

International Relations Committee - Report

Meeting of April 2, 2026
Ryan Brown (Virginia), U.S. Co-chair
Vacant, Canadian Co-Chair

Meeting convened from 1:15 pm to 3:00 pm. There were 20 people in attendance.

Several international meetings are occurring in 2026 that offer valuable opportunities to shape the global conservation agenda and ensure that state, provincial, and territorial priorities are represented and heard.

- Convention on Migratory Species (CMS): March 23-29
- CITES 54th Animals Committee: July 13-17
- The Spaw Protocol, Scientific Body: June 30 – July 3
- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) SBSTTA28: July 27 – August 1
- CBD CoP17: October 19-30
- CITES 78th Standing Committee: November 2 – 6

One Health (Jason Sumners): The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (the Association) created a One Health Task Force to develop recommendations to guide the Association's work. One outcome was the creation of a One Health Committee. The Committee's Charge is to collaborate with relevant Association committees and others outside the fish and wildlife sector to discuss, communicate, develop policies, and take action to elevate the importance and relevancy of fish and wildlife conservation on the landscapes in which they depend within the One Health Framework in North America. Essentially the work spans many Committees and is everyone's work. We need to be a network working in concert. How do we promote health in part through conservation? Director Sumners also shared a video developed by Conservation Visions. The video does an excellent job clarifying the components of One Health and connecting human well-being to the health of wildlife and the land. They are discussing next steps for the video and when it will be released more broadly. If the timing works out, we will share it with the Canadian Wildlife Directors Committee.

CITES Technical Work Group Update (Buddy Baker (SEAFWA), Gordon Batcheller (NEAFWA), Carolyn Caldwell (MAFWA), Stewart Liley (WAFWA)): The Work Group represented the state fish and wildlife agencies at the 20th CITES Conference of the Parties (CoP). The Association's International Relations Committee Co-chair Ryan Brown (Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources) served as the state representative on the U.S. Delegation. More than 4,600 participants attended CoP20, including government representatives from 164 CITES Parties (of 184 countries who signed the Treaty), non-governmental organizations, and the press.

The Team met regularly with members of the U.S. Delegation to discuss areas of concern and enjoyed a collaborative and cooperative relationship with colleagues from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), including Director Brian Nesvik.

Key outcomes from the CoP include:

1. The European Union's listing proposal to add all eel species to Appendix II was not adopted.
2. The Parties voted to endorse a comprehensive resolution on the management of eels which

was supported by the States as well as the U.S. Delegation. This resolution is designed to encourage collaboration and cooperation amongst eel range countries, especially in data sharing and evaluation of various management systems practiced worldwide.

3. The Mexican proposal to list all *Crotalus* and *Sistrurus* rattlesnakes in Appendix II was not adopted.
4. The proposal to move Peregrine Falcons from Appendix I to Appendix II was not adopted.
5. The proposal to amend annotations for American Ginseng with a limited exemption for low risk, retail ready products of 1-3mm sliced roots from artificially propagated ginseng was not adopted.
6. Considering the 'look-alike' criterion, species and taxa have been included in CITES Appendices based on their resemblance to other species for many years. The rationale for including look-alike species in Appendix II is to address the challenge of misidentification and potential for laundering. Currently, there is minimal guidance in how the look-alike criteria are applied in listing proposals nor has the effectiveness of such listings been evaluated. Following lengthy discussions at the CoP, no consensus could be reached, and the document was not adopted. Based on comments made by Parties this is likely to be revisited in the 2026 Animals Committee.

Two concerns about CITES are 1) that more proposals are not scientifically rigorous or based on trade data and 2) the sheer number of agenda items is limiting the ability to have meaningful dialogue about the agenda items. The Work Group will attend the Animals and Standing Committees this summer and fall. There may be a side event on U.S. eel management and enforcement at the summer meeting that would include the state of Maine and possibly the Atlantic Coast Marine Fisheries Commission.

USFWS International Affairs Update (Elsa Haubold): The USFWS CITES office participated in CoP20 (November 25-December 5, 2025, in Samarkand, Uzbekistan) with Director Brian Nesvik as head of delegation. Ryan Brown served as the Association's representative on the U.S. Delegation. The Service coordinated with the Association, through Executive Director Brown, on more than 24 CoP20 agenda items, covering a wide range of topics including species proposals submitted by other CITES parties that concerned species occurring in the United States or in U.S. territories.

