

# HWCC Meeting Transcript

July 23, 2025

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**Hobbs, Doug** started transcription

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 0:03

This meeting is being recorded and transcribed for our administrative record here so but with that John, I'll go ahead and turn it over to you.

**JD** **John Devney** 0:10

Alright, first of all, I'd like to thank Doug per normal for finding a way to keep us all together and convening us here.

Appreciate the opportunity from the administration to keep the hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council's charter intact, at least to get through this point.

On the journey we've been on for the last couple years, I want to thank all the members of the Council.

And the alternates for the work that they put in, especially just as a heads up, I'm gonna make a call today for any of the subcommittee leads that would like to.

Bring forward any items that they think have been.

You'd like to impress upon the new administration leadership that were work products.

In the work of the Council over the last couple years.

And any ideas that you might have to guide the work of the Council as it's reconstituted here in the near future?

So again, much appreciation for everybody making a couple hours out of your day today. And with that, I'll turn it back to Doug to do roll call.

Please.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 1:31

Thanks John.

Just real quick here, I'll do the roll call and then I'll have a couple of housekeeping items before John starts begins to introduce the speakers this afternoon.  
So Colin Beck.

**CB** **Colin Beck** 1:44  
Here here.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 1:47  
Ryan Bussey.  
Jeff Crane.

**JC** **Jeff Crane** 1:52  
Eric.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 1:53  
Michael Crowder.  
I've got John Devney, George Dunklin.  
Andrew Schmidt.

**AS** **Andrew Schmidt** 2:04  
Here.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 2:06  
Dan Forster.

**DF** **Dan Forster** 2:08  
I'm here.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 2:10  
I believe Cole Mannix could not make it.  
But Cole, if you're on, just acknowledge, please.  
Lucas Martinez.

**LM** **Lucas Martinez** 2:18  
Here.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 2:20

Ed Arnett for Colin Omara.

Jason Sumners.

Wayne Hubbard.

Wayne, I see you.

Somebody go ahead and Mark you in present.

I know Joel Peterson was not able to make it, but Blake Henning are you on acting for Joel Peterson.

Land Tawney.

Keith Tidball.

**KT** **Keith G. Tidball** 2:55

Here.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 2:57

Lauren Ward.

**LO** **Lauren K. OShea** 3:00

Here.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 3:02

Joel Webster.

**JW** **Joel Webster** 3:04

Good afternoon.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 3:07

And then just quickly alternates Kathleen Falk.

I know you're on Mark Kennelly.

**MH** **Mark Hennelly** 3:14

Yep, here.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 3:17

Blake Henning. If you're on, let me know.

Wayne is here. Marshall Johnson.

Simon Roosevelt.

Theodore Sedgwick.

Roberta Salazar Henry.

All right. Thanks.

I've got everybody for all going to go to the podium real quick and make a few housekeeping remarks, but mainly to get the camera focused here using some new technology in the room.

So we'll see if we swing around.

**WH** **Wayne Hubbard** 3:49

Repl.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 3:53

I'll see you tomorrow. Talk.

All right.

So I'll stick a few housekeeping comments and I'm hoping that the here we go.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 4:05

So just a few housekeeping items for members of the public that are attending the call. If you would keep your mic muted and your camera off just so we avoid disturbing the meeting and asks you also not utilize the teams chat function.

For presenters and public commenters who will join later, the chairman Chairman Dabney will recognize you at the appropriate time.

And your accounting representation and then in the room. If you would just because the owl's new technology for me and Frank, it's a little.

Slightly cantankerous, if you would try to keep.

Chatter down South minimum.

So the the owl will stay for stuff here please for the time being. So with that, John, I think the camera's focused on the podium.

I'll turn it back over to you and make some introductions.

**JD** **John Devney** 5:01

Thank you, Doug.

We're going to have some comments from our friends both at the Department of Interior Fish and Wildlife Service and USDA. The first invited guest this this afternoon is Mr. Kevin Lilly.

Kevin is serving as acting assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and parks.

**LM** **Land Tawney, Montana** 5:23

Well, he's getting on our call too. Sorry.

**JD** **John Devney** 5:26

At the Department of the Interior.

Kevin.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 5:32

Yeah, right.

**LM** **Land Tawney, Montana** 5:35

We would like to see that part again.

**Kevin Lilly** 5:38

And.

Are we good to go?

Yes, great.

Thank you.

Hello everyone. Thanks for taking the time to join in this.

This very important a very important mission.

My name's Kevin Lilly.

I'm the acting assistant secretary of the interior over fish, Wildlife and parks.

And I only recently joined.

The department I've come from Texas.

Previously I was the chairman of the Texas.

Alcoholic Beverage Commission, which is both a regulatory and law enforcement body, the largest in the country.

Of its kind and before Governor Abbott placed me in that position, I was a former army officer.

Then I was with from Goldman Sachs and ran and started a financial services firm.

So I have a very background, but one thing you might notice is that I'm not a degreed environmentalist.

Nor am I a biologist, or scientist.

And yet I believe that I am extraordinary.

Environmentalist because I'm 100.

It's also a scout master. I have two sons that are both Eagle Scouts and we have hiking throughout this country.

We have fished literally all over the country and so fishing and hunting is something that is central to my family and it is something that has been part of our family literally since I was first married.

My wife, Leslie, although she doesn't like to spend a lot of time in a duck blind. She's very supportive of what we do.

Umm the my time here at the department has been fast-paced.

We have a huge agenda, both President and Secretary are passionate about hunting.

They're passionate about fishing Secretary Bergen himself is an extraordinary and experienced hunter.

And so this is not just lip service.

When I'm here working with my colleagues here.

At Fish and Wildlife Department, I think we all realize that we are here.

Serve the American people and we are here to also ensure that public lands are always available for the working men and women in this country to be able to take their children out like I have and to teach them about conservation through and through fishing. And so we.

Have an extraordinary team. I will let.

My esteemed colleague Jay Shirley.

Who is our acting director of the Fish and Wildlife Department? Introduce his staff.

I'm here with Doctor Jennifer Chatfield, who's my senior advisor, as well as Tyler Kellogg and Derek Boland, who are both my special advisors, and they are subject matter experts and I'm privileged to have them and we as a department are privileged to have such dedicated people who want.

To serve their country.

In a way that I think is remarkable and special.

One area I'd like to focus on is.

That, I think fits nicely with the objectives and purpose of this advisory committee is to increase access of public lands for recreational opportunities, especially for

hunting and fishing.

You're obviously familiar with the lands of the waters in the National Wildlife Refuge system and opportunities for access, especially for hunting, is something that for me personally is very important and an objective that again is consistent with both the President and Secretary to push forward.

For those that know me, know that collaboration is extraordinary.

We all can't be good at everything.

There's, I say.

There's no such thing as an A-Z person, and so having collaboration with you, the ladies and gentlemen that are on this call, I think is crucially important.

We can't just dictate policy from Washington without having input from the individuals to whom we are offering these ideas.

And policies. And so I think that it is incumbent upon us to have these types of meetings to have this type of discourse so that we can listen to what the requests are. The needs are the desires of the American people.

And the environmentalists and the conservationists that are on this fall, who are so passionate about hunting and fishing in this country.

And also we're working to balance the supply chain and grow our nation's economy while simultaneously conserving public lands.

And so on behalf of Secretary Borgen, it is my pleasure and honor to be here.

And it is a privilege to serve, as I often told.

People, when I came to Washington, this is a mission.

It is not a job, and so I'm surrounded by people who are incredibly passionate about it.

About conserving God's creation.

And it is an extraordinary responsibility and it's a task that we are quite serious about and I'm grateful for the time that everyone of us falls taking to be here.

So, Sir, thank you very much.

And Jay, are you up next?

Yes. Can I introduce our acting?

 **John Devney** 11:11  
Absolutely, Kevin.

**Kevin Lilly** 11:13

OK.

So I'd like to introduce Jay Shirley, who has a very esteemed background.

He served as the director of the Parks and Wildlife Division in the Great State of Utah, and Jay just had his first testimony in front of the legislature.

So you know, he made it through alive and unscathed.

So Jay, you look great.

And great to have you.

### **Jay Shirley**

Thanks Kevin.

Appreciate that.

Yeah, I think this feels a little more comfortable than how I felt yesterday prior to the meeting. So I'm super excited to be here.

I wish we were meeting in person today. That would, that would be nice and I look forward to meeting all of you sometime because I do know many of you on this call.

And just remember that was a different time. Again, I spent 6.

I.

Six months ago.

So I retired as the director of the Division of Wildlife Resources in Utah, as Kevin mentioned.

And I've spent the last 22 years in that with that agency at the state level, most of you probably already know that was generally in a law enforcement wildlife law.

And then as the director towards the end of my career and stepping away was a hard decision at the time just because of.

The passion that I have for the resources that that we have and but it seemed like the right time for me and it hasn't been very long and here I am today and yesterday didn't.

You know, makes you question that a little bit when you're sitting in front of Congress and Ed Cher all by yourself.

But what Kevin mentioned today, that's that's really what I wanted to focus on.

That's why I'm here is I.

I really am dedicated to service.

I'm dedicated to the resource. I'm dedicated to the country, and so when the opportunity came up to to be able to.



Put a little bit of my footprint on the national scale.

I thought this is something that I really need to think about and consider and I I truly am excited to be here and it has been a crazy life.

As Kevin mentioned, it's been very fast pace here.

I've only been in for about 6 weeks and and you know, just kind of living on the road. It seems like every night and that's that's a big change, but it really it does boil down to.

And this what this Council does is so critical to the mission of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Bringing our partners together, working with others, and it's for the benefit of the American people and that is something we should all be able to wrap our minds around and be able to be on board and do.

And I'm I look forward to working with this Council.

I we want to.

I mean the service we the reason why I thought this seemed like a great opportunity because it also seemed like a great opportunity for change.

And there's always ways that we can do things better.

I look forward to being able to to work with this Council in the future to do that where we wanna be able to use public input, we wanna be able to keep our partners close at hand. That's how we're gonna get conservation work done in the future.

Promoting our hunting and shooting sports is something I've been involved in since I was probably old enough to to run around with a dad that was a wildlife biologist and I I active hunter.

This seems really weird to be in a scene tie every day, and it's almost August.

And have a really good deer tag in Utah, so I'm looking forward to sneaking out of here a couple times and sneaking back.

But anyway, I really do appreciate the work that you do and look forward to working with you in the future.

So thank you. And I, Doug, everyone knows here we also have Cynthia Martinez here from our refuge program for the meeting today. So thank you.

 **John Devney** 15:24

Thank you, Jay.

And I'd like to welcome Ellen.

I'm sorry.

I'm probably gonna do a terrible job on your name, Irish.  
The Irish have very simple names, so we're not terribly good at pronunciation, but.  
Like to welcome Ellen Schultzelberger, the senior advisor acting to natural resource and environment at the US Department of Agriculture.  
And my apologies for the butcher Rhiannon.

