Conservation Affairs and Public Information Committees Development of Policy, Resolution, and Issue Statements by the Western Section: **Background and Proposed Guidelines**

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The Public Information and Conservation Affairs Committees (PIC and CAC, respectively) of the Western Section (WS) of The Wildlife Society (TWS) regularly interface with other scientists, managers, policymakers, and the public on activities ranging from responding to inquiries regarding a WS position on a wildlife-management or land use issue to interacting with state and federal policymakers and the legislature. These interactions often require developing, within a very brief timeframe, a position or statement representing the views of the WS. The PIC and CAC are unique among WS committees in this regard and the current committee chairpersons have identified a need to clarify their roles, and the committee roles, toward more effectively meeting the goals and objectives of the WS and TWS.

Developing timely statements and positions on issues that accurately represent the views of the diverse WS membership is challenging. Our sense is that the WS represents a broad cross section of wildlife professionals with often divergent views on policy, management, and research issues. Capturing this diversity in WS policy, positions, and statements while ensuring consistency with policies of TWS and other Sections should be the guiding principle within which the PIC and CAC operate. At the same time, the effectiveness of PIC and CAC activities is usually dependent on issuing these policy statements and issue letters within a prescribed and unforgiving timeline. This paper is intended to summarize the parameters under which the CAC and PIC operate and both clarify and document our ideas for improving the committee's effectiveness while meeting important membership representation mandates.

Background

The PIC and CAC are bound by several organizational regulations and guidelines that attempt to focus guidance for committee activities. These include the TWS bylaws, the WS bylaws, operations-manual policy, and general recommendations from TWS. Relevant sections of these documents are included with this paper as attachments 1-4.

The TWS bylaws grant the council (TWS board) authority to formulate and issue statements expressing the position of TWS. TWS bylaws also grant Sections and Chapters the authority to formulate positions 1) when the content falls within established TWS policy and 2) in the absence of TWS policy, provided statements are not in conflict with TWS policy. Another provision requires the Council to adopt policy statements within 90 days of receipt (Attachment 1).

TWS policy guidance documents attempt to further define and, to some degree codify, the bylaws by providing detail on the policy authority conferred to Sections and Chapters. In summary, the guidance document suggests:

- 1) Adhere to TWS bylaws
- 2) Adhere to Section and/or Chapter bylaws
- 3) Communicate with TWS policy director if deemed appropriate
- 4) Document and file statements with the Section or Chapter, and forward to TWS
- 5) Section or Chapter executive body review of all statements; statements should reflect executive body majority position
- 6) Base statements on scientific data and professional expertise
- 7) Arrange invitations to participate in legislative activities; invited participation does not constitute lobbying
- 8) Get to know legislators and legislative staff who sponsor key bills
- 9) Be selective in choosing issues

The policy guidance document goes on to provide operational guidance for the TWS policy director. The complete guidance document is included as Attachment 2.

A companion document, "Guidelines for Society Volunteers on Wildlife Policy Activities" (Attachment 3), suggests practices for Section and Chapter conservation affairs volunteers including 1) be selective and deal only with issues directly related to wildlife and our (TWS, Section, Chapter) expertise, 2) always respond to issues for which you have been invited to participate or requested to comment, and 3) carefully consider letter-writing campaigns and, if they are used, do not provide suggested text. The last guidance item is intended more for distinguishing lobbying activities from policy or issue statement development.

Finally, Attachment 4 is the relevant text from various Section and Chapter bylaws relating to policy and issue statements. We reviewed the bylaws from several Chapters and the Section and all of them use the model described in Attachment 4. The WS bylaws (which follow this model) require submittal of statements or resolutions to the board, which may approve or reject them, and, if they contain new policy, two-thirds voting membership approval. Actions falling within previously established policy may be carried out by any Chapter/Section representative. In instances when the action is considered "new" policy and must be carried out quickly, the Chapter/Section president or designated representative, may carry out the action provided 1) the statement is presented to the board before issuance and 2) copies are sent to the membership within 15 days after public issuance. Our bylaws further require that statements be within TWS policy and follow the TWS guidance document (Attachment 2).

