



# 2018 ANNUAL REPORT

ADVANCING COLLABORATIVE, PROACTIVE, SCIENCE-BASED FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ACROSS THE WEST

Since 1922, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) has worked to advance conservation in western North America.

We take pride in the many partnerships we've forged to conserve our treasured fish and wildlife resources.

Working together with private landowners, conservation partners and state and federal agencies, we have been the catalyst in developing collaborative landscape-scale conservation efforts across the West. These voluntary efforts are making a difference in the health of iconic western species like wild sheep, native trout, lesser prairie-chicken and greater sage-grouse.

As we reflect on the work that's been accomplished in 2018, we are grateful to all who work together to achieve our shared goals. The many WAFWA committees and work groups are the pistons that make the WAFWA engine run, and their accomplishments are detailed in this 2018 report.

As WAFWA positions itself to move into its second century, its member agencies are confident that by working together, the fish and wildlife resources of the West and the habitat upon which they depend will be conserved and enhanced for generations to come.

#### Brad Loveless

Secretary, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism  
President, WAFWA

## MILESTONES

January 2018

### CWD Recommendations Approved by WAFWA Directors



During WAFWA's annual mid-winter meeting, state wildlife agency directors and conservation professionals from across the West attended a number of work sessions and committee meetings, including discussions centered around chronic wasting disease (CWD). CWD is an infectious disease that affects cervid species, including mule deer and elk. It represents a significant threat to the future health of free-ranging cervid resources in western North America. **The Wildlife Health Committee and the Mule Deer Working Group collaborated on a set of adaptive management recommendations that are now available online.** Recommendations in the document reflect the best science available from the states that are grappling with the disease.

February 2018

### Secretarial Order References WAFWA

**Secretarial Order 3362 was signed by the Interior Secretary**, which aims to improve habitat quality on western big game winter range and migration corridors for antelope, elk, and mule deer. The order directs bureaus within Department of the Interior to work closely with 11 western states to enhance and improve the quality of big-game winter range and migration corridor habitat on federal lands in a way that recognizes state authority to conserve and manage big game species. The order specifically directs federal agencies to assess state-derived migration data for land-use plans, and to proceed in close cooperation with the states, in particular WAFWA and its program coordinator for the Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool (CHAT), prior to developing maps or mapping tools related to elk, deer or pronghorn movement or land use.

March 2018

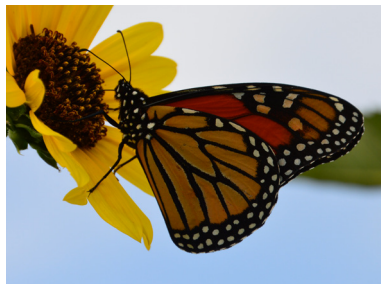
### WAFWA Welcomes the Northwest Territories as Newest Member

The Wildlife Division, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Government of the Northwest Territories petitioned membership into WAFWA in March 2018. With subsequent Executive Committee approval, the agency became WAFWA's 24th member, which now includes 19 western states, three Canadian provinces and two Canadian territories. The Northwest Territories encompass 519,700 square miles of western Canada not previously represented in WAFWA - nearly twice the size of Texas and 80% the size of Alaska.

# 2018 INITIATIVES

## GRASSLANDS INITIATIVE

### Conserving Grasslands Across the West



The monarch butterfly's annual migration cycle is one of the most remarkable natural phenomena in the world. Over the past 20 years, the monarch butterfly population has declined by more than 80 percent throughout much of its range.



WAFWA's Lesser Prairie-chicken Range-wide Conservation Plan entered its fifth year of implementation in 2018. A collaborative effort of WAFWA and state wildlife agencies of Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas and Colorado, the plan was developed to ensure long-term viability of the lesser prairie-chicken through voluntary cooperation by landowners and industry. By the end of 2018, industry partners had committed more than \$64 million in enrollment and mitigation fees to pay for conservation actions, and landowners across the range have agreed to conserve more than 150,000 acres of habitat through 10-year and permanent conservation agreements. However, declining industry enrollments are threatening the long-term viability of the industry mitigation framework part of the plan. As required by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the program will undergo a five-year review in 2019.

In 2018, Monarch butterflies took center stage as WAFWA led efforts to convene a working group to develop a **Western Monarch Butterfly Conservation Plan**. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) supported the effort with \$120,000 grant to develop this regional strategy and improve coordination among monarch butterfly conservation partners west of the Rocky Mountains.

WAFWA has long recognized that conserving remaining grassland habitat in the West requires a landscape-scale ecosystem approach. This approach is detailed in a comprehensive WAFWA prairie conservation strategy that was approved in 2008 and will be updated over the next few years. The strategy integrates components of companion efforts for a variety of species ranging from black-footed ferrets to lesser prairie-chickens.

