

Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council SUMMARY OF APRIL 17, 2023, MEETING

The Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council was convened for its second meeting at 9:00 A.M. on April 17, 2023. The meeting was held in-person at the Stewart Udall Department of the Interior Building in Washington, D.C. In accordance with the provisions of Public Law 92-463, the meeting was open to the public.

Council members present:

Vice Chair:

John Devney

Primary members:

Colin Beck

Ryan Busse

Michael Crowder

George Dunklin

Bethany Erb

Dan Forester

Cole Mannix

Lucas Martinez

Lydia Parker

Joel Pederson

Land Tawney

Keith Tidball

Joel Webster

Roberta Salazar-Henry* (serving in absence of state fish & wildlife management agency primary member)

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

Simon Roosevelt* (served as primary member in the absence of Jeff Crane)

**Alternate member*

Alternate members:

Kathleen Falk

Mark Hennelly

Blake Henning

Wayne Hubbard

Marshal Johnson

Theodore Sedgwick

Ex Officio

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

Welcome and Council member introductions

John Devney, HWCC Vice Chair

Comments from of Tommy Beaudreau, Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior

The Deputy Secretary thanked the Council for its work. He also mentioned the importance of partnerships in implementing the Inflation Reduction Act, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and the Great American Outdoors Act, and acknowledged the briefings the Council will receive during the meeting. Lastly, he stated the DOI looks forward to continuing to work with the Council.

Comments of Robert Bonnie, Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Under Secretary Bonnie made comments about the importance of funding made available through the Inflation Reduction Act, active management of National Forests, fire management, and conservation programs authorized and funded through the Farm Bill, including the Conservation Reserve Program.

Questions to the Under Secretary: Michael Crowder, how can new conservation practices could be established in IRA? Ed Arnett, is USDA coordinating with USGS? Joel Webster, are there potential new pilot wildlife corridor projects that can be put into place?

Meeting overview

Vice Chair John Devney provided a brief overview of agenda.

Public comment session

While there were no requests from the public to make comments to the Council, Vice Chairman Devney opened the floor to any attending members of the public that wanted to make comments. There was no public comment.

Briefings on Departmental/agency implementation of Great American Outdoors Act/Inflation Reduction Act/Bipartisan Infrastructure and Jobs Act

Department of the Interior

Sarah Greenberger, Associate Deputy Secretary

Associate Deputy Secretary Greenberger highlighted the \$2 billion in funds made available through the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. This includes addressing climate change impacts, restoring healthy lands and waters and enhancing community's quality of life through addressing pollution and recreation. There is Also a focus on wildfire, drought and coastal resilience for climate, rivers, wetlands, grasslands and islands and cultural resources.

Greenberger also discussed DOI flagship initiatives including the Arctic Yukon and Appalachia. Lastly, she highlighted DOI efforts to implement the Great American Outdoors Act.

Question to the Associate Deputy Secretary: Keith Tidball, can you further discuss the keystone initiative in the Appalachia region? Marshall Johnson, can you provide detail on bison restoration and thinking on grassland ecosystem restoration? Mark Hennelly raised issues related to water rights on Refuges.

Fish and Wildlife Service

Steve Guertin, Deputy Director (*See the HWCC website to view the PowerPoint presentation delivered by Mr. Guertin)

Guertin highlighted the funds made available to the FWS through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Funding in the amount of \$455 million, over 5 years, will be used for: Klamath Basin Restoration Program, Sagebrush Ecosystem, Delaware River Basin Restoration, Lake Tahoe Restoration, and the National Fish Passage Program. Other Elements included funds for Legacy Pollution, Ecosystem Restoration, Wildfire Mitigation.

The Inflation Reduction Act provided additional funding in the amount of \$250 million for significant climate and conservation projects. Of that, \$125 million will be used to restore National Wildlife Refuges and State wildlife management areas, with a Focus on coastal resilience and climate adaptation via nature-based solutions. Congress provided the Service with \$125 million in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) for recovery planning and implementation for threatened and endangered species. Finally, the Great American Outdoors Act established the National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Act which funded five years of projects at \$95 million per year from 2021 though 2025. An additional \$63.7 million though 2025 is available to fund Maintenance Action Teams.

