

## **Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council**

### **JULY 23, 2025, MEETING MINUTES**

The Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council convened for its Fourth meeting at 2:00 P.M. eastern time on July 23, 2025. The meeting was held virtually via Microsoft Teams. In accordance with the provisions of Public Law 92-463, the meeting was open to the public.

#### **Council members present:**

##### *Chair:*

John Devney

##### *Primary members:*

Colin Beck

Jeff Crane

Michael Crowder

George Dunklin

Dan Forster

Lucas Martinez

Ed Arnett\* (served as primary member in the absence of Collin O'Mara)

Wayne Hubbard\* (served as primary member in the absence of Lydia Parker)

Blake Henning\* (serves as primary member in the absence of Joel Pedersen)

Andrew Schmidt

Jason Sumners

Land Tawney

Keith Tidball

Lauren O'Shea

Joel Webster

##### *\*Alternate member*

##### *Alternate members:*

Kathleen Falk

Mark Hennelly

Simon Roosevelt

##### *Ex Officio*

Ron Regan, Executive Director – Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

## **Welcome, roll call, and meeting overview**

HWCC Chair John Devney

Doug Hobbs, HWCC Designated Federal Officer, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

## **Opening Comments** (*\*see the full comments of public speakers in the meeting transcript for this July 23 meeting located on the HWCC website*)

### Kevin Lilly - Acting Assistant Secretary for Fish & Wildlife & Parks, Department of the Interior

Acting Asst. Sec. Lilly introduced himself to Council members. He indicated that there is a huge agenda to address at DOI and within the Administration. He highlighted that DOI Secretary Burgum is an extraordinary and experienced hunter, and that he is committed to wildlife conservation and wildlife-associated recreational opportunities, especially hunting and fishing. Asst. Sec. Lilly introduced his team in the Office of the Assistant Secretary, including Dr. Jenifer Chatfield, Senior Advisor, Tyler Kellogg and Derek Boland, who are both my special advisors, and they are subject matter experts. The Asst. Sec. indicated that it is a dedicated group. He then highlighted a couple of areas of focus that he indicated fit nicely with the objectives and purpose of this advisory committee. One is to increase access of public lands for recreational opportunities, especially for hunting and fishing. The Department will look to get input into the decision-making process, including through federal advisory committees like the HWCC.

### Justin “J” Shirley - Principal Deputy Director, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Principal Deputy Director Shirley introduced himself to Council members. He is dedicated to service and to natural resource, and the Country, so is appreciative of the opportunity to work at the national level in his new role. The work of the Council is critical to the mission of the Fish and Wildlife Service, so he indicated that he is looking forward to working with the group and getting its input. He also stated that working with partners is critical to accomplishing conservation work in the future.

### Ellen Shultzabarger - Senior Advisor (acting) - Natural Resources and Environment, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Senior Advisor Shultzabarger introduced herself and her professional background. She highlighted the importance of collaboration in balancing the demands related to natural resources and to help support and maintain, protect and enhance public lands, wildlife and their habitat. She indicated that the USDA and the Forest Service are committed to partnerships to conserve fish and wildlife resources and provide recreational opportunities. USDA values its partnership with the HWCC and looks forward to working together.

USDA will continue to work to reduce wildfire risks and expand active forest management. It will also work to restore and improve wildlife habitat. Lastly, it looks forward to working the HWCC and stakeholders to get some good solid work done on the ground.

### Comments from Council members:

Mark Hennelly: Commented that he had heard that the bird banding lab under the US Geological Survey had lost some staff. Community wants to make sure that the bird banding lab is going to be able to continue to do its important work.

Jeff Crane: Stated that he hopes that the Administration will continue to charter a hunting/wildlife conservation-related Federal advisory committee like the HWCC.

Land Tawney: Expressed concern about the possible impacts of reduced funding and staffing on the ability of Federal agencies to undertake and accomplish their conservation missions. He indicated that robust funding in the next budget cycle is important.

Ed Arnett: Expressed support for providing appropriate funding and staffing for Federal management agencies so that they can undertake, and produce needed scientific data to inform wildlife management actions.

Joel Webster: Indicated that the wildlife conservation community can collaborate with Federal agencies to support adequate funding to undertake their missions.

### **Review of HWCC recommendations & identification of critical wildlife conservation issues** (*\*see the full comments of public speakers in the meeting transcript for this July 23 meeting located on the HWCC website*)

Subcommittee Chairs summarized issues and work that their respective members addressed during the 2-year Council session.

#### Hunting and Recreational Shooting: Jeff Crane, Chairman

- Chair Crane referenced the Dingell Act & public lands access and dispersed recreational shooting on public lands as issues that the Council and subcommittee have sought to address.

