritize locations for habitat management on game areas.
 - Midwest got ~40% of the C-SWG funding this year.
 - We discussed our internal processes and how they align with when we talk at a regional scale. It sounds like states handle this in a variety of ways, it's not streamlined.
 - We will make sure that time for a discussion of potential C-SWG projects is added to the next meeting agenda.

MAFWA Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee December 4, 2025 Quarterly Virtual Meeting Summary

Present: Erin Hazelton (OH), Katy Fullin (IA), Karen Kinkead (IA), Chelsey Pasbrig (SD), Chris Berens (KS), Diedre Kramer (KS), Jennifer Kleitch (MI), John Navarro (OH), Jonathan Soper (NE), Kate Parsons (FWS), Kelly Poole (IA), Kelly Rezac (MO), Leon Hinz (IL), Malissa Briggler (MO), Mandy Pearson (SD), Owen Boyle (WI), Patrick Isakson (ND), Shari Koslowsky (WI), Shelby Timm (MO), Tara Bergeson (WI), Brett Anderson (NE), Julia Geschke (MN but dropped off when sound wouldn't work?), Hugh Ratcliffe (USGS MCASC)

Agenda & Notes

1. MLI Update - Kate Parsons

- What's next -
 - Blueprint covers 13 states but will be expanded to cover the nearshore areas of the Great Lakes
 - SWAPs - support for new plans and regional database
 - RSGCN - preparing for 2026 update
 - At Risk Species Working Group workshop
 - Conservation Innovation “---” not a “center” but we need to work across borders in Midwest - so how do we better amplify each other's efforts
 - Conservation Storytelling and social science
 - Midwest grasslands summit Implementation - summit was August of 2024
 - Update of mission and vision - to center people in conservation
 - How people respond and how people get involved in conservation
 - Business plan
 - Pollinator team projects
- Kate will reach out to KS about joining different groups
- Owen (At Risk Species) and Leon (Habitat) each say their MLI Work Groups could use more people
- Katy - this MAFWA WD Technical Committee input formed several of the original goals of MLI and this group is good about being informed and avoiding duplicative efforts

2. How are States incorporating Climate Change into the 2025 SWAP Revision?

- The group discussed how Hugh Ratcliffe's work from the Midwest Climate Adaptation Science Center was incorporated into or referenced by their SWAP. There were a variety of approaches, depending on the various timelines for the states' SWAP submissions and the various formats of the Plans. Several states are also planning to work on this more after the revised plans are submitted, possibly as part of their Plan (doing a modification) and others by referring to other sites for more information.

<https://mwcasc.umn.edu/SWAP-support>

3. In Person meeting April 7-9, 2026 in Des Moines vicinity.
 - Will send out a rough agenda and details in early January
 - Will be in conjunction with MAFWA Public and Private Lands working groups but not spend as much joint time with them.
 - Invited the Human Dimensions and Social Science groups to meet with us but we haven't heard back yet.
 - As we get closer (and on our next call) if we have things we need from the directors we will need to start those in advance of the April meeting as they will be due before the in person meeting now.

4. Which states will be commenting on the ESA changes?
 - A few of the states are not planning to submit comments because they did last time and nothing happened
 - AFWAF T&E is talking about it tomorrow too.
 - Some states are planning to decide after this call
 - It could lead to reevaluations of species - does a species still meet the definition with the new definitions? The wording is they "Shall" delist if they don't meet the criteria.
 - This time around the States are supposed to be considered as bigger partners to the federal government than they were before.

5. Bat discussion of harvest on private land
 - This highlights a larger issue with projects that don't have a federal nexus. Section 10 of ESA is intended for projects lacking a federal nexus, but FWS will say if there isn't a federal nexus we don't have time to address it. But clearing trees in the middle of July within the range of listed bats would still potentially be a violation of the ESA.

