



## The IAFWA's Conservation Communication Team: Implications and Recommendations from a Quantitative Survey of State Fish and Wildlife Agency Directors and Information and Education Chiefs

---

*“The conservation and protection of the nation’s fish and wildlife resources ultimately depend upon the positive opinions and attitudes of Americans, as well as their commitment to act on its behalf. The key to instilling this commitment is through effectively designed information, education, and outreach programs.”*  
-Wildlife and the American Mind

A Multi-State Conservation Grant was awarded in 2002 to the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) to develop the Conservation Communication Team (CCT). The purpose of this grant was to launch a central communication office serving not only the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies but also its member states on a national level. The project was designed to augment, coordinate, and complement the communication work being done by the states. It was not designed to replace or override the information and education (I&E) functions at any state agency.

Responsive Management was contracted to complete a telephone survey of fish and wildlife agency directors, information and education chiefs, and the IAFWA committee chairs to assess their attitudes and opinions on the establishment of and direction for the CCT. One hundred and three interviews were completed: 43 interviews with directors, 53 interviews with I&E chiefs and top level communications staff, and 7 interviews with the IAFWA committee chairs.

- **Majorities of both member agency directors and I&E chiefs supported the establishment of the CCT.**

Sixty-five percent of directors and 80% of I&E chiefs strongly or moderately supported establishing the CCT. Even higher percentages of both groups felt the CCT would be very or somewhat beneficial to their agency (75% directors, 85% I&E chiefs).

- **It is clear that state agency directors and I&E staff recognize the value of communications in dealing with fish and wildlife issues.**

Overall, agency directors and I&E staff feel that the role of communications is important to the fish and wildlife field. In the past, the value of outreach and communications within the fish and wildlife field was not always recognized<sup>1</sup>. This study however, indicates that agency personnel now clearly recognize the value of communications in promoting wildlife management and conservation and support state communications staff and departments.

- **Most I&E chiefs work relatively close with their agency directors.**

Sixty-eight percent of state agency directors reported interacting with their communications staff at least daily, and 49% of I&E chiefs reported interacting with their agency director at least daily. Less than ten percent of state agency directors (5%) and I&E chiefs (8%) reported interacting with each other less than once per week.

- **Most (79%) I&E chiefs report that the staff within the agencies’ communication department work frequently with staff in other agency departments.**

It is clearly a reflection of the importance of communications within the fish and wildlife field that most communications divisions are in near daily contact with agency directors and frequently work with other agency divisions. The interaction and cooperation of communications in agency activities is recognition of the important role that communications play in managing fish and wildlife issues.

---

<sup>1</sup> Duda, Mark D. et al. 1998. Wildlife and the American Mind. Harrisonburg, VA: Responsive Management.

- **Budget concerns are the top issue of concern for state fish and wildlife agencies. A plethora of other issues were identified as well.**
- **Strong majorities of agency directors and I&E chiefs believed that their communications office would play a major role in all three of the top issues facing their agency over the next 5 years.**

Of 20 major issues identified as facing agencies in the next 5 years, communications was predicted by a majority of respondents to play a major role in all 20 issues. If a respondent identified a topic as being a top issue their agency would face, they also agreed communications would play a major role in that issue.

Of 11 specific topics presented to respondents, 9 were identified as important activities/issues in which communications should play a role. The top activity, identified by directors, in which communications should play a role was, “setting of hunting and fishing regulations.” The top activity, identified by, I&E chiefs, in which communications should play a role was “habitat conservation and restoration.”

- **State agency personnel are open to the CCT providing the tools and information to enhance their communications efforts, but they want to maintain the responsibility for the actual performance and execution of communications in their state.**

When asked about possible CCT projects to assist member agencies, respondents had definite opinions. Projects dealing with information coordination and clearinghouse functions between member agencies and IAFWA were clearly the most needed. It was equally clear from the survey that respondents are reluctant to support any projects that were presently a function of member agencies’ I&E programs. If the function of the CCT was as a source for sharing “lessons learned” or case studies relating to agency communications, majorities of both agency directors (70%) and I&E chiefs (57%) said this would be very helpful. In comparison, the function identified as the least helpful to state agencies was, “providing sample news releases, op eds, and letters to the editor on issues of common concern” (19% of both directors and I&E chiefs said this would be very helpful).

- **One benefit the CCT could provide member states is to study the differences in the effectiveness of different communications methods and the reality of the effectiveness of such methods on reaching the general population.**

#### **POTENTIAL PROJECTS WHERE THE CCT COULD ASSIST MEMBER AGENCIES**

1. **Upon the establishment of the CCT, the CCT should prioritize those issues that they will focus on in assisting member agency communication efforts. The results of this study will assist in this effort.**
2. **The IAFWA consider efforts to educate and increase knowledge among all levels of fish and wildlife personnel about the programs and services the IAFWA offers its member states.**
3. **The CCT be available to assist member agencies to develop and promote formal communications policies.**
4. **The CCT attempt to change the belief that almost half (49%) of directors and more than a third (38%) of I&E chiefs hold regarding the idea that their agency’s activities are only somewhat relevant to their state’s news media.**