We believe the WS has been operating within these requirements and recommendations and has been diligent regarding TWS policy consistency and WS Board approval. A review of past WS policy and issue statements indicates the WS has not established new policy, has operated within the confines of organizational requirements and administrative policy, and has kept members abreast of CAC and PIC activities through the quarterly Section *Newsletter* and Section website; however, the specter of membership misrepresentation still looms and has been raised in response to recent CAC activities.

Recommendation

We submit the following Section guidance for PIC and CAC activities for Board approval and, ultimately, approval by the WS membership and, if desired and necessary, TWS.

Issue Statements and Public Information—Request Responses

These statements are defined for our purposes as active development of a position or reiteration of a TWS or WS policy in response to a request from the public or a specific project-level, planning, or legislative proposal and are consistent with existing TWS policy.

- 1) Consideration, development, and publication of public information–request responses and issue statements will follow current TWS and WS bylaws and guidance documents. The CAC and PIC chairpersons, through the WS Executive Board, will be responsible for maintaining current copies of the TWS bylaws and relevant guidance documents.
- 2) The WS CAC and PIC will generally address issues that may affect the WS region, that may result in new laws or regulations of interest to a majority of the WS membership, or may be local in geographic or ecological scope but establish a land use, management, or regulatory precedent of interest to a majority of WS members. Chapter PIC or CAC activities will generally address issues specific to the geographic or ecological scope of the Chapter and affect, or will be of interest to, a majority of Chapter members.
- 3) The CAC chairperson will convene a committee comprising CAC members and/or WS members to review pending legislation meeting the criteria described in item 1 above and establish priorities for evaluating, monitoring, and responding to draft bills throughout the legislative session. The CAC chairperson will submit the list of prioritized active legislative items developed by the committee to the Board for review and inform the membership through the quarterly *Newsletter* and WS website.

- 4) To ensure consistency with TWS, Section, and constituent Chapter policy and member views, the WS PIC and CAC chairpersons will be responsible for decisions regarding which issues to pursue and subsequent preparation of WS written statements. It is incumbent on these committee chairpersons to remain abreast of TWS and Chapter activities related to committee actions. This guidance is not intended to prevent Chapters from preparing issue statements for local Chapter issues as described above.
- 5) The WS CAC and PIC committee chairpersons will solicit input from their respective committees and WS Chapters when preparing issue statements or responding to public requests for statements. The CAC and PIC chairpersons will seek to provide reasonable time for Chapters and members to consider and respond to draft issue statements; however, as discussed above, issue statements must often be prepared and submitted within a short and strict timeframe. In these instances, the WS CAC and PIC chairpersons will use their discretion in finalizing draft issue or public statements in the absence of an adequate Chapter review and response period and will consider previous related TWS, Chapter, and membership statements and views.
- 6) Before issuing any issue statement, the WS CAC and PIC committee chairpersons will submit a final draft statement or public response to the Board for unanimous approval. The WS Board will seek to approve statements and/or responses generated by the CAC or PIC within a reasonable time period; however, draft statements and responses submitted for Board approval will be considered rejected if not approved by the Board within 7 working days.
- 7) Issue statements or public information–request responses developed by WS Chapters will be submitted to the PIC or CAC chairperson for distribution to the Board and publication on the WS website and in the quarterly WS Newsletter.

Policy

Policy statements are defined for our purposes as positions developed to refine the stated TWS purpose in relation to an ongoing issue or activity. Policy statements are typically not developed in response to a particular project or proposed legislation, but to address a standing issue.

- 1) Consideration, development, and publication of new policy statements will follow current TWS and WS bylaws and guidance documents. The CAC and PIC chairpersons, through the WS Executive Board, will be responsible for maintaining current copies of the TWS bylaws and relevant guidance documents.
- 2) The WS CAC and PIC will generally address policy matters that may affect the WS region, that may result in new laws or regulations of interest to a majority of the WS membership, or may be local in geographic or ecological scope but establish a land use, management, or regulatory precedent of interest to a majority of WS members. Chapter PIC or CAC activities will generally address policy specific to the geographic or

ecological scope of the Chapter and affect, or will be of interest to, a majority of Chapter members.