MAFWA Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee March 4, 2026 Quarterly Virtual Meeting Summary

Present: Jeb Williams (Director Liaison, ND), Katy Fullin (IA, co-chair), Kelly Poole (IA), Jennifer Kleitch (MI), Malissa Briggler (MO), Alison Cariveau (MN), Daren Carlson (MN), Leon Hinz (IL), Shari Koslowski (WI), Owen Boyle (WI), Mandy Pearson (SD), Chelsey Pasbrig (SD), Patrick Isakson (ND), Brett Anderson (NE), Jon Soper (NE), Laura Burford (KY), Erin Hazelton (OH), Hugh Ratcliffe (Midwest CASC), Jessica Piispanen (USFWS), Claire Beck (MAFWA).

Agenda & Notes

1. Director Action Items - All

- The group discussed potentially drafting a resolution in support of SWAPs, and there was support for the idea of the resolution in general.
- Aside from the resolution in support of SWAPs, no other Director Action Items were proposed for this year.

2. Midwest Landscape Initiative (MLI) Updates – Claire Beck, MAFWA Landscape Conservation Technical Coordinator

- Claire updated the TC on the activities of several MLI Work Groups and Teams.
 - **MLI Habitat Inventory and Assessment Working Group** recently finished an update to the Midwest Conservation Blueprint. Webinar will be March 25th, which will be recorded and posted to the MLI website: <https://www.mlimidwest.org/>
 - **SWAPs and Landscapes Team**: Claire recently invited the region's SWAP coordinators to a meeting to re-start the MLI's SWAPs and Landscapes team. The group brainstormed a good list of potential priorities to work on together. Some of these things will be pursued by the SWAPs & Landscapes Team and others might fit better under the MLI At-Risk Species Work Group.
 - **At Risk Species Working Group** recently held a workshop facilitated by Michelle Wilson from Iowa DNR. The purpose was to inform a new vision and workplan for the work group, which has been around for ~6 years. There was a pre-workshop questionnaire for group members as well as one for the group's stakeholders, with a lot of ideas for priority work generated before the event. During the workshop, those thoughts were categorized into issues which the group has control over, influence on, or are outside of the group's control. There will be some follow up meetings and ultimately a new work plan, possibly a new purpose statement. There will likely be a webinar once the group has updated their charter. There were 3 major buckets of topics:
 - Continuing to engage with the larger at-risk species community through Taxa Teams or some other means
 - Further prioritization within the RSGCN list to get to something more tangible that we can communicate about and make progress on.
 - Increased coordination with MLI's Habitat Work Group.

3. Wildlife Diversity Program Managers (WDPM) Meeting report out - All

- The WDTC discussed whether there was anything that the Midwest needs to work on specifically and shared perspectives on the meeting, held in February in Utah. There were 80+ people there, which is good attendance. Next year's meeting will be in Arkansas. It was interesting to see what other states are doing, there are always states doing some aspect of SWAP communication or implementation better, so it's always inspiring to go and get great ideas.
4. AFWA effort on Wildlife Diversity Program Visioning / BMPs
 - There was a fair amount of discussion in Utah about the WDPM Visioning effort that ultimately led to a resolution that AFWA Directors required to be revised to become focused only on support for State Wildlife Action Plans (this was due to concerns over the potential for audiences to misconstrue the meaning of "Wildlife Diversity.")
 - The resolution is now part of a broad communications plan to do outreach on the newly revised SWAPs. There was discussion about working more closely with outreach and marketing teams to raise the profile of SWAPs.
 5. TWS Annual Conference November 2026 - SWAP Symposium
 - Proposal deadline is March 27 for symposia. Karen has been working with Mark Humpert on developing a proposal. The group discussed ideas for presentations during the symposium and which committee members might be able to travel to the conference. Out of state travel is restricted in several states.
 6. Agenda topics for April in-person meeting
 - How different states decide what to focus on and prioritize. What C-SWGs do we go after? For SWAP implementation and also this could include T&E program priorities and Wildlife Diversity Program work beyond SWAP implementation.
 - How have plans been integrated into the other work of the agency that aren't supported directly by SWG, or if there are restrictions.
 - Integration of social science into wildlife diversity conservation work. WI's office of applied science has a decision science sub-program. They've started looking into engagement with the public on SGCN. (This effort started with trying to learn more about who donates on the tax checkoff and who buys license plates, but has since expanded.) These projects are just getting underway.
 - Discussion about Wildlife Diversity Program conservation efforts or responsibilities for native species that are not T&E or SGCN (e.g., permits, surveys, land acquisition, land management, targeted actions).
 - Patrick suggested a talk on using more community science. How are states using community science to fill information gaps?
 7. Next steps - This is the last quarterly meeting until after our committee reports will be due, although a subset of us will be meeting in person in April. The next virtual meeting will be scheduled for early June.