Questions to Deputy Director Guertin: Joel Webster asked about whether the Service is coordinating the new funding with funding for wildlife management areas. Keith Tidball, any opportunities to address human capital needs? Colin Beck, how are you partnering with Tribes, do you have authorities needed to work with Tribes, and are you utilizing 638 contracting? Roberta Salazar-Henry, how are you working in relation to state wildlife management areas?

Bureau of Land Management

Tomer Hasson, Senior Policy Advisor & Rosemarie Spano, GAOA Program Manager (*See the HWCC website to view the PowerPoint presentations delivered by Mr. Hasson and Ms. Spano)

Mr. Hasson presented an overview of the \$1 billion in funding that has been provided through the Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Hasson highlighted ecosystem restoration efforts including sagebrush habitat restoration, restoration of habitats impacted by wildfire, and Lower Snake River ecosystem restoration.

Question for Mr. Hasson included: Joel Webster, how will BLM sustain long-term efforts to install/maintain exclusionary fencing of wild horses and burros? Ed Arnett, is BLM seeking increased gathers and management of wild horses and burros? Blake Henning asked about increased staff capacity. Joel Pedersen asked what efforts BLM is undertaking to make it easier for non-federal partners to seek program funding. Colin Beck asked about whether BLM with focus more funding in Oregon.

U.S. Forest Service

*Robert Harper, Director - Biological and Physical Resources, Betty Jewett, GAOA Director (Acting), and Bradley Kinder, BIL/IRA Coordinator for the National Forest System Manager (*See the HWCC website to view the PowerPoint presentations delivered by Mr. Kinder and Ms. Jewett)*

Mr. Harper made introductory comments and introduced Mr. Kinder.

Mr. Kinder presented a funding summary related to U.S. Forest Service efforts to implement the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act. The Forest Service is undertaking efforts to implement a Wildfire Crisis Strategy, scale-up reforestation and restore priority watersheds, and improve recreation infrastructure and access. It is also undertaking efforts to conduct business to focus on equity, working with tribes, and establishing Keystone Agreements. Other efforts include: Fire, hazardous fuels reduction projects in 134 out of 250 high-risk western watersheds; Reforest and watersheds, raises amount of available funding for reforestation and provides resources to address reforestation backlog by planting 1 billion trees over 10 years. Recently, the Forest Service announced a \$10 million investment to meet reforestation needs, increase capacity for nurseries and seed orchards, and meet future demands for seedlings; Watersheds, the Watershed Condition Framework establishes a new consistent, comparable, and credible process for improving the health of watersheds on national forests and grasslands. This framework will help focus our efforts in a consistent and accountable manner and facilitate new investments in watershed restoration that will provide economic and environmental benefits to local communities; Recreation, over \$37 million in investments to improve vital recreation infrastructure on national forests and grasslands.

Ms. Jewett presented information about USDA efforts to implement the GAOA. GAOA efforts focused funding on the following areas: Legacy Restoration Fund will help reduce deferred maintenance, address housing shortage, benefit tribes & underserved communities, support Wildfire Crisis Strategy implementation, and aid climate change mitigation and adaptation. LWCF efforts will protect unique and important at-risk natural and cultural resources, strengthen the resilience and biodiversity of public lands, waters, and ecosystems to climate change impacts, and increase access to outdoor recreation, engages strong local partnership support and provide benefits to a broad audience that includes underserved or at-risk communities. Finally, the Forest

Legacy Fund is providing grants to states through a competitive process to conserve forestlands threatened by conversion to non-forest use.