- 3) Consistent with the WS and Chapter bylaws, new policy statements may be proposed by any two WS members and submitted to the Board for majority approval. Proposed policy statements generated by the membership should be first submitted to the CAC and PIC chairpersons for consistency review and evaluation.
- 4) Also consistent with WS and Chapter bylaws, draft policy statements approved by the Board must be circulated for review to the membership. Draft policy statements can be circulated to the WS membership after issuance of the policy statement provided it is accomplished within 15 days and the policy is first approved by the Board.
- 5) Membership-approved policy statements should be published in the next edition of the quarterly *Newsletter* and posted to the WS website within 2 weeks of approval.

TWS Bylaws Relating to Policy Statements

ARTICLE IX. RESOLUTIONS AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS

Section I. COUNCIL -- The Council, as need arises, may formulate and issue statements expressing the position of the Society on matters of concern to the public and Society members.

Section 2. SECTIONS, CHAPTERS, AND WORKING GROUPS -- Sections, Chapters, and Working Groups are authorized to issue statements pertaining to subjects in their locale or subject area (1) when the content of the statement falls within the established policy of the Society, and (2) in the absence of existing Society position statements. They shall not issue statements in conflict with policy of the Society without first obtaining Council approval. Statements submitted to the Council for adoption must be acted upon by the Council within 90 days of receipt at the Society office.

TWS National Conservation Affairs Policy Guidance

GUIDELINES FOR WILDLIFE POLICY ACTIVITIES

Because of the membership's desire that The Wildlife Society (TWS) take a more active role addressing wildlife policy issues and legislation that directly affects wildlife and/or its habitat, Council feels there is a need to coordinate our efforts so that TWS will be most effective in meeting its objectives. The following material is intended to inform you, as TWS members, about: (1) how Sections and Chapters can most effectively be involved; and (2) how the Society operates on conservation issues.

I. Society Bylaws and Guidelines for Conservation Activities

Chapters, sections and the Society should make public statements within the Society's expertise on wildlife and/or habitat. As a professional Society, it is paramount that these statements be accomplished in a credible manner. Consequently, the following guidelines are suggested:

- 1. Follow the bylaws of TWS when drafting statements. The approved 14 December 1989 bylaws of The Wildlife Society, Article IX, Sections 1 and 2, state:
- Section 1. Council--The Council as need arises, may formulate and issue statements expressing the position or attitude of the Society on matters of public and Society membership concern.
- Section 2. Sections and Chapters--Sections and Chapters are authorized to issue statements pertaining to subjects in their locale (1) when the content of the statement falls within the established policy of the Society, and (2) in lieu of existing Society position statements. They shall not issue statements in conflict with policy of the Society without first obtaining Council approval. Statements submitted to the Council for adoption must be acted upon by the Council within 90 days of receipt at the Society Office.

Whenever in doubt as to the Society's position, Sections and Chapters are encouraged to contact the Wildlife Policy Director.

- 2. Because approved Section and Chapter bylaws vary, each unit should check its bylaws regarding references or guidelines for making public statements concerning legislation, policy or other issues.
- 3. Sections and Chapters are encouraged to communicate initially with the Society's Wildlife Policy Director to: (1) keep the Society informed of proposed actions; and (2)

have the opportunity to obtain suggestions or recommendations based on the expertise gained from prior statements or concurrent issues.

- 4. Statements need to be documented and filed for the record. Copies should be forwarded to the Wildlife Policy Director and to all units within and including the Section. Communication can be a major weakness within any organization. When one unit of TWS makes a statement or testifies, we're all involved and we need to be informed of one another's activities. This holds for the Society (See April 1976 Wildlifer).
- 5. The proposed statements or testimony should be reviewed by the Section or Chapter's executive body. All statements issued under the name of the particular Section or Chapter need to reflect the majority's position. In highly controversial issues, where the membership holds widely divergent opinions, the views of the Section or Chapter members shall be solicited before the statement is released. The executive body should inform the membership of it's environmental and legislative actions.
- Statements shall be based on scientific data and professional expertise. Avoid the "emotional" approach or reaction.
- Arrange to be invited to draft or testify on legislation by the legislative body (or committee chairman). Activity conducted under invitation does not count as lobbying.
- Know the legislators sponsoring the bill and know the Committee members. At the national level, we need to know the Committee members, the states they represent, and who the wildlife professionals are in those states who have expertise on the topic of the bill.
- 9. Be selective in choosing issues to address. Select only those issues within the scope of our expertise and those that most directly impact wildlife and/or its habitat.
 - II. Operating Procedure for the Wildlife Policy Director

The Society, through the Wildlife Policy Director, has developed guidelines for responding to environmental issues at the national level. They include:

- Identifying those members of TWS with specific expertise who would be willing 1. to draft legislation or testify on their specialty.
- 2. Implementing a methodology for choosing issues for action. There is a strong feeling among members that TWS should be concerned with any issue or legislation that has major impact on wildlife and/or its habitat. That philosophy should guide us in

selecting issues, but time and money will force us to narrow our specific choices to be effective.