MAFWA Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee Meeting Agenda

April 7-9, 2026

Meeting Space: Jester Park Nature Center <https://www.jesterparknaturecenter.com/>
[12130 NW 128th St, Granger, IA 50109](#)
Hotel: Tru by Hilton, Grimes
[701 NE Gateway Drive, Grimes, IA 50111](#)

THEME: Navigating Complexities in Landscape-Scale Habitat Restoration

Present: Karen Kinkead (IA), Katy Fullin (IA), Alison Cariveau (MN), TJ Boettcher (MN), Brett Anderson (NE), Jon Soper (NE), Erin Hazelton (OH), Malissa Briggler (MO), Hugh Ratcliffe (USGS- MWCASC), Anna Buckardt Thomas (IA), Stephanie Shepherd (IA), Riggs Wilson (WMI/Iowa DNR).

Tuesday, April 7, 2026

Meeting Notes:

Morning session was joint session of presentations with the Public and Private Lands Work Groups.

- Landscape scale conservation - Pete Hildreth, Conservation & Recreation Division Administrator
- Sharing responsibilities on a landscape complex - Doug Sheeley, Polk County Conservation Natural Resources Supervisor & Todd Gosselink, Iowa DNR Wildlife Biologist
- Foundational Elements for Wildlife Conservation: what's needed for today and tomorrow - Bill Moritz, Wildlife Management Institute Midwest Regional Representative
- Midwest Grasslands Initiative, America the Beautiful - Tyler Harms, Biometrician and Joshua Dickinson, Grassland Conservation Delivery Network Coordinator

After lunch, the WDTC held its first breakout session that included 2 presentations as well as informal discussion.

- Community Science Programs - Stephanie Shepherd, Iowa DNR
 - Iowa has multiple types of Community Science Programs including programs that are run by the DNR, some that we conduct with partners, and others that we promote.
 - Types of surveys include Bald Eagles (midwinter surveys and general nest reporting), frog and toad call surveys, acoustic bat monitoring, and a bumble bee atlas.
- Wildlife Crossings research with Iowa DOT - Gabby Barnas, Iowa State University
 - Gabby presented on her Master's research which looks at factors impacting crossing locations for snakes and turtles, in order to develop a predictive map layer to prioritize wildlife crossing projects.
- The committee held discussions about both of these topics, as well as potential C-SWG project ideas, methods for engaging effectively with congressional representatives about State Wildlife Grants, plans for a symposium on State Wildlife Action Plans at the 2026 TWS Annual Conference in Des Moines, and other topics of relevance to wildlife diversity conservation.

Wednesday, April 8, 2026 - Field Tour

All 3 committees joined together for a field tour of several grassland-wetland complexes at the southern edge of the prairie pothole ecoregion. The focus was on landscape scale habitat restoration across public and private lands, with benefits for both game and nongame species.

Thursday, April 9, 2026

The morning started with one presentation for all three groups:

- Iowa's Approach to Integration of the Wildlife Action Plan - Katy Fullin, Iowa DNR

After that, the WDTC had breakout time for several topics, summarized below.

Inreach –

How are state Wildlife Diversity Program and SWAP programs integrating with the land managers and game and fish managers in their states? Some states could focus on inreach for a decade – need to have purposeful sit-downs with land managers because there is turn over and not everyone is aware of the SWAP or activities that diversity program does. Other states have a more integrated approach. It can depend on the organizational structure of the agency. We also talked about different state approaches to Preserves programs and Natural Heritage programs. There are a wide variety of models across the region.