CITES Outcomes (beyond the CITES TWG update)

- The European Union's proposal (Prop 36) to include six sea cucumber species in Appendix II was not adopted, despite the U.S. voting in favor.
- The proposal for Golden Sandfish (*Holothuria lessona*) (Prop 37) was adopted with U.S. support.
- The proposal for School shark, Common smoothhound, and Patagonian narrownose smoothhound (Prop 29) was adopted by consensus with an 18-month delayed implementation (June 5, 2027).
- **Permitting & Implementation:** USFWS is focused on improving permit implementation by utilizing a conservation-forward prioritization methodology, a user-friendly application wizard, and streamlined process steps. They continue to implement the CITES export

program with support from state fish and wildlife agencies.

- **Trilateral Committee:** Canada will host the annual meeting virtually on May 12-15. Working Tables are resuming technical discussions, and progress is being made on a potential Letter of Intent on ocelot conservation.

Special Session: Conservation Models Beyond North America (Katie MacKenzie): The session aimed to illustrate how shared conservation challenges play out across global conservation paradigms and was focused on critically examining assumptions and identifying transferable lessons. Outcomes are determined by governance, incentives, and social legitimacy, not solely by ecological science.

The presentations centered on four foundational principles that transcend boundaries:

- Human-wildlife coexistence and conflict management
- Sustainable use and incentives (regulated use)
- Rights, Tenure, and Authority
- Local leadership and community engagement

Attendees noted the surprising level of similarity across conservation contexts, such as dealing with development, growing economies, and coexistence/conflict. It was recognized that while some lessons are transferable, others are not (e.g., sustainable use models varying due to local hunting bans). Some participants identified some areas for discussion:

- How to conserve areas outside of conservation areas and build trust with resource users?
- How to rewild urban, politically powerful populations that are disconnected from the resource?
- How to work with the education system that is not adequately equipping people for conservation.
- How to feed the planet without destroying nature.

Our conservation models are continuously evolving. How can we learn from each other. The positive feedback supports a continued effort to foster international dialogues and move toward active, mutual learning. Participants discussed the idea of future webinars and committed to sharing the recording of the special session.

IUCN Motions (Deb Hahn): The IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC) adopted over 140 resolutions, with key highlights focusing on species management, new conservation concepts, governance, and addressing major threats.

Key motions:

- **Species Management and Sustainable Use:**

- **Sustainable Use (Res 65 & 81):** Res 65 initiates a formal, transparent process to review and update the IUCN Policy Statement on Sustainable Use of wild species. Res 81 calls for developing new international standards for wild species management to ensure they are practical and science-based.
- **Direct Exploitation (Res 134):** Focuses on overexploitation, urging the identification of species that may require new listings under multilateral agreements to prevent further decline.
- **Commercial Pet Trade (Res 107):** Requires the establishment of a task force to review the commercial pet trade and develop IUCN guidelines for effective control measures.
- **New and Potentially Concerning Conservation Concepts:**
 - **Free Evolution (Res 91):** Urges members to recognize "free evolution"—ecosystems adapting without human intervention—as a core conservation objective. It calls for protecting large-scale wild areas where natural processes can occur on an evolutionary scale.
 - **Longevity Conservation (Res 113):** A new focus area that asks the organization to define 'Longevity Conservation' and evaluate how the harvest of older and larger individuals impacts population biodiversity and resilience.
 - **Ethical Human-Ocean Relationship (Res 055):** Calls for establishing best practices to integrate the ocean's intrinsic values into governance and for members to adopt laws that acknowledge human responsibilities to safeguard ocean ecosystems.
- **Governance and Participation:**
 - **Subnational Participation (Res 121):** Supports the new membership category for subnational governments (with CA and MA having applied) and aims to ensure their participation in global conservation agendas.
 - **30x30 Target (Res 066):** Promotes models of regional and sub-national protected areas to contribute to the global Target 3 (30x30), emphasizing shared governance and adopting models using IUCN guidelines.
 - **Indigenous Knowledge (Res 093):** Promotes the legal recognition of Indigenous languages, establishing grants, and requiring that governments and IUCN respectfully use traditional knowledge in conservation projects with free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC).

The Association plans to engage actively in the implementation of Resolutions 65, 81, 134, and 121. AFWA will engage with and monitor implementation of Resolutions 91 and 113.