3. There should be a flow of ideas and concerns, and requests for action should proceed from both directions. Sections and Chapters may request TWS support on local issues which have national implications and the Wildlife Policy Director will suggest issues for local units to handle.

It is important that the membership be informed about communication between the various executive bodies and the Wildlife Policy Director regarding environmental issues. The members want to and should be involved.

4. The Wildlife Policy Director is the wildlife policy contact for TWS and should build a regular program of communication with Congress, governmental agencies, private conservation organizations and all the sections and chapters of TWS.

The Wildlife Policy Director takes the lead in assessing the need for TWS action on any specific issue. In assessing the appropriateness of any issue for TWS consideration, existing policy statements and stated goals and objectives of TWS should be the first guidelines. Many issues will be controversial, both within the scientific community and within TWS. There can be no set formula for solution of these conflicts, but the Wildlife Policy Director will be expected to consult with Council, units in the affected area, or other experts to assist in making a recommendation for action. In some cases TWS will not have the expertise, time, or mechanisms to respond on some issues. Judgement will have to be exercised in certain situations where no response would be better than an uninformed response. In many cases, other conservation and scientific groups will have assessed an issue, and will have a stand or public statement which conforms quite closely to the objectives and goals of TWS. In these cases, it would be most efficient for TWS to support such a stand or statement rather than attempting to make its own assessment.

TWS National Guidance for Policy Volunteers

GUIDELINES FOR SOCIETY VOLUNTEERS ON WILDLIFE POLICY ACTIVITY

The following three items are suggested ways for Society section and chapter officers and committees to carry out wildlife policy activities in a proper manner:

- 1. Regarding wildlife policy activities be more selective and deal only with issues directly related to wildlife, our area of expertise. It is recognizably difficult to draw the line between direct and indirect effects, but, for example, chapter comments on town dump site might be eliminated in most cases.
- Respond to issues of your choice on which you have been invited or requested to comment. Give discrete general notice to proper authorities that you are available for comments in order to encourage requests to you to do so. A response solicited by legislators, or other decision makers, is viewed as a public service and is not "lobbying".
- 3. Go easy on urging unit members to write someone on an issue, and be particularly careful not to provide the words they should use!

General Section/Chapter By-Laws

Two or more members may submit resolutions or statements to the Resolutions and public Statements Committee (Article VIII, Section 2F) for possible consideration by the Section/Chapter's Executive Board. These shall be accepted or rejected by the Board and, if involving new policy, prepared for submission to the Section/Chapter membership. Such new items must be approved by two-thirds of the Section/Chapter membership voting and must be transmitted to The Wildlife Society, the [NAME] Section Representative, and the [NAME] Section President, if approved. Actions falling within previously established Section/Chapter policies may be carried out by any Section/Chapter officer upon unanimous approval of the Executive Board. On issues where there are not previously established Section/Chapter policies and that demand action on a reasonably short notice, the President, or designated representative, may present a Public Statement on behalf of the Section/Chapter, provided that: 1) the concept of the statement be brought to the Executive Board's attention and accepted by them prior to the public issuing of the statement; and 2) copies of the statement are sent to the membership within 15 days after public issuing of the statement. Furthermore, the [NAME] Section/Chapter may issue statements pertaining to subjects in its locale:

- a) when the content of the statement falls within the established policy of The Wildlife Society; and
- b) in the absence of existing position statements by The Wildlife Society.

The [NAME] Section/Chapter will not issue statements that may be in conflict with the policy of The Wildlife Society without prior approval of The Society's Council. All statements will follow the "Guidelines for Wildlife Policy Activities" (Appendix 4.421 of the Operations Manual). The Section/Chapter membership, The Wildlife Society, the Section Representative, and the Section President must receive copies of any approved Resolution or Public Statement within 15 days of such action.