SWAP Committees -

The group discussed how often to bring SWAP committees together. It can help with tracking accomplishments too, if we have partners present. Ohio has an annual wildlife diversity conference and a wildlife diversity partners meeting. They have a Survey 123 to have partners fill out a form about what they have done a monthly email blast that includes some of the results. Other states maintain several SWAP committees regardless of whether or not a SWAP update is in the works.

Climate Change –

The committee asked Hugh Ratcliffe what's next, what is the ideal messaging for us to pass along to our staff? The reports weren't prescriptive because there's still uncertainty and also that isn't USGS role. But adaptation activities can range from something really targeted like managed relocation to things that are already being done. Best to integrate adaptation into regular planning. Get word out about resources that are being developed. Climate Adaptation Technical Services is a new part of MW CASC. They are able to answer questions quickly.

We discussed the AFWA and MAFWA climate change WG's and how their efforts might align with our work. For example, MAFWA CCTC is working on training staff, but MN has a climatologist on staff with their DNR that gives good webinars. So, they are ready to work on actions. Ideally, we could move towards a risk analysis – when do we let go of certain ecotypes – are we managing for 50 years out or 100 years out?

In many states, our approach is pretty much 100% all resist (as opposed to accept or direct within the Resist-Adapt-Direct, or RAD, framework). Climate change will make Eastern Red Cedar control worse and managing it harder. In more southern states where they've been dealing with it longer, you can see that it's harder to control.



Group picture of field tour attendees from MAFWA Public Lands Work Group, Private Lands Work Group, and Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee. April 8, 2026, Iowa.

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MIDWEST
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July 7, 2025

Public Comments Processing
Attn: FWS–HQ–ES–2025–0049
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
MS: PRB/3W
5275 Leesburg Pike,
Falls Church, VA 22041–3803

Re: FWS-HQ-ES-2025-0049: Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 10(a) Program Implementation; Development of Conservation Benefit Agreements and Habitat Conservation Plans, and Issuance of Associated Enhancement of Survival and Incidental Take Permits

To Whom It May Concern,

The Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA) was formed in 1934 to provide a common forum for state and provincial fish and wildlife agencies to share ideas, information, pool resources, and form action initiatives to better the management and conservation of fish and wildlife resources in the Midwest. Currently, **MAFWA represents 13 state and 3 provincial Midwest fish and wildlife agencies.** These agencies exercise primary statutory authority for management of fish and wildlife as public trust resources within their borders. We appreciate the opportunity to provide the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (“FWS” or “the Service”) with the following comments in response to the Service’s request for information and comments on Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 10(a) program implementation.

To develop these comments, MAFWA consulted with members of our Wildlife Diversity Technical Working Committee, which includes Endangered Species Coordinators from every MAFWA state. These individuals have extensive experience working with the Service and with other entities to develop and implement Habitat Conservation Plans and Conservation Benefit Agreements.

Though MAFWA represents the shared voice of the 13 Midwest state fish and wildlife agencies, the Service may receive comments from our individual member states that are important sources of input for the Service to consider. This letter does not supersede or change the views or input of any state. These comments should not be regarded as voicing the perspective of any individual state. The Service particularly seeks comments concerning the following six items. Our comments appear below each item.

- (1) Barriers that prevent applicants from pursuing development of conservation benefit agreements and habitat conservation plans.