**S** **Shultzabarger, Ellen - FS, DC** 15:53

Well, actually you did wonderful.  
You said it perfectly, so and and this would not be the first time that there's been a struggle with the last name.  
So thank you and hello everyone.  
I'm Ellen Schulzbarger and and I am a senior advisor in USDA's Natural Resources and Environment Mission Area, which works.  
Directly with the US Forest Service and I really like the vibe that was already.  
Set up as far as talking about the importance of.  
Wildlife. And so I guess I'll share just a little bit about me.  
So I spent 20 years in the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry and worked predominantly on the wildlife side of things.  
So wildlife has been a large component of my work and I've been in the Forest Service and and working right now in USDA NRE, but mostly focus.  
Based on natural resources with wildlife and timber and other aspects, but it has been since I was a child running around in streams and in the forest.  
It has been a large component of, you know, my life and then my career. So I'm really, really pleased to be here and and we have many folks on on the call as well as part of the team but.  
I guess I'd share that as as along with the comments.  
That have already come up this morning or this afternoon.  
I think what is really great about this Council is the collaboration and the work to balance those demands on natural resources and to help us support and maintaining, protecting and enhancing these treasured public lands, wildlife and their habitat.  
So like many of you I and USDA in the Forest Service are committed to those partners.  
Ships for Fish and Wildlife resources and what it takes for all of us together to be supporting, you know, recreation and wildlife habitat here for the American public.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 18:06

OK.

**S** **Shultzabarger, Ellen - FS, DC** 18:09

And as part of being sportsmen, women and conservationists, the continued effort of this group in educating the public, our congressional representatives and and this model is really.

Important in moving this Fish and Wildlife heritage for forward, so it's really happy to be part of this conversation and glad our staff can be part of the team 'cause we value this this partnership and look forward to working together. So as part of the administration's prior.

What we're working to implement is reducing those wildfire risks, expanding active forest management, and all of that.

Moves towards.

Restoring and improving wildlife habitat as well. So we continue to work forward on getting some good projects on the ground and furthering that work.

We have tons of opportunities in front of us to increase that active and proactive management on the landscape and we look forward to expanding the work with your organizations. We're looking at all of those opportunities to work with you, our partners.

Communities, how can we best?

Work together in increasing and managing the the needs of wildlife and improving habitat on and off National Forest lands.

Today, our natural resources director, Steve Lohr, is on, and he'll be speaking a little bit later and and providing some more updates as far as what's going on in the Forest Service. But I think this is a great model.

And look forward to working with all of you and continuing our partnership and looking for those ways that we can further engage and just get some good solid work done on the ground.

So thank you.

Appreciate the time and look forward to the conversation.

**JD** **John Devney** 20:09

Alright. Thank you, Kevin.

Thank you, Jay. Thank you, Ellen.

Appreciate you taking the times out of your schedules to join us today.

And we'll look forward to having lots of good, productive conversations with you all in the months and years to come.

I'd just like to maybe open it up for a question or two.

We're in good shape.

Time wise, is there anybody that has a question they'd like to ask?

Kevin J.

Go ahead, mark.

**MH** **Mark Hennelly** 20:56

Yes, hi Kevin.

It's Mark Henley with California Waterfowl Association and great to hear that you hunt and you have a passion about that. Like we all do here.

So really appreciate it.

I just wanted to flag an issue for you.

We had heard that the bird banding lab under the US Geological Survey had lost some staff as a result of, you know, the early retirements and other related things.

And as you know, you know the bands that are sought after by hunters.

Is.

A really important to our community, the reporting with that helps with waterfowl population monitoring that frankly is, you know, critical to justifying our hunting seasons and bag limits.

So we just want to make sure that the bird Banding Lab is going to be able to continue to do its important work.

So any assistance you can all provide with that.

And make making sure it's fully staffed would be much appreciated. So thank you.

**Kevin Lilly** 22:00

Thank yeah.

Well, thank.

Thank you, mark.

And I know that that is obviously a critical issue and I appreciate your input and you know we are trying to make things better.

And so I can assure you that we will look into, you know.

This particular issue.

I don't know exactly everybody to call on in this big building because I've only been here about six weeks, but I can assure you that there are plenty of people around me who do.

So we'll take your comments quite seriously, Sir.

Thank you.

**MH** **Mark Hennelly** 22:35

Appreciate it.

**JD** **John Devney** 22:37

Any other questions or comments from the group?

Just to follow up on Mark's comment, Kevin, if you go back and watch Mr. Nezvik's hearing in the in the Senate Environment, Public Works Committee, you'll know that that the question similar along the same lines as Mark, was asked by Senator John Bozeman from the Great.

State of Arkansas.

Obviously, Arkansas has a huge stake in making sure.

We're making good and right minded decisions about waterfall management, waterfall conservation.

And it was.

It was pretty wonderful for all of us in the waterfall hunting community to hear how directly and how frankly Mr. Nesvik handled that line of questioning about the critical role, the service and managing and monitoring duck populations.

So just just to follow up on Mark's comment, but appreciate it, Mark.

Jeff Crane, I see you've got your hand up.

**JC** **Jeff Crane** 23:47

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm Jeff Crane, President and CEO of the Congressional Sportsman's Foundation here in Washington.

I had the honor of being the chair of the previous iteration of this Council under the first.

President Trump's first term, as in his last administration, and I certainly hope that the folks on the call and Department of Interior and Department of AG are looking at

chartering this again.

And continuing the legacy of this Council that was started under President George W Bush in 2005.

But I did just want to flag one thing.

That was a recommendation from this Council from just over a year ago where we were concerned about the Department of Interior not having criteria for the open and less closed language.

For federal public lands.

Primarily, is it related to shooting ranges and that is something that groups on, like the Congressional Sports and Foundation and others on this call will worked on with Congress.

It was contained in the Dingell Act, which was signed into law by President Trump in about 2017.

I'm not positive about the time, but basically.

That that requirement was to close the minimum amount of an area necessary.

To achieve whatever the the results were as opposed as opposed to these huge closures and you know the the public lands and in particular in the West are are really paramount for hunting, fishing, recreational shooting. They belong to the American people.

And this was underscored when the BLM previously sought to ban recreational shooting within the entirety of the Bears.

There's National Monument and after 99% of the snoring Desert National Monument were closed to recreational shooting.

It was successful in protesting the Bears ears. The Sonoran Desert still remains closed to recreational shooting, and just as a priority for from this group.

You know, concerns recreational shooting, hunting and fishing is to look at criteria, transparency in terms of why things are being shot and again reminding the statutory requirements under the Dengue Act to keep.

Those areas open to the most extent possible, and when closures are required to keep them at a minimum.

So that's more of a comment than a question, but thank you, Mr. Chairman.

 **John Devney** 26:45

Thanks Jeff.

Any other comments land. See your hand up.

**LM** **Land Tawney, Montana** 26:54

Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for you all joining us today.

Thank you for your service.

It was great to hear kind of your backgrounds and your dedication and your connection. I would say to the outdoors and the public lands and public waters in particular.

My name is LAN Tawney here in Missoula, Mt.

It's a little bit cooler probably than there in DC and I'm the Co chair of American hunters and anglers.

My comment I guess will be just thinking.

About the last couple decades and the funding for our public land agencies.

And really, our funding for our public land agencies, they've been underfunded and understaffed.

Now we're going into a situation this summer where there's even more pressure, I would say on the folks that are still on the ground managing. And so as I my comment would be, as we look towards the next budget in particular thinking about robust funding for our public.

Land agencies and the again these agencies, I think you know they're the on the front lines of conservation and they've been woefully underfunded. And what?

Last, you know budget that's proposed.

There's even more cuts, obviously you're aware of the cuts that happen within Doge, and then also with folks are retiring or taking the fork in the road. And so I just urge you to think about how we continue to keep up this legacy that we have in this.

Country and really support those that are on the ground and that is by making sure they have the money and making sure they have the resources to actually manage these wildlife that we all care about.

So thank you.

**JD** **John Devney** 28:20

Thank you, Land.

Ed Arnett..

**EA** **Ed Arnett** 28:31

Mr. Chairman, and good afternoon everyone.

I'm Ed Arnett, the chief executive officer of the Wildlife Society.

For those that don't know us, we consider us the trade Association of wildlife professionals and I wanted to build a little off Mark's comment as well as lands in support of our wildlife professionals.

That's what we do.

We publish science that's conducted by a lot of our wildlife professionals.

We hold annual conferences training workshops.

All the various things to keep our our wildlife professionals up to speed on the latest technology science and we put a lot of effort into early career professionals and our students and just want to put a plug in for those wildlife professionals. We don't have our system of.

Wildlife Conservation period. Without a baseline of sound science and professionals out there doing the work, conducting the science, conducting habitat management, all of these things that are fundamental.

To our system of conservation.

So just echoing off some other things and Mark mentioned the bird banning lab.

We've obviously very supportive of that, but there's a whole system of government science that's now been under scrutiny and of course some early retirements and stuff and just need to throw a plug in for.

The science centers.

The cooperative research units through US Geological Survey, but also for Ellen the Forest and Range Experiment station. We tend to forget about those folks.

And there are a lot of scientists that do critical work on understanding forest and range ecosystems and how habitat management and various other things affect wildlife and fisheries populations for that matter.

So just to plug in for the science that underpins all this and the professionals that are both acting today and will be in the future as our students.

So thank you very much.

Really appreciate everybody being here and good to see everybody on the committee and and in the room there.

**JD** John Devney 30:28

Thank you, Ed. Land and Ed, could I ask you to lower your hands?

Because you'll confuse the heck out of the chair.



Perfect. Thank you.

Joel Webster.

**JW** **Joel Webster** 30:42

Yeah. Thanks John.

Good afternoon.

I'm Joel Webster.

I'm the chief conservation officer at the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.

I just want to start off by saying thank you.

And I really appreciate you all bringing us together today. And just for your attention and interest and issues affecting hunters and anglers and there's over 40 million hunters and anglers in America.

And it's a way of life.

It's important for our economy and.

You're all sort of entrusted with.

Responsibility to make sure that you know those the resources that support those activities continue into the future.

So thank you.

I also just want to offer.

You know my help and our help and and helping you all succeed.

You know, I think we can get some wins together on wildlife and access and want to offer our help and and working with you to do that.

I also think we can help you work through some stick. Some of the stickier issues that you have to navigate.

And you know what?

There's issues that sort of have that intersection with our community.

They're a little bit challenging. You know, I think this body can work together to develop recommendations that sort of help you navigate through those to do what you need to do in a way that can have the support of our community.

So thanks again and appreciate the opportunity to be here today.

**JD** **John Devney** 32:04

Thank you, Joel.

Any other questions or comments for Kevin J or Ellen?

All right.

Again, echoing everybody's sentiment, Kevin J and Allen sincerely appreciate your interest in this body.

And our work and and as Joel and others pointed out, we're sincerely interested.