Questions included: Lucas Martinez, related to Justice 40, what are plans to invest in local minority and woman-owned business? George Dunklin, can you provide more information about Keystone agreements? Lauren Ward, have you have considered trying to form a Keystone agreement with any private forest owner group any of those types of organizations at the national level? Lydia Parker, how are you empowering tribes and traditional ecological knowledge to lead that wildfire reduction long-term strategy? Keith Tidball, are you addressing accessibility issues and have you considered a Keystone agreement with a veterans organization? Wayne Hubbard, what is your strategy for getting information about public opportunities to diverse communities? Joel Webster, what is the Forest Service doing to use recreational access dollars in a way that's different?

Briefing on status of current operations of the National Wildlife Refuge System

*Cynthia Martinez, Chief – National Wildlife Refuge System, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Manager (*See the HWCC website to view the PowerPoint presentations delivered by Ms. Martinez)*

Chief Martinez presented a comprehensive overview of current Refuge System operations, including information on current visitation, operations and maintenance funding, the current deferred maintenance backlog, community-centered conservation, the Partners for Fish & Wildlife Program, and efforts undertaken to implement the America the Beautiful Initiative.

Question for Ms. Martinez included: Mark Hennelly, how do hunter groups address a situation where a Refuge Manager is not pursuing new Refuge hunting opportunities?, Wayne Hubbard, what are Refuges doing to make public aware of recreational opportunities?, Lauren Ward, will the Partners for Fish & Wildlife Program be expanded?

Comments of Corey Roegner

Deputy Division Chief – Division of Recreation & Visitor Service, Bureau of Land Management

Mr. Roegner delivered introductory comments.

Introductory briefing on Bureau of Land Management Public Access Issues

Jeff Cartwright, Public Lands Access Program Manager

*Manager (*See the HWCC website to view the PowerPoint presentations delivered by Mr. Cartwright)*

Mr. Cartwright provided information about the BLM New Public Land Access Program. The program aims to increase public access through the acquisition of land and interest in land to support new and improved recreation opportunities and landscape conservation. Components of

the program include the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (LWCF). This is the priority source of funds for use by BLM to gain access to public lands and waters. The Dingell Act Nomination List (DANL) is also a component. BLM is working to identify and prioritize public lands with no or restricted access. Lastly, the BLM is implementing the Modernizing Access to Our Public Land Act (MAPLand Act) as a component of the public lands access program. Through the effort, public facing maps and data of roads and trails which provide access to public lands and waters will be created and provided publicly. Mr. Cartwright also briefly provided information on the public/private lands corner crossing issue, including information on federal, state, and local laws related to the issue.

Questions for Mr. Cartwright included: Lucas Martinez, why do you think BLM had increased success in getting local Dingell Act recreation access project submissions?, Ryan Busse, can you provide a bit more information on BLM's position on the corner crossing issue?, Wayne Hubbard, how does BLM get story our about jobs and careers?, Joel Webster, is there any effort by BLM to identify and prioritize land-locked federal lands for acquisition?

Briefing and status update on on-going implementation of big game migration corridor conservation efforts

Department of the Interior

Sarah Greenberger, Associate Deputy Secretary

Ms. Greenberger indicated that the Biden Administration is still supportive of implementation of the Secretarial Order. She highlighted recent maps released by the USGS and discussed funding available for implementation of corridor projects. Going forward, we were happy to be able to call out migration corridors generally but big game migration, in particular our FY24 budget proposal. I'm sure many of you saw CEQ issued guidance encouraging all of us to continue to push to integrate migration corridors into our policies funding the way that we are purging work. Last, I think many folks probably saw the DOT pilot program that they are beginning to move.

Questions for Ms. Greenberger included: Simon Roosevelt asked about cooperation and collaboration between the Forest Service and Department of agriculture in the BLM and interior on the specific issue. He also asked if there are structural issues that could be addressed to increase cooperation.

Bureau of Land Management

*Frank Quamen, Division Chief - Division of Wildlife, Aquatics, and Environmental Protection Manager (*See the HWCC website to view the PowerPoint presentations delivered by Mr. Quamen)*

Mr. Quamen provided a summary of BLM efforts to implement the Big game migration corridors Secretarial Order. He indicated that BLM is working with the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation to provide project dollars. Through the NFWF collaboration, BLM has: Initially funded three large research projects under direction of DOI with Arizona, Utah, & Oregon state wildlife agencies. BLM has also supported an additional 50 research projects on elk (14), mule deer (45), and pronghorn (24) with partners across ten states. Lastly, Mr. Quamen highlighted the organizations that BLM is partnering with to implement the conservation actions.