- a. State agencies find the processes for developing conservation benefit agreements (CBAs) and habitat conservation plans (HCPs) to be lengthy and costly. A statewide, programmatic HCP takes several years, and substantial staff time, to develop and permit. For large or complex HCPs (e.g., statewide, multi-state, multiple applicants, programmatic with multiple activity types) an experienced consultant is usually needed, adding to the cost.
 - b. For some states, development of these agreements is beyond reach due to capacity and budgetary limitations. MAFWA member states are in very different situations with regards to the capacity to invest in development of these tools.
 - c. States need additional training and guidelines for the development of CBAs.
- (2) Methods to streamline conservation benefit agreement and habitat conservation plan development and their associated permit issuance.
- a. MAFWA appreciates continued efforts on the part of the Service to streamline the process for development of CBAs and HCPs. We recognize that a lot of thought has already been given to gaining efficiencies in development and implementation of these tools and appreciate the progress that has already been made in this regard.
 - b. One of the most effective methods for streamlining Section 10 permits is for state staff to engage Service staff early and throughout the process. To support this, the Service needs sufficient capacity at the Field Office level to participate in HCP / CBA development process, including addressing associated National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents and Section 7 review. Additionally, sufficient capacity is needed at the Regional Office level to review, approve and issue permits in a reasonable timeframe, including Solicitor review.
- (3) Strategies to enhance Service communications on conservation benefit agreements, habitat conservation plans, and their associated permits.
- a. Have FWS staff at the Regional Office level guide applicants through the development process. These individuals would be able to work directly with the applicants to suggest language or work with Field Office species leads to help develop a draft document.
 - b. Guidelines and trainings are needed for state and federal staff regarding development of CBAs and HCPs. Communication could be further enhanced by making HCP and CBA training more accessible. In particular, trainings held at the Regional level at a lower cost than can be offered by the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) would be useful, as would online trainings for applicants.
 - c. For HCPs, streamlining the application process and the HCP Handbook would make these tools more accessible.
 - d. As stated in #2, a key strategy to enhance Service communications is for the Service to have sufficient staff capacity at both the Field Office and Regional Office levels to dedicate to the processes of HCP and CBA development and implementation, and to review and issue permits.
- (4) Whether any clarification is needed on the roles and responsibilities of the Service and applicants during conservation benefit agreement and habitat conservation plan development and permit issuance.
- a. This can be effectively provided through guidelines and trainings, including at the FWS regional level.

- (5) Funding and resources necessary to develop and implement conservation benefit agreements and habitat conservation plans.
- a. To provide one example from a MAFWA member state that has one Section 10 agreement in place, their HCP took over 5 years to develop from the time the consultant was hired until the permit was issued. The cost to the state for the consultant was over \$1.5 million. The state also invested a significant amount of staff time to this process for over 5 years. Many states do not have a funding source for this type of investment, or the ability to ensure that such a funding source could be dedicated to this purpose over several consecutive years.
 - b. Federal funding is needed in order for the Service to have sufficient staff capacity at both the Field Office and Regional Office levels to dedicate to the processes of HCP and CBA development and implementation, and to review and issue permits.
- (6) Strategies the Service could pilot to improve the overall effectiveness of the section 10(a) program.
- a. Develop CBA Guidelines and training for state and FWS staff and provide more accessible training on Section 10 tools at the regional level.
 - b. Coordinate with States to develop programmatic, comprehensive, range-wide Biological Opinions or CBAs to cover potential take caused by beneficial habitat management practices implemented by State fish and wildlife agencies.
 - c. Promote consistency among FWS Regions with regard to permit requirements and the processes for review, approval, implementation and monitoring of HCPs, CBAs and other Section 10 tools.

Conclusion

Conservation Benefit Agreements and Habitat Conservation Plans are important tools for States. They are also important for business and industry, providing clarity and assurances around allowed activities. We recognize that these tools will, by nature, require early investment in order to reap the desired long-term efficiencies and conservation outcomes. However, these tools need to be made more accessible, because they are currently prohibitively expensive and time consuming to develop and implement.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment and remain ready to provide assistance if you have any questions or desire additional information. Please contact Ollie Torgerson at Ollie.Torgerson@wisconsin.gov.

Sincerely,



Shannon Lott
President

cc: MAFWA Board of Directors
Ron Regan
Meagan Keen



MIDWEST
Association of
Fish & Wildlife
Agencies

®

**MAFWA Public Lands, Private Lands, & Wildlife Diversity Working Groups
Joint Meeting Agenda**

April 7-9, 2026

Meeting Space: Jester Park Nature Center <https://www.jesterparknaturecenter.com/>
[12130 NW 128th St, Granger, IA 50109](https://www.jesterparknaturecenter.com/)

Hotel: Tru by Hilton, Grimes
[701 NE Gateway Drive, Grimes, IA 50111](https://www.truhilton.com/grimes-ia)

Meeting Registration Link: <https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/ev/reg/nu7k54c>