In you know, arriving at good outcomes, working with all you folks in any way, we can be of service. You know, please feel free to call on us.

**Kevin Lilly** 32:43

Thank you, John. Thank you.

**JD** **John Devney** 32:47

With that, we will move into the next segment of the agenda.

Which is to review the H, the HWC CS, previous recommendations and identification of critical Wildlife Conservation issues.

You know, we can do this in a number of ways, but I'd like the members of the Council.

Not necessarily specifically, but perhaps.

Led by those folks that led the subcommittee process of the Council over the last couple years to maybe share.

With our with Kevin Jay and Alan and their staff, maybe some noteworthy, you know, progress or forward movement, maybe identify some of those places where we didn't make it much progress as we'd like to or maybe some ideas. Is this Charter or this Council's reconstituted?

Under the new administration, on some issues to prioritize moving forward.

So I'm I'm just gonna sort of do an open invitation for folks to identify some of those comments.

Or questions.

While we have these good folks with us.

So to hear from your best experience over the last few years of being on the Council.

Mr. crane.

**JC** **Jeff Crane** 34:23

I think I kind of jumped the gun because that was a formal recommendation from the Council that was generated out of the hunting and and shooting subcommittee, which I chair and again just restating.

The the ongoing issue which is.

As potential closures are considered or envisioned that there's still no no transparent criteria as to.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 34:51  
OK.

**JC** **Jeff Crane** 34:52

To what steps are taken as those decisions are made and reminding?

The administration, obviously this was directed at the previous administration that.

The that the Dingell lack does statutorily require that it's the minimum amount necessary, and that was not, in our opinion, applied in that proper fashion.

So I see that as something that from our subcommittee.

It's still an ongoing issue and just flagging it and and hopefully have the opportunity to address that at appropriate time.

Thank you.

**JD** **John Devney** 35:33

Thank you now.

And Jeff, you just want to speak to the context before pre Dingal act?

Cuz this has been a Jeff for everybody's benefit has more institutional knowledge of the Council than almost, I think anyone here been involved in lots of councils, but this has been sort of a persistent issue going back to your very early time on the Council, correct, Jeff?

**JC** **Jeff Crane** 36:05

Correct. And and that is that is accurately stated in terms of being a persistent issue. Whether it is forced through litigation.

Where outside parties are suing whichever department of the Interior or some mostly department of the Interior struggling to remember. If that's the case against the Forest Service and Department of AG. But.

Just trying to.

Look at and and its particular, primarily around dispersed recreational shooting, and without taking the entire afternoon on a history and things that have steps that have been taken.

It is just something that.

The federal public lands with the safety considerations as a backdrop on on, on shooting and recognizing there clearly areas where where people should not be shooting.

For safety reasons, or if there are some sort of cultural or otherwise.

Important things that do not want to be damaged by by mistake but it, but again, it's just that it seems that that pendulum swings from one side to the other in terms of what we are as a community of tutors are allowed to go on to the.

Federal public lands and then not and Sonoran Desert in particular.

Has been a A1 that is flip flop back and forth.

So yeah, I don't.

Again, there's a long history here. I think there's a quite a bit of record that Doug Hobbs over the years has been able to from the various councils would could be able to pull off just to show that this persistent issue is has been something that we really. Would like just some some sort of directions of the recreational shooters.

In particular.

Would know that they are still going to be able to to go and enjoy their public lands, our public lands responsibly.

And and safely. So I don't know if I answered that John or not, but it is a long standing issue.

**JD** **John Devney** 38:18

Yep, Yep.

Yeah. Perfect.

Thank you, Jeff. Joel.

**JW** **Joel Webster** 38:27

Sure. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

So Joel Webster again.

I led the Public Lands Subcommittee as part of the FACA, and we also work pretty closely with the Recreational Shooting Subcommittee on some of these issues where there's sort of some crossover, there's a number of things.

That we've worked on over the past couple of years and I'll highlight a couple of them.

First, recreational access.

You know the.

The the full, you know, through the subcommittee process has developed several sort of recommendations on expanding, enhancing recreational access and appreciate the words earlier in support of that.

I'll I'll start just with there's been some bills passed in in recent years that are really aimed at opening recreational access. One of them is a map land act that passed in 2022.

Blakemore Congressman Moore from Utah.

And Senator Risch from Idaho sponsors that bill and what it does is it really helps, helps to make sure that recreational access information is available through smartphone applications.

You know the way that the world recreates has changed and people use technology. And that bill was really aimed at that.

I know there's also the Explore Act that also has some additional stuff in there that is really important.

So just really appreciate.

You're all you know, support for that work.

Work and I know the secretaries, you know, very focused on technology and and really appreciate that. We also want to build on.

What Mr. Crane said about the section 4103 open, unless closed language in the Dingell Act. I do want to point out too, just for our friends at the Forest Service.

That there is some specific language in there about emergency exceptions, basically that that that provision in the Dingell Act lays out the process.

Process for temporary closures and permanent closures for shooting and hunting and fishing.

And there's also a clause in there for emergency closures, and there's been some cases in region six of the Forest Service where there's been some indefinite closures for really large landscapes, falling wildfire that we understand why there'd need to be some temporary closures, but some of them.

Have been prolonged for years and they're over large landscapes which has really impacted people's ability to to recreate trying to flag that for you.

Also, I just want to point out Section 4 and O five in the Dingell Act, which is focusing on establishing access to areas that have been closed or or lack access and really helps the agencies identify priorities for opening and expanding recreational access.

And then finally.

I just want to note Secretary Order 3362, which was created under the first Trump administration, by then Secretary Ryan Zinke, which created a partnership between the federal government and the Department of the Interior.

And the state wildlife agencies on big game Migration, corridor research and habitat enhancement and improvement.

That work is our community, loves that stuff.

It's super important for maintaining wildlife abundance.

It helps us prioritize how to deploy limited resources to have the biggest bang for our buck.

And we'd love to partner with you all on on continuing that work moving forward. I'll stop there. Thank you.

**JD** **John Devney** 41:51

Thank you, Joel. Doctor tidball.

**KT** **Keith G. Tidball** 41:57

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, distinguished guests and administrators. Very, very happy to see you all here and and glad you were able to share this time with us, particularly want to raise a couple of points that have happened in, in the areas that I have some oversight of as a subcommittee and so forth.

But first, by way of introduction, I'm from Cornell University's Department of Natural Resources.

I'm a social scientist.

There I work on two main portfolios there.

One is veterans and military families and outdoor recreation.

Specifically, hunting and fishing as therapeutic and as health bringing and the 2nd portfolio is R3 hunting and angling. Recruitment, retention, reactivation and social acceptance of hunting.

So the the hat I wear as a member of the Council is around the veterans and military families and the the veteran service organizations and and I do want to thank Secretary Lilly for your YOUR service you mentioned.

One of the things that's come up here in in lieu of talking about, you know, sort of. Handouts for veterans, which the state agencies and I think federal agencies are have had plenty of conversation around in the past, is rather more about an opportunity to explore a triple win. And I and I appreciated Joel's comment earlier about trying to

help with some wins so.

The win really is around exploring venison donation systems on a state by state basis for addressing military families.

Food demands, which has been had been popping up on an installation.

By installation basis, especially opportunities to partner across federal and state agencies in proximity to military installations.

So this activity would not only overlap with hunting recruitment and retention efforts in proximity to installations, but obviously would also be dealing with some of those food issues in those communities, especially among the younger enlisted and so forth and their families, as well as recruitment and retention efforts.

And and deer management in in proximity to those installations.

There's a lot of opportunities among the states with.

There are venison donation apparatus. I think there would be some excellent opportunities for partnership across federal agencies to include the agencies assembled here as well as Department of Defense.

So that's one area that we've talked about hadn't made as much progress as we would have liked in the last iteration of this Council.

I think there's a lot of low hanging fruit there, a lot of opportunity there to to make some headway in that space going forward. The second area and this is the subcommittee that I chair, which is public outreach in R3.

Again, recruitment.

Reactivation and retention of hunters.

We continue to push hard on the the value of better understanding the food motivations and and social acceptance of hunting and and its value in R3.

So food really matters.

Survey after survey done by various organizations over the last two decades really indicate that when when we're talking about food and its relationship to hunting, public acceptances is the best it can be.

And yet we have struggled, especially in the last.

Few years where we push really hard on this to actually get the nutritional data analysis done on a species by species basis of the the very animals, the game that we pursue and want to eat, we don't have the nutritional information in most cases on that and it.

A.

It there's a there's an obvious and and pretty straightforward pathway to

collaboration. I think between USDA and the Department of Interior, in order to get that done. And in fact, as part of our committee work, one of the charges was to. Develop a sort of a white paper.

Paper with which would basically be a road map for doing that and that has been done and and is in peer review now and expect to be published soon.

So I wanted you all to be aware of that as an opportunity for R3 as well as not only recruiting and retaining new hunters, but also just working hard on the on the area of social acceptance of hunting among the non hunting public. So those two areas. Are are the areas I wanted to report on.

I appreciate your time and I'll yield back to the chair.

Thank you for that opportunity to share those thoughts.

**JD** **John Devney** 45:56

Thank you, doctor Tidball.

**Kevin Lilly** 45:57

Hey, Mr. Chairman, this is Kevin. Lily.

I wonder if I could comment.

**JD** **John Devney** 46:02

Absolutely.

**HD** **Kevin Lilly** 46:03

Yeah. So.

Professor Tidball.

I just want to first of all thank you for bringing that issue and I know that it is an issue and I know that in the past I have been very saddened to see that some of our young soldiers, especially our young enlisted, have to go on food.

Stamps.

In the past and the opportunity to.

To provide game venison to our soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen is, I think, an extraordinary and honorable thing that I frankly think most hunters in America would love to do right if they knew more about that, I got to tell you, I've hunted all my life. And I.

Never even heard of that.



And so that's one thing. Also as it relates to game.

Boy, we a lot of game at my house and I'll personally invite you over.

For some back strap and duck poppers that I think will light you on fire 'cause, we put a lot of jalapenos in them in Texas. But anyway I want to thank you for bringing that topic up and that's something that the director and I were just kind.

Of whispering to each other that we'd like to look into further.

So thanks.

**KT** **Keith G. Tidball** 47:14

Yes, Sir.

Thank you.

**JD** **John Devney** 47:16

And and just Doctor Tidball is.

Sort of understated gentleman, but he will be an incredible resource for you folks as you move ahead.

We're not going to do open calls for nominations today, but Doctor Tidball's done really wonderful work in this space.

On the previous two councils and would be a wonderful resource for you. I can't think of anyone better.

So Mr. Tawni.

**LM** **Land Tawney, Montana** 47:50

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I had the great pleasure of chairing the Wildlife Health Subcommittee.

I see a couple of the members of that committee with us today. Joel Webster, who's already talked today. Also Simon Roosevelt. Kathleen Falk. We have some ex officios.