## CRUCIAL HABITAT ASSESSMENT TOOL

### Data-Driven Solutions Benefit Western Wildlife

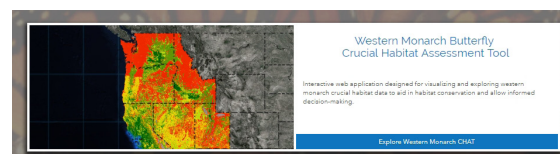


WAFWA's Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool (CHAT) provides data-driven solutions to benefit wildlife by enhancing the use of state fish and wildlife agency data across the western United States.

Since its release in 2013, CHAT has been the product of state fish and wildlife agencies collaborating to provide the public with a landscape-level, interactive map to help conserve crucial wildlife habitat across the west. The CHAT framework was designed to transition complex and sensitive wildlife data into a publicly appropriate scale and format for the purpose of aiding the decision-making process during a project's pre-planning stages. To improve the understanding of fish and wildlife habitat priorities, the agencies defined "crucial habitat" to support consistency across state boundaries and ranked suites of priority datasets to represent areas "most crucial," to "least crucial". This provides landscape level consistency to facilitate informed land use project planning; to reduce conflicts and ensure wildlife values are better incorporated into planning decisions and to facilitate efforts (such as the Monarch Initiative, see image) to identify important areas for landscape conservation efforts.

In 2018, WAFWA upgraded the CHAT website and operating platform to expand usability by offering the cloud-based capabilities of ESRI's ArcGIS Hub and ArcGIS Online. See the new CHAT in action at [wafwachat.org](http://wafwachat.org) and experience WAFWA's collection of ArcGIS Story Maps showcasing how CHAT has incorporated state fish and wildlife agency data into regional projects such as the Western Native Trout Initiative.

*Crucial habitat describes places that are expected to contain the resources necessary for continued health of fish and wildlife populations or important ecological systems expected to provide high value for a diversity of fish and wildlife.*



April 16-18, 2018

### Western States Wild Turkey Technical Committee meets in Minden, Nevada

Eight state agencies were represented at the annual meeting of the Western States Wild Turkey Technical Committee, which was sponsored by the National Wild Turkey Federation. Participants finalized a turkey hunting economics fact sheet and added to the manuscript "A Review of Harvest and Population Monitoring Methods for Wild Turkeys," which has been submitted for publication in the Twelfth National Wild Turkey Symposium, to be held in North Carolina in June 2021.





## WESTERN NATIVE TROUT INITIATIVE

Leveraging Dollars and Partners for Western Native Trout



The **Western Native Trout Initiative (WNTI)** is a program of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and a nationally recognized

partnership under the National Fish Habitat Partnership program. WNTI works cooperatively across 12 Western states to conserve, protect, restore and recover 21 native trout and char species across their historic ranges.

In 2018, WNTI received a \$278,000 grant from Resources Legacy Fund through the Open Rivers Fund to benefit trout in Utah, Idaho and Wyoming. The partnership will benefit Bonneville cutthroat trout, recreational fishing, and ranchers who divert water for irrigation. The 2018 grant will ultimately fund eight restoration projects that will remove five diversion dams, three additional barriers and restore stream and riparian habitat. Additional funding is expected in 2019.

WNTI also awarded \$232,640 in grant funding in 2018 for eight projects that benefit native trout species across the western United States. The community-based projects are funded through the National Fish Habitat Action Plan and the USFWS. The projects were selected because of their emphasis on collaborative action to address some of the biggest challenges facing the restoration and recovery of western native trout. WNTI also awarded \$23,205 out of its small grant program for nine additional projects, which was matched by \$514,364 in other public and private funding.

In 2018, WNTI also worked with state partners on an exciting new program to raise awareness of native trout, promote fishing and encourage conservation. The Western Native Trout Challenge launches in 2019.

### WNTI SUCCESS BY THE NUMBERS (2006-2018)

98	Fish passage barriers removed
1,199	Stream miles reconnected, restored or improved
35	Barriers constructed to conserve and protect priority populations
613	Miles of habitat protected above barriers
714	Watersheds or populations surveyed or assessed

## SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM INITIATIVE

Conserving the Sagebrush Sea



America's vast sagebrush ecosystem stretches across 13 western states and supports more than 350 of species of wildlife, including the greater sage-grouse. In 2015, citing unprecedented landscape-scale conservation efforts, the USFWS

concluded that greater sage-grouse did not warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act. The collaborative, science-based greater sage-grouse conservation effort, in which WAFWA plays a key role, is the largest land conservation effort in U.S. history.

WAFWA is now working with partners to develop a Sagebrush Conservation Strategy. Several research projects currently underway will inform that strategy. Recognizing that people are an integral part of the sagebrush landscape, two social science research projects were funded in 2018 as part of the Sagebrush Science Initiative. The initiative is a collaborative project of WAFWA, the USFWS and the Bureau of Land Management.