Action Items / Resolutions / Motions

- **International Conventions:**
 - **CITES:** Continue work with the USFWS and partners to advance priorities at the Animals Committee and Standing Committee this summer and fall.
 - **IUCN:** Engage in resolutions as implementation begins, and schedule a virtual

meeting to discuss the implementation of IUCN resolutions as needed.

- **CBD/CMS:** Follow up on CBD SBSTTA outcomes and engage with partners. Engage on CMS CoP15 outcomes, including the Americas Flyways Framework and the Global Taking Initiative.
- **One Health:** Next steps are being discussed for the One Health video developed by Conservation Visions, with plans to share it with the Canadian Wildlife Directors Committee if the timing works out.
- **Special Session Follow-up:** Work with the planning team to circulate the session video. Follow up on outcomes and lessons learned from the Special Session (Conservation Models Beyond North America) to refine local practices and foster cross-regional learning. Initiate a follow-up discussion on how to continue and deepen this conversation, including strategies to engage a broader network of partners
- **General:** Engage the Committee and subject matter experts in IUCN and CITES issues as needed. The IR Committee is planning to meet again in September 2026.

OTHER ITEMS MENTIONED:

- A side event on U.S. eel management and enforcement may occur at the summer Animals Committee meeting, potentially including the state of Maine and the Atlantic Coast Marine Fisheries Commission.
- Conservation Force provided the following update. Conservation Force raised awareness on the interconnectedness of several priority issues across multi-lateral environmental agendas, namely the IUCN WCC and CMS CoP15, where they have been actively countering the following resolutions and documents.
 - IUCN Resolution 065 (co-sponsored by the Natural Resources Defense Council, Born Free Foundation, Center for Biological Diversity, IFAW and others) is of immense concern. Conservation Force anticipates that it is an attempt to add animal welfare to the IUCN's policy on sustainable use. Collaboration across IUCN members will be needed (e.g., AFWA, TWS, other AWCP members from the North American space).
 - IUCN Resolution 113 (co-sponsored by Born Free Foundations, Natural Resources Defense Council and others) on the "longevity" conservation approach appears to be anti-hunting and a paradigm shift away from wildlife management that harvests based on age, size, sex, spatial and temporal extents, bag limits, etc. The motion was successfully amended with mixed results but needs scope and further monitoring. A potential commentary paper was proposed in response.
 - Draft IUCN Situational analysis on the scope, scale and impacts of trophy hunting was mentioned. The 200-page document was still under review and will be influential, but Conservation Force and Dallas Safari Club are concerned with

its approach to hunting generally and potential misuse of scientific literature.

- CMS Doc. 28.13 on “animal culture and social complexity”, lacks scope or safeguards for wildlife management, and is integrating into wildlife health agendas and a 5-year work stream with IUCN. The item was adopted at CMS CoP15, where Conservation Force successfully removed “hunting” from an action to study the impacts of individual removals and specified application for species that are threatened and where culture can be identified as a conservation value.

These items have the potential to undermine sustainable use and wildlife management and are not dissimilar to issues faced by state agencies. Conservation Force encourages collaboration in our approach and responses.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES IDENTIFIED:

Submitted by Ryan Brown

Committee Member Attendees:

Ryan Brown, Virginia Department of Wildlife Conservation
Gordon Batcheller, NEAFWA CITES Representative
Jason Sumners, Missouri Department of Conservation
Lorisa, Missouri Department of Conservation
John Jackson, Conservation Force
Stewart Liley, NM Game and Fish Department, WAFWA CITES Representative
Shane Mahoney, Conservation Visions
Elsa Haubold, USFWS

Non-Committee Members Attendees:

Elizabeth (Lizzie) Schueler, Manomet Conservation Sciences
Tristan Breijer, CIC
Joe Goergen, Conservation Force
Greg McClinchey, Great Lakes Fisheries Commission
Joe Crocker, Canadian Wildlife service
Dave Kustersky, AFWA
Dr. Brian Childs, University of Florida
Katie Mackenzie, Jamma Conservation & Communities
Dr. Sajel Worah, World Wildlife Fund India
Clay Crowder, Arizona Game and Fish Department
Auden Monteith, Great Lakes Fisheries Commission
Shelby LaButte, Center for Conservation Excellence (NWTF)
Glen Salmon, Indiana University