Chris Parrish, who's with the non-lead partnership. We had folks from the National Shooting Sports Foundation with Larry King and also Mitch Butler.

And we're going to hear from Cynthia later, kind of an update on.

The the modern ammunition, I would say.

Non-lead pilot program within the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

I just wanna give a little context to kind of where we are and I'm so pleased that you guys are carrying forward that pilot program we look at.

This is not necessarily a compromise. Is a path forward and I think Jeff brought it up

earlier is like between administrations.

There's sometimes there's this pendulum that goes back and forth, and it's really hard for folks on the ground.

I think both managers, but also the public, to understand what those changes are. And so we started looking at kind of just the lead and wildlife issues and how that was affecting access potentially on US Fish and Wildlife service areas. In particular. It was really the Nexus and the kind of the impetus for us to come up with a pilot program.

Which we, you know, we're going to again hear from Cynthia, but we're really excited about and I think that you know for us, again, it's about providing an opportunity and choice for folks, not dictating to them what they shall and shall not do.

And So what this pilot program was really about providing opportunities for folks to try out new ammunition and then to have those opportunities on the US Fish and Wildlife Service lands.

And so loved working with the subcommittee, with the LDX officials that were involved there, both from, I would say, an administrative point of view, but also from the outside like I talked about Chris Parish and folks from National Shooting Sports Foundation.

But we'd love to see that going forward because we feel like it's a path forward that can stand the test of time.

Versus this pendulum that goes back and forth.

And so, thank you for looking at that program and we look forward to hearing from Cynthia later.

**JD** **John Devney** 49:51

Thanks land just to offer one observation, under the chair's prerogative. Kevin, you'll appreciate this because you mentioned Mallard or duck poppers. So that means guys like you and I haven't spent a lot of time thinking about non-toxic shots since about 1990.

And again, the credit to land in the work of the subcommittee to find a way past a consensus way through this really thorny, difficult issue that has resulted in litigation and drains on Fish and Wildlife service resources. And we think charts really durable path forward.

One of the other recommendations that Lands Group made that I think is important for you all to be aware of is one of the real needs to address this issue in a more

universal and substantive way is to work across the government with ATF to deal with the.

Sporting purpose exemption, which was very specifically identified by the industry.

As one of the structural impediments to developing new.

Contacts alternative. So just to buttress lands thoughts there and just flag the sporting purpose exemption is a real priority, but thanks to land for all the work you did on that for bringing it up, Michael.

**MC** **Michael Crowder** 51:24

I chaired the Private Land Subcommittee and I just want to start off by thanking you, John.

You've done a really nice job of chairing this, this committee and you know, kudos for for good work there, putting good meetings together.

But I had a great group here. I want to thank all them for all attending all the meetings.

They were all very well attended and good feedback.

At a very high level, not getting in too deep.

Every meeting we had DC updates of what's going on on the hill.

What's going on in FarmVille?

I are a infrastructure discussion, so just kind of keeping the committee updated on kind of the private lands part of of what's going on the hill. We did get a migratory bird Resurgence initiative letter to the secretaries in 2023 supporting that initiative. And we still support that initiative.

We got a letter out for no, no net loss of of wetlands to both of the secretaries and and administrations have made that pledge of no net loss of wetlands in the past, and we will continue to work with this administration and all future administrations to try to.

Keep that goal of no net loss of of wetlands. We had discussions on VPA hip.

Engaging mid and.

Larger forest land owners and naka North American Waterfowl Conservation Act came up quite a bit in our discussion.

So it seems like we were kind of waterfowl focused, but we were kind of waterfowl focused on that and at times and that's my inherent bias. And I will tell you Kevin, if I have.

Tried to perfect the the duck Popper and I've got a couple of 1000 in and.

If you want to try that sometime, you get to Washington state, you let me know.  
We'll we'll compete on a duck Popper contest.

**Kevin Lilly** 53:32

It would be. It would be my pleasure, Sir.

**MC** **Michael Crowder** 53:32

So.

Yeah. Yeah, so.

You can see my background there.

It's in the waterfowl world here, so.

**Kevin Lilly** 53:44

And I like your flags.

**MC** **Michael Crowder** 53:44

That's the highest level.

Yeah.

Pretty proud of the background there, but just very high level.

John, we had a good discussions and I think that I'll leave it at that. And if there's any questions, we can go any further, but thank.

Thank my group for their time.

**JD** **John Devney** 54:03

Thank you, Michael.

Lauren.

**LO** **Lauren K. OShea** 54:08

Thank you. And and thank you to our guests for being here.

It's great to get to know all of you and a little bit about your background and we just really appreciate your time and look forward to working with you.

So I'm Lauren Ward O'Shea.

I'm a consultant.

I have a law degree and APHD in forestry, a pretty deadly combination.

So what I do is I mainly work with private land owners focused on collaborative

conservation.

So I was really excited to hear each of you use those words when you're introducing yourself at the beginning, I think collaboration is something that we can.

Across all of the organizations represented here, and especially on private lands, and I was on Michael's committee said.

We did some great work there.

It's fun to hear it all summarized like that, so I work with private land owners, particularly on on working lands and especially forest land owners. So really trying to find those collaborative solutions that help reduce risk while supporting conservation goals and for my pH. DI Actually it was.

Social science based as well.

And I surveyed private land owners.

Without the Endangered Species Act and how it impacts the decisions that they're making on their land, do they want to help these species recover or are they trying to make habitat worse so that they don't have to face potential regulatory risk down the road?

Put some numbers behind that and then really spend a lot of the rest of my career trying to get people to stop suing each other and start collaborating and coming up with ways to reach our common goals.

So a couple of things I just wanted to build upon.

One is something that we did work on during the past couple of years.

On our subcommittee and that really is just trying to make it easy for land owners to engage in voluntary conservation practices so that we can expand the impact of works that's happening across the landscape.

And really, we're trying to focus on, you know, not getting too deep into the farm bill. But anyway that the administration from a standpoint where you're administering programs or regulatory structures through these agencies.

That we can, you know, make that easier for land owners.

To do voluntarily without taking on that burden of additional risk.

Just really happy to be of service and advancing some of those conversations.

We've talked about, you know, the just a lot of different ways that we can kind of get that support out to land owners in a way that helps them get that conservation on the ground. And then another area that I did want to bring up that I see.

Is sort of emerging and becoming more and more critical.

Is wood markets and I know that Ellen probably knows a lot about this as well.

Especially since she is with the Forest Service and also works with wildlife, but forest land owners need strong markets in order to continue to plant trees, keep their forests as forests and manage them as healthy and resilient forests.

That can be a home to all the wildlife that we love to hunt and endangered and rare species as well.

And when we don't have those markets, that natural incentive to continue that cycle of sustainability is called into question.

And right now the the really critical thing that's happening, particularly for wildlife, is the markets for small diameter wood are just withering away and small diameter wood. That's when we're going in and we're doing an early thinning. We're opening things up so we can prevent pests and disease.

It's also the exact treatment that a lot of our our species that we love to hunt.

Really depend upon and so when land owners don't have a market for that wood to go into, they don't have an incentive to go in there.

Do those sittings.

And then we again, we have the risk of increase wildfire and everything else that goes along with that as well. But one of the labs research labs that Ed did not

mention because it's a little bit off of his radar, but it is related directly to wildlife Ed.

Is the wood innovations and wood products lab that has really kind of dwindled away in terms of its support and funding? And if we can really put some science behind?

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 57:51

Uh.

**LO** **Lauren K. OShea** 58:00

New products that can be coming out of of those small diameter thinnings.

Then I think that we can come up with new markets that are really going to incentivize land owners to keep those lands healthy so that we can keep hunting on private lands as well as public lands.

So I just wanted to flag that as another emerging issue that I'd like to kind of see us look at moving forward.

And thank you again to everyone here. Really appreciate it.

**JD** **John Devney** 58:26

Thank you, Lauren.

Appreciate the feedback, Ellen. Yes.

**S** **Shultzabarger, Ellen - FS, DC** 58:33

Can I respond to some of what I felt like if we're calling out wood and and and forestry that for sure?

**JD** **John Devney** 58:35

Absolutely.

**S** **Shultzabarger, Ellen - FS, DC** 58:40

So you're you're you are exactly right with everything you outlined, Lauren, and a lot of our work and what we've been focused on over the past 12 years, but months is how do we help land owners and you know the mills and.

And and communities be able to have a market.

And and what do we?

How do we best work together to build that in within those communities?

Because you're right, it's very hard to manage for wildlife and it's hard to manage your forest if you can't afford it.

And so how we are all ears and would love to partner and talk further about how we can do that.

And I mean, that's Steve's ever you'll hear from Steve later that Steve's everyday.

That's most of our most most of our everyday.

The Wood Products lab, so for sure we would love to continue that conversation.

And and see how we can make it easier for land owners and many to get some good work on the ground.

So thank you.

**LO** **Lauren K. OShea** 59:39

Thanks, Ellen. And I knew you'd be right on that too. So thank you.

**JD** **John Devney** 59:39

Thank you, Allen.

All right.

Just recognizing that this is a federal Advisory Council.

And as a number of folks mentioned in their opening comments, we too serve the American public.

And as part of that process, we have a dedicated public comment session as part of every one of these meetings.

And I'm going to ask Doug to

Introduce.

Jean, who is our first guest that would like to have a few moments of our time this afternoon. I will also point out that by focus regulations.

Guests from the outside have 4 minutes of time to make their point and to the council, and so with that, Doug, I'd invite you to have Jean join us.

Join us.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 1:00:36

John, before we get started, just the assistant secretary had a meeting at 3:00.

So he had to head there.

But he he's expressed his appreciation for the invitation and the ability to address the group.

I just wanted to let folks know that that he had to run to a meeting.

**JD** **John Devney** 1:00:54

Thank you, Doug.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 1:00:55

Yeah, so John said.

4 minutes for each speaker during the public comment session.

So, Jean, if you're on the line, go ahead and unmute your mic.

And provide your comments. Thank you.

**JD** **John Devney** 1:01:25

Jean, are you with us?

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 1:01:25

Umm.

John, why don't we go to Lauren McCain and then we'll revisit Gene before we end the session.



**JD John Devney** 1:01:38

Perfect.

Yep. Thank you, Doug.

Lauren McCain, who's representing the Animal Welfare Institute. Good afternoon, Lauren.

**LM Lauren McCain** 1:01:50

Good afternoon.

Thank you for listening to my comments and I'm going to be very brief, maybe 3045 seconds.

Really, I just wanted to thank you for supporting efforts to reduce the use of lead ammunition hunting.

I have no doubt that most of you are familiar with the science on the health impacts to humans and wildlife from spent a shot and bullets and.

Anyway.

I just wanted to say that we urge the Council to continue to promote actions that successfully decrease the use of lead ammunitions on federal public lands.

We support the lead free ammunition voluntary incentive pilot program that was implemented across 7 wildlife refuges last fall and we look forward to hearing the update about this program.

And I just hope that.