Questions for Mr. Quamen included: Joel Webster asked if all of the work and projects highlighted in the presentation done over the last 5 years.

Council Subcommittee report-outs

Hunting & Recreational Shooting

Council and Subcommittee member Dan Forster provided a report on subcommittee activities (on behalf of Subcommittee Chairman Jeff Crane).

Issues identified for Council consideration:

Sunday hunting on Refuge and National Forest lands: We encourage the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to direct the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), to synthesize Sunday hunting opportunities within NWRS units and NFS lands, respectively, to be consistent with the laws and regulations of the states that allow Sunday hunting.

Funding for the FWS Migratory Bird Program: The Subcommittee suggests that the HWCC consider recommending that the FWS request additional annual funding through the Administration budget process to adequately carry out its responsibilities in a timely manner, including scientific research to support migratory bird hunting regulations.

Public input opportunity for hunters related to Refuge hunting programs: The Subcommittee suggests that HWCC consider a recommendation to the FWS that it require Refuge managers who administer a hunt program to annually provide an opportunity for hunters to comment on that program, such as through a public meeting.

The Subcommittee did not ask for Council approval, but will submit recommendation letters for consideration at the next Council meeting.

Wildlife Health (*See the HWCC website for the Subcommittee report.)

- Subcommittee Chairman Land Tawney provided a report on subcommittee activities.

Conservation Funding

Subcommittee Chairman Joel Pedersen provided a report on subcommittee activities.

Issues identified for Council consideration:

Asked the Council to consider a recommendation that DOI & USDA use Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act funding to implement forest health projects.

Motion to approve: Michael Crowder

Second: Joel Webster

- There was subsequent discussion about a example project list that would accompany a recommendation letter. Crowder withdrew his motion.

Motion to approve letter after final Council review: Simon Roosevelt

Second: could not be identified.

The motion was approved by the Council

Public Lands

Subcommittee Chairman Joel Webster provided a report on subcommittee activities.

Webster reported out an issue for Council consideration as a recommendation:

Issues identified for Council consideration:

Recommend that the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service use of funding from Great American Outdoors Act and Inflation Reduction Act to identify and prioritize project opportunities on both the National Wildlife Refuge System and state-owned Wildlife Management Areas identified in collaboration with NGO partners.

Motion to approve: Joel Webster

Second: Michael Crowder

- During subsequent discussion, Colin Beck offered a motion to amend to include language in the recommendation related to 638 contracts with tribes.

Motion to amend: Colin Beck

Second: Lydia Parker

Both the motion to approve the recommendation and motion to amend were approved by vote of the Council.

Private Lands

Subcommittee Chairman Michael Crowder provided an update on subcommittee activities.

Issues identified for Council consideration:

The Subcommittee requested that the Council consider sending recommendations related to: utilization of Inflation Reduction Act funding for conservation purposes and issues related to wetlands/marginal lands conservation; expanding the Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry Mitigation Activities List to include critical conservation practices in addition to those that directly reduce and mitigate greenhouse emissions; recommend adopting the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations definition on climate-smart agriculture; and recommend ways to improve wetland determinations.

Motion to approve: Michael Crowder

Second: Roberta Salazar-Henry

- During subsequent discussion, Lauren Ward offered a suggestion that language be added to the recommendation that would help address the issue of smaller forest landowners not being eligible for some programs.

Motion to amend: Lauren Ward

Second: could not be identified

Both the motion to approve the recommendation and motion to amend were approved by vote of the Council.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn: George Dunklin

Second: Ed Arnett

Motion approved and the meeting adjourned at approximately 4:45 P.M.

These minutes will be formally considered by the Council at its next meeting, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes of that meeting.