#### Public Lands Conservation: Joel Webster, Chairman

- Chair Webster highlighted some of the issues that the subcommittee focused on, including: recreational access to public lands; Dingell Act implementation as it relates to opening and/or closing public lands; and implementation of DOI Secretarial Order 3362 which addresses big game migration corridors in the West.

Public engagement / R3: Keith Tidball, Chairman

- Chair Tidball highlighted subcommittee discussions about how to establish venison donation programs for military families as part of R3 outreach efforts, efforts to better understand food motivations and the social acceptance of hunting and its value in R3, and efforts to get the nutritional data analysis done on popular game species.

Wildlife Health: Land Tawney, Chairman

- Chair Tawney highlighted the efforts of the subcommittee and its working group to assist the Fish and Wildlife Service develop and implement its lead-free ammunition incentive program on select National Wildlife Refuges.

Private Lands Conservation: Michael Crowder, Chairman

- Chair Crowder highlighted issues that the subcommittee has focused on, including wetlands conservation issues that support waterfowl populations and engaging forest landowners as it relates to conservation practices.

**Public comment session** (*\*see the full comments of public speakers in the meeting transcript for the July 23 meeting located on the HWCC website*)

Comments from Lauren McCain - Animal Welfare Institute

- Ms. McCain thanked the Council supporting efforts to reduce the use of lead ammunition hunting. She referenced the science on the health impacts to humans and wildlife from spent a shot and bullets, and urged the Council to continue to promote actions that successfully decrease the use of lead ammunitions on federal public lands. She indicated that the Animal Welfare League supports the lead-free ammunition voluntary incentive pilot program that was implemented across 7 wildlife refuges during fall of 2024. She commented that the hope is that the program or something similar will continue to grow and expand on Refuge lands, and lands of the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service.

Comments of Brenda Elmer, Executive Director - North Dakota Corn Growers Association

- Ms. Elmer thanked Acting Assistant Secretary Lilly and his team at DOI for recently meeting with a group North Dakota farmers and representatives of the Corn Growers Association. Ms. Elmer made comments regarding issues some farmers are experiencing because of easements established prior to 1970. She indicated that the Association is looking at avenues for legislative relief or administrative improvements at the federal agency level.

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuge System updates**

Cynthia Martinez, Chief – National Wildlife Refuge System, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, introduced staff to make the following presentations:

#### Chronic Wasting Disease update

Dr. Samantha Gibbs, Wildlife Veterinarian for the National Wildlife Refuge System, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided a detailed update on both the presence and spread of Chronic Wasting Disease within the continental United States, as well as an update on the status of the spread of the screwworm in Central America and Mexico.

#### Update on the National Wildlife Refuge System voluntary lead-free ammunition incentive program

Nick Kaczor, National Coordinator – National Wildlife Refuge System, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, provided a review of the implementation of the Service’s lead-free ammunition program on select National Wildlife Refuges during the 2024-2025 hunting season. He also provided a preview of the program for the 2025-2026 hunting season.

#### Update on the 2025/2026 National Wildlife Refuge System Hunt/Fish Annual Rule

Debbie DeVore, Chief - Division of Natural Resources and Conservation Planning, National Wildlife Refuge System, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, provided an update on the proposed 2025/2026 Refuge hunt/fish rule.

### **Update on U.S. Department of Agriculture issues**

#### Steve Lohr, Natural Resources Director - U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Mr. Lohr introduced himself and the programs he covers in his Natural Resources Director position. He highlighted priorities at the U.S. Forest Service. Active forest management is a priority, in part because of Executive Order 14225, related to the expansion of American timber production. Timber harvesting, as an active forest management practice, is an excellent habitat management tool. The USFA is developing a national active Forest management strategy which streamline compliance activities, including related to the Endangered Species Act. USDA Secretary Rollins also issued a secretarial memo that creates an emergency situation determination on 112 million acres of Forest Service lands in light of our wildfire situation, which makes it easier to streamline project planning and get work done on the ground. The USFA is also working with partners, including our state partners by developing new and modifying existing shared stewardship agreements. We have worked with our hunting conservation partners through partnership agreements over the last couple years to undertake habitat management work on the ground. Implementation of the Secretarial Order on migration corridors will continue and we recognize that as a priority, as does this Council. Lastly, hunter access is a priority for the USFS.

## **ADJOURN**

Motion to adjourn: Keith Tidball

Second: Land Tawney

The motion was approved by unanimous Council vote.

Meeting adjourned

\*\*Meeting minutes certified by HWCC Chair John Devney on Friday, November 21, 2025