This program or similar will keep will continue to grow and expand.

The refuges and Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service lands, and that's all I have to say. Thank you.

**JD John Devney** 1:03:04

All right.

Thank you very much for your comments, Lauren.

Much appreciated.

**HD Hobbs, Doug** 1:03:09

John, I would note too for everybody that.

Lauren submitted written comments and that has been posted to the Council.

Website is available there.

The the longer letter is available, so we have that on hand as well.

**JD** **John Devney** 1:03:24

All right.

Thank you.

Thank you, Doug.

Thank you, Lauren.

Doug, do we have Jean with us?

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 1:03:34

Just looking to see if.

I.

Not saying Jane at this point, John, so maybe we should go to Brenda next and then we'll check in with Jean.

**JD** **John Devney** 1:03:47

Yeah. Yep. Perfect.

Next, I'll introduce Brenda Almer, who is the executive director of the North Dakota Corn Growers Association.

I had the occasion to meet Brenda.

On a rare well, maybe not so rare snowy day in April here in North Dakota. So welcome, Brenda.

**BE** **Brenda Elmer** 1:04:09

Chairman Devney, thank you.

It's good to see you again, and members of the Council and Fish and Wildlife team and distinguished guests.

Yes, my name is Brenda Elmer.

I'm executive director of the North Dakota Corn Growers Association.

We're statewide organization that advocates for our states.

More than 13,000 corn producers, and we appreciate the opportunity to hear us today.

As someone who represents egg producers in the heartland that work.

The land every single day and want to preserve it for the next generation. Last week I

was fortunate to be a part of a small group of agriculture leaders from North Dakota who met in person in Washington.

DC with acting assistant Secretary Lilly and some of his team at the Department of Interior. So we wanted to thank them for their time and attention and respect shown to our group.

We felt, heard and understood.

And the six farmers among us who spoke about the other farmers.

Throughout our Prairie pothole state, many of them are struggling to produce the food, feed and fuel in a prolonged period of high input costs and continued low commodity prices. And even as of late, oftentimes are producing egg goods much below the cost of production.

You can only sustain that for so long.

The hundreds of perpetual US Fish and Wildlife wetlands easements.

That were established in North Dakota and our surrounding Prairie pothole states pre 1970s is what I wanted to just bring to your attention.

Usually they were with land owners from generations ago.

They're becoming a significant additional burden for our farmers, who inherited them, and This is why initially they were not delineated and they've only recently become mapped decades after their.

Installation and it's a bit of an understatement, at least from our perspective, to say that serious disputes have ensued.

Based on the disconnect between the original intention and the actual implementation and it's eroded trust between the farmers and the agency, and even among some conservation groups in the wetland easement program here as it stands.

Has almost become a symbol of federal government overreach and what started decades ago as a simple agreements for small payments, has turned into a permanent restrictions that land owners can't challenge.

Renegotiate buyout even if the land or the environment around them has changed.

And a majority of those farmers involved don't feel like partners anymore.

You can see that you see, you know, fewer and fewer of those stickers.

With conservation groups on the trucks around the state.

Farmers now see some of those indications as a red flag for intrusion and not necessarily conservation.

Farmers consider themselves here in North Dakota as stewards of the land they want

to protect the land in the water so that they can pass their farm operations down to their children and grandchildren the next generations.

But when there's little or no flexibility, recourse or Ave. for buyout, even when the original terms were vague or misunderstood, that erodes the trust and the cooperation that goes with it.

And we did let the assistant secretary know that we are looking at some legislative relief, but we're also open to administrative improvements at the federal agency level.

And so how do we fix this?

First, from our perspective, we need dialogue, not just directives.

We'd like to bring farmers into the room before decisions are made, not just after the rules are handed down. And then we want to rebuild a culture of mutual respect.

Conservation groups can be allies, but starts with listening from both sides.

And hunting access could be restored if those land owners felt more respected.

Not simply there to be used and regulated.

So if groups like Fish and Wildlife and waterfowl groups come to the table as our partners rather than enforcers, the dynamic could change literally overnight.

So we just wanted to ask you as members of the Council, and thank you for your your public service and and being a liaison to help us be that bridge.

I note there's a couple of you that have agriculture perspectives.

Or AG adjacent background.

I appreciate that.

We want to help reconnect the people managing the wildlife with the people managing the land around them, and we can achieve the true conservation without agriculture. Also at the table.

So it's time to rebuild that relationship and starting with conversation.

John, you know how to get a hold of me.

I welcome any one of you to, you know, call a follow up questions.

Or you know, if you want to come out to our great state of North Dakota, we would welcome welcome that as well.

So any questions for me?

Thank you.

**EA** Ed Arnett 1:09:56

It was a little late on my hand, chairman Devney.

Could I go ahead, John?

OK.

You're muted, Brenda.

I'm just kinda curious.

What's the biggest hurdle that you see and are these permanent as well as term easements or is it a combination of both?

Or is it really the the permanent easements that are creating the biggest issues? And how would you see us helping in in this?

**BE** **Brenda Elmer** 1:10:25

Their permanent easements.

**EA** **Ed Arnett** 1:10:27

OK.

**BE** **Brenda Elmer** 1:10:29

And like I said.

You know it.

They were usually from generations ago.

**EA** **Ed Arnett** 1:10:35

Yeah.

**BE** **Brenda Elmer** 1:10:37

And pennies on the dollar at the time when a lot of farmers were going under, you know, in those years. And so the current land operators and owners haven't seen the benefit.

Benefit. We did have a delegation of farmers that came out to DC and met with a number of congressional offices and and demonstrated and they were just a few case studies.

But we're trying to get more data.

But but we think that it would, it would follow through on these case studies in that like seriously significantly diminished value of of the farmland that have those easement on them, because fellow farmers just all the restrictions.

New setbacks on them.

They just want no nothing to do with it.

And so we have seen that routinely when when egland changes hands.

And if you look, if you just Google Prairie potholes states, you will see North Dakota has.

You know, probably a higher concentration or majority of them and we don't have a lot of drain tiling here in the state like you see in South Dakota, southern Minnesota.

**EA** **Ed Arnett** 1:11:44

Yeah.

**BE** **Brenda Elmer** 1:11:53

We we can't.

We can't manage the water on those lands or adjacent to those lands.

It seems like we're either too wet or too dry here.

The delineation mapping that occurred decades later.

Here is where the rub occurs.

And John and I and others had a nice conversation and education for me, talking about what is the ideal habitat for waterfowl. And I learned much from him.

But for the farmers, you know, they looked those slews that have ducks and cattails, and I'm visually as an optic and those weren't mapped as part of the wetlands in a lot of tracks of land.

It was, yeah.

**JD** **John Devney** 1:12:39

Brenda, I gotta be.

I gotta be careful here because invited guests we had 4 minutes and I'm. I'm getting in getting deep into the agenda and I'll be honest. You brought something to the Council that I think is important, which is why I allowed Ed to ask a question which is not.

**BE** **Brenda Elmer** 1:12:43

Yes, I'm sorry.

Yes.

**JD** **John Devney** 1:12:57

Sort of standard practice, but I also need to be respectful to the time on our agenda. I'll give Joel just a very.

Quick opportunity to ask a question then, Brent.

I'm sorry we have to move on just because of the constraints of our agenda. I hope you understand.

**BE** **Brenda Elmer** 1:13:15

Understandable. Thank you, Sir.

**JD** **John Devney** 1:13:16

You bye.

Joel, did you want to continue with your question?

**JW** **Joel Webster** 1:13:23

Yeah, sure. Just real quick.

So my family has a farm in North Dakota that has fish and wildlife service conservation easements, and my dad sees it as part of his legacy.

And it's something we support.

With that said, I'm curious what percentage of those easements were established prior to 1970.

**JD** **John Devney** 1:13:44

A bunch, I think.

**JW** **Joel Webster** 1:13:46

OK.

**JD** **John Devney** 1:13:47

Probably better than 65%.

Joel would be my off the cuff response to that.

**JW** **Joel Webster** 1:13:52

OK.

Thank you.

**JD John Devney** 1:13:53

Yeah. Thank you for making the time, Brenda.  
Doug, did we have Jean join?

**HD Hobbs, Doug** 1:14:04

Looking now, I don't.  
See Jean on the list here. But final call Jean if you're on the in the meeting, go ahead and make your comments.

**JD John Devney** 1:14:20

Hearing none. I'm gonna move it over to Cynthia.  
Good afternoon, Cynthia.

**Cynthia Martinez** 1:14:26

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair.  
Thank you for having us.  
It's a pleasure to be in front of this committee again and thank you for all your service during the time that you have been on here. As we looked at the agenda and the things that were on here and looking, we have three different items that we would.  
Like to update the Council on I've got a subject matter expert, so we'll give the presentations on that. The 1st is going to be Doctor Sam Gibbs, our wildlife veterinarian for the National Wildlife Refuge.  
Some in the fish market service to give an update on chronic wasting disease. Certainly the topic that has been very important to this committee, as well as new world screw worm, which is headed our way with that doctor.

**GS Gibbs, Samantha** 1:15:15

Thank you and thank you for having me today.  
I wanted to start out with chronic wasting disease and then we'll discuss a disease that hasn't reached us yet or a parasite that hasn't reached us yet or I should say again.  
Which is new world screw worm. Next slide, please.  
So the distribution of chronic wasting disease detections in North America continues



to expand.

Despite efforts to control it, chronic wasting disease has a negative population level impact on deer and elk herds, and when it occurs, the agencies must alter their management of wild served populations in the area, which may include harvest regulations and may end up diverting resources away from other.

Functions.

To disease surveillance.

Due to the unknown human health impacts of chronic wasting disease, we don't have any evidence yet that it does affect humans. But there's some research along those lines. Hunters may become less willing to hunt in areas where CWD occurs. So the service strives to assist estates and tribes when requested when able.

In responding to chronic wasting disease primarily through surveillance, diagnostic supports and training for sample collection and submission to the laboratories, the Americas Conservation Enhancement Act of 2020 and the ACE Reauthorization Act in 2024, direct the secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to establish within the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

The chronic wasting disease.

Task force.

Section 104 of the ACE Act details the responsibilities of the task force, specifically, the task force will develop recommendations, best practices, and an Interstate action plan to ensure consistent management and research, collaborate to share the research and coordination efforts with foreign governments.

The Act also directs the secretaries and any other applicable federal agency to set up cooperative agreements.

States to fund necessary actions under the Interstate Action Plan for conic wasting disease.

Unfortunately, no funding has been appropriated to date for Americans Conservation Enhancement Act. Next slide, please.

So I'll move on to new World screwarm.

This is a parasitic fly whose larvae infest wounds of warm blooded animals, causing severe tissue damage and death if left untreated.

It was eradicated from the United States in the 1960s and we were able to push it all the way to Panama.

But unfortunately it began working its way back up in 2023 from Panama.

And you can see in the map there that there is movement from star number one up

through.