WAFWA's Wildfire and Invasive Species Working Group updated a gap analysis report in 2018 that was originally produced in 2013. That gap report summarized the policy, fiscal, and science challenges that land managers have encountered regarding the control and reduction of the invasive annual grass/fire cycle. The Gap Report Update published in 2018 includes a review of the original gaps and an overview of remaining work, with recommendations for actions to improve the conservation and management of the sagebrush biome.

In 2018, WAFWA also led a collaboration of state and federal agency biologists in the development of a framework to inventory conservation actions that have been conducted in the sagebrush biome from 2015 to 2019.



### Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) Partnership

The IWJV accelerated development and implementation of its two major initiatives in collaboration with WAFWA and key federal agencies:

#### Partnering to Conserve Sagebrush Rangelands

The BLM-IWJV partnership increased voluntary collaboration, improved science and technology transfer, advanced communications, and implemented projects. Accomplishments include 102 projects completed, 66,154 acres impacted with conservation treatments, \$3.2 million of projects funded, 387 partners engaged, 116 landowner visits, and 72 forums created to support public and private partners.

#### Water 4 Initiative

This initiative was developed and funded to build collaborative capacity for effective, lasting, and community-based wetlands conservation in strategic landscapes. It is designed to conserve wet meadows and "water for" irrigated agriculture, wildlife and fisheries habitat, groundwater recharge, and landscape resiliency in ways that matter to people.



May 21-24, 2018

### Northern Wild Sheep and Goat Council Symposium held in Whitefish, Montana

The 21st biennial symposium was hosted by Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks and was sponsored by 20 NGOs and state and federal land management and wildlife agencies across the West. More than 120 participants from the U.S. and Canada attended. A highlight of the meeting was group discussions about wild sheep genetics and genomics, and how to bridge the gaps between researchers and land managers.





May 21-24, 2018

### 13th Western Black Bear Workshop held in Grand Junction, Colorado



The workshop theme was “Bear Management in the Changing West,” and was sponsored by Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Workshop participants attended presentations on conflicts, conflict mitigation, bear ecology, habitat and predation and two panel discussions, including one on stakeholder perspectives on conflict management of black bears,

and a second that focused on agency lessons learned in liability and litigation resulting from bear attacks.

June 18-21, 2018

### Western States Sage and Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Technical Committee meets in Billings, Montana



The 31st Sage and Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Workshop was held in 2018, marking the continuation of the first officially authorized WAFWA workshop, which was held in 1959. The workshop provided a forum for students, managers and scientists to present their research. Additionally, biologists from the range of sage-grouse and Columbian sharp-tailed grouse report on the status of management in their respective states or provinces.

July 2018

### Partners Sign Agreement to Enhance Western Fish and Wildlife Resources



WAWA entered into an agreement in July 2018 with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) to enhance communication and collaboration regarding fish and wildlife habitat management on public lands in the West.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed at WAFWA's annual summer conference in Eugene, Oregon. BLM's Kristin Bail, AFWA President Virgil Moore, and WAFWA President Curt Melcher signed for their respective organizations. The new MOU establishes a framework and communication protocols for the BLM to proactively coordinate with AFWA, WAFWA and the state agencies they represent on wildlife issues of mutual interest.



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Advancing collaborative, proactive, science-based fish and wildlife conservation and management across the West

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Treasurer

August 13-15, 2018

### Western States and Provinces Biennial Pronghorn Workshop convenes in Reno, Nevada



The 28th biennial pronghorn workshop was held in Nevada in 2018. The proceedings from this meeting include four peer-reviewed manuscripts and 20 abstracts from presented papers. The proceedings are posted on the WAFWA pronghorn workshop web site, along with prior proceedings. South Dakota will host the meeting in 2020.

November 7-8, 2018

### Coastal Cutthroat Trout Symposium held in Newport, Oregon



Photo: James Losee

WNTI co-sponsored a two-day Coastal Cutthroat Trout Symposium in Newport, Oregon, along with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission and the Coastal Cutthroat Trout interagency team. The goal of the symposium was to share information and knowledge gained since the 2005 Coastal

Cutthroat Trout Symposium and to share the results of the first range-wide assessment of the species, completed in 2017.

*Since 1922, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) has advanced conservation in western North America. Representing 24 western states and Canadian provinces, WAFWA's reach encompasses more than 40 percent of North America, including two-thirds of the United States. Drawing on the knowledge of scientists across the West, WAFWA is recognized as the expert source for information and analysis about western wildlife. WAFWA supports sound resource management and building partnerships at all levels to conserve wildlife for the use and benefit of all citizens, now and in the future.*

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