



ASSOCIATION of
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES



February 2, 2012

TO: State Fish and Wildlife Directors and Senior US Fish and Wildlife Service Managers

The Executive Committee of the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies met with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Directorate on the afternoon of December 12, 2011, in Washington, D.C., to discuss ways to improve relationships between the Service and the State Fish and Wildlife Agencies. This meeting was intentionally structured to encourage forthright discussion among leaders of the State agencies and the Service in this first-ever joint endeavor.

An open and honest discussion centered on identifying and characterizing what is or isn't working well. Not surprisingly, we concluded that strong relationships and frequent communication were foundational and fundamental to our current successes, and essential to ensuring future success.

While minutes of the meeting will soon be available, we wanted to share some initial thoughts with you from the meeting. We are committed to striving for "quick wins" over the next few months by tackling issues currently in need of attention and by establishing a mechanism *now* to address future issues more quickly. This will be accomplished by a small state-federal work group, having weekly calls on "quick win" hot button issues and making resolution of these issues one of our highest priorities. In addition, we are also committed to working expeditiously to address issues of greater complexity and depth through mechanisms such as the Federal-State Joint Task Force on ESA Policy. Task Forces have proven themselves as an effective means to tackle and resolve complex conservation and administrative issues.

We all agreed that words matter, and tone and tenor are as important as the words. All of us need to re-commit ourselves and our respective staffs to be respectful and exercise professionalism when discussing the federal-state relationship in advancing wildlife conservation objectives.

Additionally, in these discussions as well as corresponding actions, we encourage you to be sensitive to the need to personally engage in circumstances when you sense escalating tensions between our respective agencies. While electronic communication is a welcome and efficient tool, it is not a substitute for a personal phone call to bring calm to a tense situation. As you know, once issues rise to the attention of either elected (or appointed) officials and/or the courts, we sometimes lose the ability to be creative and flexible in our effort to reach mutually beneficial solutions.

You may know that we are in the process of scheduling a short "tour of duty" in each other's respective organization. These efforts will allow individuals to "shadow" people from other agencies so that we can all gain a better understanding of what it's like to walk in the other's shoes. While all of you cannot necessarily do the same, we encourage you to commit yourself to improving relationships between our respective agencies. Differences and disagreements will continue to arise, but it is in the best interest of our agencies, our publics, and the fish and wildlife resources we are mandated to conserve, to work past those differences in a respectful and professional manner to achieve shared success.

Thank you and we look forward to our future conservation successes together.

Sincerely,

Jon Gassett
President, Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies
and Commissioner, Kentucky Department of Fish
& Wildlife Resources

Dan Ashe
Director
US Fish & Wildlife Service