The Gray area into Mexico.

And currently we are seeing it or we have detected it now 370 miles South of the US border.

So it is getting closer and closer.

Severe and widespread impacts to domestic animal, wildlife and human health causing injury and death occur unless screw worm is left untreated. I mean, unless it is treated sorry.

There's potential for severe conservation impacts, for example.

We had an outbreak in 2016 and 2017 in the Kedar population in the Florida Keys.

And we lost 15% of that population to screw worm.

Also, historically in the United States, in the Southern states that were impacted by screw worm prior to the 1960s, up to 80% of whitetail deer fawn mortality occurred in bad years due to screw worm infestations of the umbilicus.

So that's just to give you an example of the potential impacts we may see to.

Wildlife populations.

The USDA is the lead for the overall response to screw worm and is focused primarily on the agricultural impacts. While CDC is leading.

The approach to human health impacts by screw worm and the US Fish and Wildlife Service's leading the DOI response to screw worm from the technical side and focusing primarily on trust species and impacts to DOI lands. We're working very closely with the state.

And federal agencies, we're providing recognition reporting and specimen collection training and in collaboration with USDA Avis Wildlife Services, Resending collection kits for these crew arm larvae to DOI lands along the border.

We're also developing communication products for visitors and hunters and identifying at risk species and developing contingency plans for prevention and response if necessary.

Siri. So I'd like to repeat the new world screw worm is not yet present in the United States.

However, all eyes are on the northernmost detection at the moment in Veracruz.

And that is it for me.

Thank you.

Thank you, Doctor Gibbs.

Mr. Chair, I didn't know if you wanted to entertain a question or two. If people have them or if you'd like us to move on.

We have two more presentations.

**JD** **John Devney** 1:21:19

Yeah, let's do them at the end if that'd be OK, Cynthia.

**HD** **Cynthia Martinez** 1:21:24

It certainly works for us.

I'd like to thank Land Tawney one for 10. This next one up of our lead free voluntary incentive program. But I'd also like to extend our thanks and appreciation to the subcommittee and to the Committee for helping us put this together.

I mean, this truly was elaborative cooperative effort and I think that the success of it certainly is founded in the approach that we took to establishing that you.

While you're with Christian Myers, who worked with you all this the last go around, Christian is right in the middle of trying to get our annual hunt fish update going.

So we have enlisted the assistance of Nick Kaczor here in the National Archives system.

Who will give this presentation? Nat to take it away?

**KN** **Kaczor, Nick** 1:22:15

Thanks, Cynthia.

Yeah. First off, my name is Nick Kaczor.

Fun little trivia fact for all the hunters and biologists in the group.

Anybody knows Polish katsur actually means Drake?

In the.

In the Polish language, so pretty, pretty happy to have that my my name. So yeah, Cynthia said. Currently the national coordinator for the Services lead Free Voluntary Incentive program.

And super excited to give you all an update.

Today and also help lead this effort going forward.

Big thanks again to Land Tawney and Cynthia for providing us a little bit of update on this. You guys really talked and set me up for a good presentation today.

So as you know, this entire program was born out of ongoing discussions around

lead free hunting with key partners, state agencies, hunter organizations, industries. Etc. Primarily looking at a non regulatory approach and that is going to.

That'd be something that is a key going forward is a non regulatory voluntary approach standing up. This pilot has been across disciplinary effort across the entire Fish and Wildlife Service Agency ranging from the Office of Communications.

Our partnership Office, natural resource professionals, our human dimensions, social scientists and visitor services professionals, along with refuge managers.

Park Rangers out in the field talking day-to-day with.

Hunters so really appreciate that.

Next slide please, Kristen.

Don't want to belabor this slide too much, but as you all know, lead ammunition has been a controversial, tricky issue for hunters, anglers, wildlife agencies, land managers, conservation groups, us in the entire room for many, many years.

There are important concerns on both sides of the issue and in recent years, though, however, voluntary incentives have emerged as a promising.

Path.

And to address this.

Issue allowing providing hunters with the education knowledge about the issue and allowing them to make their own decisions moving forward.

And so now I'm going to move forward a little bit into the program. Next slide please.

So is from a recommendation out of this group.

It was really to focus on partnership work and so we enlisted the help of the North American non LED partnership and I want to recognize a couple of folks that are on this call today.

The founders, Chris Parish from the Peregrine Fund and Leland Brown from the Oregon Zoo and also Adam Miller as well.

They've been extremely helpful.

Powerful and helping us relay this knowledge and communicating the stuff forward to hunters.

Give them a lot of credit.

On this work, they've started many, many years ago, enlisting states from Arizona, Utah, Oregon, Alaska across the West.

Incorporating in the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife agencies and now really moving strongly into the Northeast, I was speaking with Adam yesterday and

within the last three months we've had three new states sign on to the partnership in Vermont, Maine and New Jersey.

So some pretty exciting stuff there. In addition, many wildlife federations, sportsman groups, industry groups.

Companies have signed on to the partnership and the point of emphasis is working across those lines to truly impact hunters and provide them with opportunities, education and the choice on lead free alternatives.

Next slide please.

These next series of slides are going to focus on the 2024 pilot Project Insights. We feel this is a textbook example of an adaptive challenge that requires an adaptive management approach.

Ultimately, we hope to move towards a hunter centered design.

Through continually informed, thoughtful evaluation surveys, hunter feedback being one of the key pieces of that and guiding our our our program.

I'm going forward.

We're also incorporating valued feedback from our refuge managers.

Like I said, those those managers and Park Rangers on the ground listening to them to hear what they're hearing from those from those hunters.

And this approach will allow us to maintain a ground truth understanding of where hunters are on the issue and guide opportunities to adapt our approach in real time.

Next slide please.

So now starting to get into some numbers.

So the 202425 project pilot program has just wrapped up. Last year, we were able to host 3 educational workshops or I should say the the non LED partnership was able to delete those through some funding from various sources.

Those occurred at Blackwater, Canaan Valley and Wallkill refuges in the northeast.

We enlisted 7 National Wildlife refuges.

Refugees across the country to participate in the voluntary incentive program.

That is where we offered up to \$50 per box for center fire ammunition and up to \$25 a box for shotgun shells. Max of two boxes, a hunter so 100 could get anywhere from 25 to \$100 reimbursement on that provided that they.

Were truly hunting on a National Wildlife Refuge.

Through that effort, we had 129 hunters submit for reimbursements across those seven National Wildlife refuges.

You'll notice on the chart here that a a vast majority of those were at those refuges

where we hosted educational workshops and that is OK and it's not a signal that the three of the four other refuges were unsuccessful.

It just shows that communication and outreach is key and an area for improvement going forward.

Another thing to point out here too is like William L Finley in Oregon.

Well, it only shows 4 hunters there.

It's a relatively small elk hunt, with only 15 hunters, so just keep that in mind.

We we reached about 30% of the hunters at that refuge.

Following those refuge hunts.

Our human dimensions and social scientists shop, particularly. Andrew Doncarlos LED a Hunter participant survey.

Following those hunts, like I said.

And we had an over 60% response rate on our participants survey, which is really high, likely due to the nature of the incentive program. But it shows that we had a positive experience with hunters going forward.

Now I'll get into some of the results from the participation survey.

Next slide please.

So as part of the survey, we asked hunters some of the barriers to going lead free and these survey results mirror a lot of the other national surveys, such as the the North American LED partner lead free partnership is conducted in DJ case in prior years and it.

Replicated a lot of those same survey trends.

With the top three being availability cost and performance is the top three barriers to going lead free.

And so the incentive program really looked at addressing the cost barrier, but it in addition also helping hunters understand availability and performance through educational workshops and providing them the tools and resources they need to make their own decision moving forward on hunts. Next slide, please.

Some of the encouraging results that we got from this is that hunters are aware of this issue.

65% of hunters believe that going lead free protects wildlife from poisoning, and about 55% of hunters recognize that lead free provides an overall benefit to the overall environment.

So that's good that hunters are aware of this.

It's just providing them with information tools to make their own choices.

To find that ammunition on the stores, next slide please.

Overall satisfaction with this program and the pilot year was very high.

We had about 80% suggest that they were slightly, moderately or extremely satisfied with their overall hunt experience. So really good numbers there, almost 90% of them were satisfied with the overall incentive amount. And in addition, once folks are on our websites, the availability of information and.

Navigating the website was.

Relatively easy for them.

And they were satisfied.

So that's good information there. The one lower bar on the right turn around time while it was initially lower, we feel we've addressed this issue already when we first stood up this program, we had some initial delays and issuing prepaid debit cards and they were only being ISS.

Every three weeks we had the partnership work with their processor.

We reduced that processing time.

Down from three weeks to one week.

And so we're hopeful in future years that that.

Put that bar on the right hand side will be elevated up next to the other ones.

Next slide.

So overall, what did we learn?

Hunters are more likely use lead free with an incentive program, right?

Who wouldn't want free ammo?

Over 80% indicated that they were likely or very likely to use lead free on future hunts if an incentive program was available.

With close to 60% indicating that they're choosing to switch to a modern hunting technology.

AKA Copper lead free alternatives.

Even without an incentive program.

And so those are encouraging results there and they do mirror a lot of the other survey results we're seeing nationwide as well.

The incentive program removes a key barrier for hunters, gives them a chance to try new ammo, and hopefully start a pattern of ammo choice for future hunts. Next slide, please.

So broad survey results the incentive program showed also showed that it builds trust between the Fish and Wildlife Service and the hunting community.

The level of trust on lead and wildlife health was high at a greater than 67% for federal and state agencies.

Hunters saw positive benefits of going lead free, including for both wildlife and habitats.

The incentive program helped help address the cost barrier identified by hunters. And it has ripple effects, what with hunters more likely to go light free in the in the future, which could influence others. Some of the areas of improvement that we identified in the pilot year that we're going to be carrying forward in the future years is carefully ident.

A set of refuge selection criteria to expand the partnership to broaden our reach. Not every refuge and hunt is a good fit and we need to be strategic and how we're enrolling this program out in future years and locations.

We also know that we need to implement the incentive programs earlier in the year. This is very key, and while we may be a little late in the 8 ball this year, it's something that we are really going to be working strongly on and for the hunting seasons of fall 26, as we all know, hunters draw tags as early as April.

And may I know that's when I drew my big game tags and that's what I'm starting to look for my ammunition of choice at that time.

And so we need to be communicating with hunters as early as.

April and May and getting in front of them when they're drawing those tags potentially and providing them with the information as soon as possible, allowing them to have the time to test different ammo, work through different availability concerns, etcetera moving forward.

We also recognize that providing local guidance for purchasing lead free ammunition is important and having a lead free or a third party like the the lead free partnership is crucial.

So huge props again to the non LED partners.

Yep, Adam.

Chris Leland have been tremendous in helping us with this message.

And in addition, focusing our communication and outreach around practical considerations and delivering communications effectively.