THEME: Navigating Complexities in Landscape-Scale Habitat Restoration

Monday	April 6, 2026
	Travel to Grimes, IA (Grimes is a northern suburb of Des Moines, IA)
	Meals on your own & possible informal meet-up(s)
Tuesday	April 7, 2026 - Jester Park Nature Center Classrooms A, B, & C
	Breakfast at hotel / on your own
8:30-8:45 AM	Welcome & Housekeeping
8:45-9:00 AM	Landscape scale conservation - Pete Hildreth, Conservation & Recreation Division Administrator
9:00-9:20 AM	Sharing responsibilities on a landscape complex - Doug Sheeley, Polk County Conservation Natural Resources Supervisor & Todd Gosselink, Iowa DNR Wildlife Biologist
9:20-9:50 AM	Foundational Elements for Wildlife Conservation, what's needed for today and tomorrow - Bill Moritz, Wildlife Management Institute Midwest Regional Representative
9:50-10:15 AM	Midwest Grasslands Initiative, America the Beautiful work - Tyler Harms, Biometrician and Joshua Dickinson, Grassland Conservation Delivery Network Coordinator
10:15-10:30 AM	Iowa's Approach to Wildlife Action Plan Integration - Katy Fullin, Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator
10:30-10:45 AM	Outside break w/ refreshments
10:45 AM-12:00 PM	Small group break outs - outside in shelter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discuss morning presentations & implications for your working group
12:00-12:45 PM	Lunch (provided) - outside
12:45-1:00 PM	Thoughts from morning breakouts
1:00-2:00 PM	Break into 2 groups: Public & Private Lands – Classrooms A&B, WDTC – Classroom C

Tuesday, cont.	April 7, 2026 - Jester Park Nature Center Classrooms A, B, & C
1:00-4:30 PM (with a break at 2:00-2:15 PM)	<u>Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee Session</u> - Classroom C <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Science Programs - Stephanie Shepherd • Wildlife Crossings research with DOT - Gabriella Barnas (4 pm)
1:00 - 2:00	<u>Public/Private Lands Working Groups Joint Session</u> - Classrooms A&B <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographics, Survival and Nesting for Female Wild Turkey in SE Iowa - Dan Kaminski, Wildlife Research Biologist • Where CWD Fits: Aligning Disease Response with Iowa's Deer Management Plan - Jace Elliott, Deer Program Biologist • Farm Bill Update - Todd Bogenschutz, Upland Game Biologist
2:00-2:15	Break w/ refreshments
2:15-4:30	Break into 3 groups: Public Lands Working Group Business – Classroom A Private Lands Working Group Business – Classroom B Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee Business - Classroom C
5:30-7:00	Dinner – on your own or in groups
Wednesday	April 8, 2026 - Field Tour
	Breakfast at hotel / on your own
8:30 AM-5:00 PM	8:30 Load Buses at Tru by Hilton in Grimes 10:00: Arrive at McCords Pond. 10:45: Arrive at Dunbar Slough 11:30: Arrive at Whiterock HQ - lunch and restrooms 1:15: Arrive at Long Pond 2:00: Arrive at Lakin Slough 2:45: Arrive at Bays Branch (North) 3:25: Arrive at Bays Branch (Overlook) 3:45: Leave Bays Branch (Overlook) for Tru by Hilton in Grimes 4:30: Arrive at Tru by Hilton in Grimes
5:30-7:00 PM	Dinner – on your own or in groups
Thursday	April 9, 2026 - Jester Park Nature Center
	Breakfast at hotel / on your own
8:30-10:00 AM	Large groups to finish any joint items and report outs
10:00-10:15 AM	Break w/ refreshments
10:15-11:30 AM	Small groups for committees to finish reports and next steps
11:30 AM	Lunch on own as you leave

Restaurants:

Destination Grille - <https://maps.app.goo.gl/nbNauGAksUyHioGf6>

Sol Agave - <https://maps.app.goo.gl/nbNauGAksUyHioGf6>

McDivot's Indoor Sports Pub - <https://maps.app.goo.gl/8pLkDwiWPT2EpXM17>

18 minutes (~12 miles) to Jordan Creek Town Center & lots other dining options.