Like I said earlier, we also know that the information cannot always come from us as the federal government and that leveraging our partners to help us relay that information is going to be crucial going forward to use high visibility message delivery.



Going forward.

Next slide.

So ultimately, we would like to take this program and grow with our national partner in the in the lead free partnership.

To drive hunter patterns so that lead free choice is a hunter norm.

This includes expanding to additional refuges and hunts, and even potentially to other federal lands as we move forward in future years. We want to support the effort and hunter education programs we do recognize.

This comes at a cost and we'll be researching and pursuing additional funding opportunities with the ultimate hope.

To normalize the use of lead free ammunition as a new.

Modern head hunting technology by providing hunters with the education opportunities and choice to make their own decision moving forward.

So like I said, we're advocating for a larger roll out.

In future years, we will be increasing hopefully the number of refuges we have in this upcoming hunting season. But like I said, with a stronger roll out in the fall of 2026.

That is all I have.

I'll turn it back over to Chief Martinez.

**Cynthia Martinez** 1:36:44

I appreciate that and I know that many on the screen realize this, but we developed this program together with you.

We finalized it and we implemented it in a very short amount of time, less than a year.

Living parts. But we were able to pull that off and to do the survey at the end so that we can have some data and how to how to adapt this program and to move forward certainly committed to moving it forward again this year.

Our next update is going to be on the current 2526 hunt fish annual update that was out for public review and we're working to finalize it.

So turn over to Debbie, Deborah, Vision Chief for now resources and conservation planning to give us that update.

**Debbie DeVore**

Thanks.

I will provide one more update on the numbers for the incentive program.

We've run these numbers once a week, so that number was 129 in the slide. It's actually up to 138,000, so just every week I look for that report on Mondays. So you see what else we have.

So thanks to you all.

Thanks to your being here and I'm glad to be able to to actually make it to one of these Council meetings. I'm Debbie DeVore.

I lead the division of natural resources and conservation planning for the refuge system, Karen headquarters.

So this is an update that Cynthia mentioned.

Typically you will have seen Christian.

Buyers in the past maybe came here again in other years, so I'm glad to be able to come and give this today.

So this is a a bit of a routine update for you for you all, but.

Go to the next slide.

Well, give you give you the update. You don't necessarily need to try and convince this group of the value of recreational hunting and fishing, however.

These numbers are are nice to see, and they're they're telling.

The the bubble to the right is our specific information for 2024 refuge National Wildlife Refuge system visits 8.3 million phishing 2.6 million hunting.

So we we understand the value of our public access and we work very diligently and hard to maximize that in alignment with our state partners as well.

So diving in into the next slide just a little bit more, we do have additional information from our visitor surveys that we conduct.

Each year on a certain number of refuges.

Around the country.

Are this data indicates that our recovery are local, with about half of them living and in the local area where they're coming out to the refuge to recreate, including hunting and fishing?

They make multiple trips to those refuges a year, and they're really highly satisfied, right?

You can see those percentages of more than 90% say that that going to the refuge was the primary purpose of their trip.

And they plan to come back.

So so we have some really good data. I think we're five years into our visitor surveys and we'll keep those going into the future. So learn more.

The next slide.

All right, this is the wheel.

I don't know if we've showed you the wheel before.

This is our wheel. We've pulled the wheel of life and it might be a little hard to see, but the inner circle of the the light and blue colors are the months of the calendar year.

The larger, very outer circle where you can see at the bottom right is the start of each annual update cycle.

That outer ring.

You can see how many months that covers.

It's typically somewhere between 8:00 to 9:00 months of the count of a year is where.

Our refuges and fish hatcheries are working with their partners locally to identify the opportunities to potentially open or expand hunting.

On a refuge or a national fish catchery that's a significant amount of time.

The cycle ultimately takes about 14 months, which is why we have the middle ring, which is where in January of each year our the annual update. Those packages that the regions in the field are producing for proposals to open and expand and or expand that comes to gets.

To us here in headquarters, then we start that middle ring, which is the review process that goes.

First, we'll get get us to the public comment period.

And then when we address the public comments that will get us to the final update, which is typically by September 1st, we're a little ahead of schedule this year, but that that is to ensure that we can have those new opportunities on our refuges and fish hatcheries avail.

For those small hunting seasons, so it does take 14 months, and right now we're really.

We're embarking.

We're kind of in two cycles.

We're finishing up the 2526 cycle and we're having the conversations to start giving the guidance to the field for the 26th, 27th.

Sorry.

So what you and particularly those of you who may have seen the proposed update in the public forum, public comment on we have proposed 42, not new opportunities on 87,000 acres of refuge system and the chasuary layout.

That those opportunities will occur at 17 stations, that's 16 in National Wildlife refuges and one national fish battery.

And throughout the process of developing the annual updates, the field and regions are always looking for areas where we can better align with the States. We can remove regulatory burden and we can streamline.

We can avoid duplication, confusion, etc.

So this year we have 22 of those regulations that we are removing.

I'll note two things of note this year for our expansions are actually openings is the newest unit of the National Wildlife Refuge system and Southern Maryland Woods will open to hunting for the first time.

And we also have a national fish hatchery that'll be opening.

For phishing for the first time.

So that's that's pretty exciting.

As a public comment period, you can see the metrics here began in middle of May.

We did go out for a 45 day comment period.

We typically would like to go for 60 days this year. We added when this administration came in, in January, we actually went back to the to the regions and we we ended up adding additional opportunities that we wanted to that we wanted to propose.

So we we shortened that public comment.

Just a little bit so that we could still come out on time with our final.

Regulation by the fall ending season, we did end up with 194 public comments.

168 of those were for or from some dedicated waterfowl hunters who wanted to show their support, so we really appreciate that.

Service came in as a a letter campaign, but we we certainly appreciate the the interest.

Support. So thank you for that. We had 26 what we call unique comments that we end up sort of bending and we provide responses in the Federal Register to those, they were actually split equally.

13 were supportive and 13 were maybe less a little less supportive.

Which is typical. We do see on all sides of the conversation around access and hunting.

Machine the 194 comments we were anticipating about that number, that's kind of what we've seen the last few years.

So what we have in the past seen?

Upwards of 10s of thousands of comments, so this was a like your comment review, which we will take.

So the next slide is is actually just my last slide.

We are on target, as I said, to publish just a few days ahead of the what would be actually September 2nd since the 1st is on Labor Day.

We don't anticipate any changes. We're not.

Seeing that we need to make any changes from the purple.

And then in the final Federal Register, notice there are 13 topics that we decided that were warranted.

They were substantive and that we needed to create those responses to comments to make sure that we're adequately addressing what we've heard from the public.

So I think that's it.

**JD** **John Devney** 1:46:24

Alright, thank you, Debbie.

**Debbie DeVore** 1:46:25

Thank you.

**JD** **John Devney** 1:46:31

Thank you, Nick, and thank you, Samantha.

I see Kathleen's got her hand up.

Kathleen, do you have a question for friends at the service?

**KF** **Kathleen Falk** 1:46:39

John. Yeah. Thank you, John.

Thank you.

My question and 1st thanks to Cynthia too for what she and all her staff do every day to protect our resources.

My questions for Nick on the survey.

It looked from the slides, Nick that the two questions you surveyed the participants on were what they thought the impact.

Of not of not using lead had on wildlife and then.

And what was the impact that more generically on the environment?

My question for you is, did you ask them what their view was on lead in the in the

the wildlife that they were shooting and then feeding to their families, you know, for hunters of whitetail deer? Like, we have a million in Wisconsin. The food supplies issue in.

Feeding your kids.

Lead contaminated venison is significant.

And that would be an incredibly important incentive to ask these hunters about in the survey.

So was that asked of them and and if so, what was the response there?

**KN** **Kaczor, Nick** 1:47:52

Yeah. Appreciate the question very much.

I'm going to.

I'll I'll double check on that.

I'm not the one who actually LED those those survey questions.

So I want to dive into that a little bit deeper, but to my knowledge that question was not addressed.

We primarily focused on the impacts of lead on both just the the wildlife and the environmental aspects of it and did not go down too much down the road of the human health impacts from lead.

**KF** **Kathleen Falk** 1:48:21

Yeah, if you could send us copies of the survey, that would be helpful.

Now we could provide some comments to you for the future surveys.

**KN** **Kaczor, Nick** 1:48:28

We will do that. Thank you.

**JD** **John Devney** 1:48:31

Mark.

**MH** **Mark Hennelly** 1:48:35

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yeah. My comments for Cynthia.

I wanted to thank you for helping to get the Klamath refuges flooded up this spring. There was a lot of water there, much more so than in previous years, and from what

I've heard from our folks up there, the local waterfowl production was excellent and there's right now just 10s of thousands, if not more, of ducks molting out on those refuges, Toole Lake.

And and lower Klamath.

As you know, you know over the last five years we've had some significant waterfowl die offs from avian Botulism during the summer which?

Effects all ducks, but I mean particularly it affects our local duck production, our population including our local mallards.

The Botulism season, you know, runs through September while the temperatures are really hot up there.

I just urge you to the extent possible to maintain, you know, the water deliveries to keep those wetland water levels up full during that period so that we can make sure that any Botulism is kept to a minimum.

So again, thank you for all you do and the refuges up there definitely look much better than they have in many years.

**Cynthia Martinez** 1:49:56

Thank you, mark.

There is a major restoration project that we were able to implement up there and I actually made it there in June.

So it was really great to see it on the ground.

So thank you for those remarks.

**MH** **Mark Hennelly** 1:50:08

Great.

**JD** **John Devney** 1:50:09

Thank you, mark. Thank you, Cynthia.

Mr. Ron Reagan.

**RR** **Ron Regan** 1:50:15

Thanks John.

I'm actually dialing in from my car.

I had to leave the meeting to head to an optometry appointment, so I'll be brief.

So that I can be safe as well. But I just wanted to remind the Group of a certain

amount of fear and trepidation that I think the States went into this conversation about.

When this Council was first getting its legs under it, the lead issue.

Is one that can engender a a fair amount of passion and and concern across a broad spectrum of interests, and I want to reiterate how the association of Fish and Wildlife agencies was very appreciative of the collegial nature of discussing the the subject lands leadership in particular, and.

The collaborative nature of the voluntary program.

Nick, I really appreciated your presentation.

Thought it was was well done.

So thanks everyone and and John, thank you for your leadership of the Council during this period of time.

**JD** **John Devney** 1:51:25

Thank you, Ron.

Mr. tawni.

**LM** **Land Tawney, Montana** 1:51:29

Mr. Chairman, thank you, Nick.

Awesome presentation.

Thank you so much for giving us all those kind of that feedback that you received.

I think one thing I would reiterate, we kind of called it like you.

You said that there was like the places where there was the hands on demonstrations, which I know my friend Chris Parrish is really interested in and because it helps people actually understand what's going on, we called that the Cadillac version and we called the version that didn't have.

That kind of the Yugo version, and maybe that's dating some of us, but for the Yugo. But.

I was glad to see that participation in Oregon in particular, and I guess I would have you think about enough to answer this today.

Maybe that was because it was such a small cohort and you were able to talk to them in a different way through that kind of you go version.

But how do we expand this pilot into having it be more robust? I would say going forward and then I I appreciate you know, I think that, you know, Cynthia's assessment, which we all were aware of it, this happened in a very fast time frame



and so.

I'm very impressed.

About what happened, but also look forward to kind of the future when we got more of a runway.

So thank you. And we look forward to more Cadillac and we'll see how Hugo does on the on the road.

**Cynthia Martinez** 1:52:41

Thanks land.

**JD** **John Devney** 1:52:42

Thanks land John Devore.

**JD** **Jon DeVore** 1:52:47

I'm sorry I inadvertently raised my hand.

My T Rex fingers hit the wrong button.

I couldn't figure out how to UN hit the button.

**JD** **John Devney** 1:52:57

I'm Joel Webster.

**JW** **Joel Webster** 1:53:01

Yeah. Thank you.

Just one additional comment on the incentive based lead approach.

I I just want to sort of stress the importance of this from a an additional perspective.

There's been quite an effort in a number of states, especially from legislatures, to try and regulate the use of lead and ammunition and.

Sort of showing some leadership using this voluntary approach in an alternative way.

To try and reduce lead use in a way that doesn't regulate people I think helps us steer away from future regulatory efforts.

And so I just think it's important for folks to, I guess I ask that you just think a little bit about how this pilot, the fisherman's service helps us prevent future regulatory efforts elsewhere. And it's just as you think about, you know where this goes in the

future?

Just appreciate your consideration to that.

**JD** **John Devney** 1:53:57

Thanks Joel.

Any other? I'm not seeing any other hands raised.

Are there any other questions for Cynthia's team?

Hearing none, I just want to let my fellow Council members know that I've got a son that has to be at camp an hour and a half away at 4:30, which means.

I've got a hard stop here.

I just again like to thank all the members of the Council.

All the alternates, all the subcommittee chairs for the incredible work you've done over the last couple years.

Some of which has been highlighted today.

By appreciation for Cynthia and her team, Fish and Wildlife Service leadership, interior leadership and USDA leadership.

And again.

You know, as you're reconstituting the Charter on this, I think you've gotten a sense of the good work this Council has done and what kind of opportunities are there.

Should you choose to call on them?

And with that, again, my thanks and I am going to head or hand the baton over to Ed Arnett, who is standing in for Colin O'Mara who was the elected vice chair.

To introduce our next speaker.

Speaker and adjourn the meeting.

Thank you all.

**Cynthia Martinez** 1:55:30

Thanks John.

**LM** **Land Tawney, Montana** 1:55:33

Thanks John.

**EA** **Ed Arnett** 1:55:33

Thank you, John.

**KF Kathleen Falk** 1:55:36

Thanks John.

**EA Ed Arnett** 1:55:36

Doug, I'm having a mild crisis here having this handed over to me two seconds ago. I do not have the agenda open.

Could you either help me introduce the individual or?

**HD Hobbs, Doug** 1:55:48

Sure.

**EA Ed Arnett** 1:55:50

Send John caught me off guard. Sorry.

**HD Hobbs, Doug** 1:55:50

Steve.

Lohr, who's the director of natural resources over at the US Forest Service, is teed up to provide an update to the Council on issues over at our sister agency, Department of Agriculture.

So Steve, if you're with us floor is yours.

**L Lohr, Steven - FS, DC** 1:56:10

I'm with you and I appreciate the time.

I know everybody's busy and I'll be brevity is my specialty, so I will.

I will proceed quickly here.

So again, my name is Steve Lohr.

Or I am the director of natural resources for the Forest Service. So I cover the timber program, the wildlife program and the range program on wildlife biologist by training.

And it's a pleasure to be in this committee meeting today.

So I'm just going to run through a couple things right now that are priorities for the Forest Service right now. As we speak, Forest Service is always involved in active forest management, however.

With the current administration, it's provided us a very.

Unique opportunity with the executive order 14225, the immediate expansion of American timber production so.

You know timber, timber harvesting and active forest management is an excellent habitat management tool and the agency we harvested less than five than less than .5% of forested Forest Service lands annually. And at the same time, we're burning up over 2,000,000 acres at a SW.

Every year.

And so there is a need to protect our habitat through active forest management.

The we we as a result of that executive order we developed the national active Forest management strategy which creates a pathway for our agency to deliver 4 billion board feet by 2028, which is the most we would have harvested since the early 1990s.

As a part of that, we're working on streamlining our compliance activities.

And so Jay, we are happy that your folks are working diligently with us on ESA streamlining work, which is really going to make a difference for us, getting projects on the ground.

So I look forward to working with you and your staff on that.

Our secretary, Brooke Rollins, also issued a secretarial memo that created emergency situation determination on 112 million acres of Forest Service lands in light of our wildfire situation.

And this really makes it easier for us to streamline project planning and get work done on the ground, which is what we really need to be doing right now.

We're relying very heavily on our partners, including our state partners. We're developing shared, modified shared stewardship agreements with many states.

Montana was a recent one where we are working with them and Montana's going to be managing actively 200,000 acres of Forest Service lands in that state, so.

That's going to be very, very helpful for us to get more work done.

We are also working with our hunting conservation partners.

We've given hundreds of \$1,000,000 to these groups in partnership agreements over the last couple years and we're going to continue that work because they're doing excellent habitat management work on the ground.

I think Lauren mentioned earlier about wood innovations and the importance of that.

We recognize the challenges of small diameter.

We are working our best on that.

Last week, we announced another round of \$80 million in wood innovation grants

and we will continue to do that that work.

As well as working with our industry partners to try to have them be successful moving forward.

No, we we recognize that under the previous administration there was a there was a secretarial memo issued on migration corridors and and work in migration corridors. I am actively working with NRE now to look into that.

I know that is a that's a priority for this group, and we recognize that as a priority. We're going to continue that work.

Access Hunter access is very important to us. The new Executive Order Executive Order 14313 establish the the established by the President.

The Make America beautiful again Commission under that that really focuses on access and we will continue to work with a lot of our hunting conservation partners to work on pursuing additional access.

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has been very big for us on that.

They've helped us with access on a in a number of of very large projects and and they'll continue to do so, met with them today as a matter of fact. So I'll close with that and just say that we are more than happy and excited to engage in.

This body and if there is any follow up questions I'd be happy to take.

**EA** **Ed Arnett** 2:00:31

Thank you very much, Steve.

Really appreciate it.

Apologize, I didn't have it.

My agenda open, but Doug saved me there.

I think I can speak on behalf of the committee that you've got a tremendous amount of expertise here in wildlife and conservation, but specifically some forest management work, Doctor Ward and myself both have worked extensively in forestry, so we stand ready to help in addition to the other.

Partners so.

Questions for Mr. Lohr.

Last call.

**JW** **Joel Webster** 2:01:11

I can't help myself. I'll just say thank you.

For all that, especially just for the continued commitment on the big game migration step, we look forward to continuing to partner with the Forest Service on that.

**EA** **Ed Arnett** 2:01:26

I'll second that having chewed some of that dirt as well.  
That's a great partnership. Other questions?

**LO** **Lauren K. OShea** 2:01:35

I I just have one comment and thank you very much for for your presentation your comments.

It's great to hear the administration working on things that are very important to force land owners across the country and hence all the natural resources that flow off of their lands.

I did just want to highlight one concern that some of the land owners that I work with have is we're all, you know, very supportive of the idea of increasing timber production that's coming off of public land.

But a lot of private land owners are a bit concerned about how that will impact their markets if they're in the same sort of wood basin as some of these public lands, where we're where we're going to be harvesting more timber, which is great.

Hopefully that stimulates more mills to come and things like that, but I'm just hoping and I and I do think that you all have this on the radar, that this rollout will be mindful of those markets for those private forest land owners.

So that we're not.

Flooding those markets and then and then really kind of getting the private land owners the short end of the stick.

If I can use a a forestry joke there.

**L** **Lohr, Steven - FS, DC** 2:02:39

Yeah, thanks for that comment. And we are working very closely with industry partners and the states on all of our active forest management work.

And so we are trying to consider that you know, a lot of where we're going to be increasing our program is where they're extremely robust markets already. And so that should help in that. And we're also being very mindful about markets that have challenges. And so that's we.

Really focusing on some of our hazardous fuels transportation assistance grants, for

example.

And things that are going to make projects viable.

On public or private land.

So we, we do, we do consider those things.

So thanks.

Thanks a ton for that comment.

**LO** **Lauren K. OShea** 2:03:16

That's great to hear. Thank you.

**EA** **Ed Arnett** 2:03:20

Other questions for Steve.

Great. Well, thank you very much, Steve.

We again look forward to working with you and helping you out however we can.

Doug, I think we are at the end of the agenda unless we want to ask the Council Members if there's anything else they'd like to consider.

I don't know that we have a new business section in our meeting.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 2:03:48

I think we just call for a motion to adjourn Ed in a second and we'll be done.

**EA** **Ed Arnett** 2:03:54

Sounds great.

Do I have a motion to adjourn the meeting?

**MC** **Michael Crowder** 2:03:57

Agency.

**KT** **Keith G. Tidball** 2:03:58

With my great thanks and appreciation to all move, we close the meeting, Keith Tidball.

**MC** **Michael Crowder** 2:03:59

As.

**LM** Land Tawney, Montana 2:04:04

I'll second that with that. With with that appreciation as well, lantani.

**EA** Ed Arnett 2:04:05

Thank you.

All right, all in favor.

**JC** Jeff Crane 2:04:15

Aye, aye.

**KT** Keith G. Tidball 2:04:16

Aye.

**EA** Ed Arnett 2:04:16

Right. Ask the chair with a good haircut.

That's specifically for Jay right there.

**HD** Hobbs, Doug 2:04:23

Love it.

**EA** Ed Arnett 2:04:25

OK.

I think we are adjourned, Doug.

Thank you, everybody. Really appreciate you.

**LM** Land Tawney, Montana 2:04:30

Great pleasure.

**HD** Hobbs, Doug 2:04:30

Thank you.

**EA** Ed Arnett 2:04:31

Thank you.



**ML** **Martinez, Lucas** 2:04:32  
Thank you.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 2:04:32  
Thanks, dad.

**SR** **SC Roosevelt** 2:04:32  
Thank you. Thank you, Doug.

**LO** **Lauren K. OShea** 2:04:33  
Thanks everyone.

**EA** **Ed Arnett** 2:04:33  
Yeah.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 2:04:35  
Yeah.

**LM** **Land Tawney, Montana** 2:04:36  
Thanks Doug.

**HD** **Hobbs, Doug** 2:04:38  
Yeah.

**KT** **Keith G. Tidball** 2:04:39  
Thanks a lot, Doug. Take care.

□ **Hobbs, Doug** stopped transcription