

WASHINGTON REPORT

April 4, 2023

Lee Van Wychen

WSSA Science Policy Committee: Past and Present

Two Directors of Science Policy and two of the three chairs of the Science Policy Committee (formerly known as the Washington Liaison Committee) pose for a picture after the general session at the WSSA/NEWSS 2023 annual meeting in Arlington, VA. Their leadership of the Science Policy Committee extends from 1990 to present. The only Science Policy Committee chair missing is Donn Shilling, Georgia, who chaired the committee from 2010 to 2018.



*Pictured (L to R): **Lee Van Wychen**, WSSA Executive Director of Science Policy: 2005 - present; **Rich Bonanno**, Associate Dean, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Director, North Carolina State Extension, and Chair, WSSA Washington Liaison/Science Policy Committee: 1990 – 2010; **Janis McFarland**, retired Syngenta; Chair, WSSA Science Policy Committee: 2018 – present; and **Rob Hedberg**, retired USDA-NIFA, WSSA Congressional Fellow 1995-1996 and Director of Science Policy, Washington Liaison/Science Policy Committee 1999 – 2005.*

WSSA Research Priorities Symposium Hosts 13 Federal Agency Reps

Thirteen federal agencies participated in a symposium held during the WSSA/NEWSS 2023 annual meeting that focused on identifying research gaps and weed management needs in both managed and natural ecosystems. The symposium was co-organized by Steve Young, USDA-ARS National Program Leader for Weeds and Invasive Pests and Jim Kells, WSSA NIFA Fellow. Dan Brainerd, Michigan State University and Chair of the Research Priorities Committee, shared insights from the 2022 research priorities survey to facilitate a discussion on the future of weed science in terms of research needs, program support, and national initiatives.



Federal agency reps participating in the WSSA research priorities symposium.

(Pictured first row: L to R) Paul Heimowitz, Department of the Interior (DOI) - US Geological Survey (USGS); Scott Pfister, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS); Steve Young, USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS), Jessica L. Burnett, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA); Seth Flanagan, DOI - Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and FICMNEW Co-chair; Doug Burkett, Department of Defense (DOD) Armed Forces Pest Management Board (AFPMB);

(Second Row): Jim Kells, WSSA-NIFA Fellow; Mike Ielmini, USDA Forest Service (USFS); Jeremy Crossland, DOD - Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE); Vijay Nandula, USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA); Cameron Douglass, USDA Office of Pest Management Policy (OPMP); Eric Bradley, Department of Energy, Office of Sustainable Environmental Stewardship (DOE – EHSS-21); Chris Taliga, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and FICMNEW Co-chair; Terri Hogan, DOI - National Park Service (NPS); Lee Van Wychen, WSSA Executive Director of Science Policy.

What is FICMNEW?

Since 12 of the current 20 FICMNEW agency members were present at the symposium, let's talk about my most favorite acronym in all of Washington DC (Note: NASA was represented at symposium, but is not a FICMNEW member agency at present). FICMNEW is the **Federal Interagency Committee for the Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds (FICMNEW)**. It meets regularly (quarterly or monthly) and represents a formal partnership between federal agencies with direct invasive plant management and regulatory responsibilities spanning across the United States and territories. These agencies support weed science research or invasive plant management, or both, through grant funding, technical assistance, and scientific studies. The remaining eight federal agency members and their principals not in the photo above are:

- USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (USDA - AMS) Ernest Allen

- DOI Bureau of Indian Affairs (DOI – BIA) Thomas Mendez
- DOI Bureau of Reclamation (DOI – BOR) Jolene Trujillo
- Department of Transportation (DOT) Rhonda Solomon
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Gisele Nighswander
- Farm Service Agency (USDA – FSA) open
- Federal Highway Administration (DOT – FHWA) Richard Darden
- US Fish & Wildlife Service (DOI – FWS) Xiomara Labiosa

While the FICMNEW federal agency meetings among the principals are closed, there is an open-to-the-public meeting typically following their closed meeting. The next open meeting is:

- *FICMNEW Open Meeting: April 26, 2023, 1:00 pm EST/11:00 am MDT*
- *Presentation:* Efforts to Control European Frogbit
- *Presenters:* Thomas Alwin and Sarah Lesage from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE)
- *FICMNEW Call-in information:* The public meeting will be held virtually. Call in instructions will be sent via email. Please email Seth Flanigan, sflanigan@blm.gov, if you are not on the FICMNEW electronic list and would like to receive a meeting invitation.

The IR-4 Project Commemorates 60 Years of Impact

This year, the IR-4 Project commemorates 60 years of operation. Since its establishment by land grant universities and the USDA in 1963, IR-4 has championed specialty crop growers by facilitating the registration of safe, effective pest management solutions to meet their unique needs.

Specialty crops, which include fruits, vegetables, nuts, herbs, and horticulture crops, are not typically served by agrochemical companies' registration efforts. Larger acreage, "major crops" (like corn and soybeans) typically yield higher returns on investment. This "minor use problem" spurred the founding of IR-4.

IR-4 upholds specialty crops as essential components of a healthy diet, a thriving landscape, and a robust U.S. economy. Since its founding, IR-4 has secured over 23,000 pest management product registrations through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for food crops (and countless others for ornamental crops). IR-4 evaluates a range of tools — including reduced-risk chemical and bio-based pesticides, as well as emerging technologies and integrated solutions. According to an economic impact study by Michigan State University in 2022, IR-4 contributes \$8.97 billion annually to the gross domestic product. [More info about the IR-Project.](#)



Weed Scientists attending the 60 year Celebration of the IR-4 Project on March 7 in Washington DC.

*Pictured (L to R): **Rob Hedberg**, retired USDA-NIFA, former WSSA Director of Science Policy; **Lee Van Wychen**, WSSA Executive Director of Science Policy; **Ray McAllister**, Senior Director, Regulatory Policy at CropLife America; **Dirk Drost**, retired Syngenta, Minor Use Foundation chairman, **Doug Buhler**, Assistant Vice President of Research and Innovation at Michigan State University; **Dan Kunkel**, former IR-4 Project manager, Northeast Field Product Development Director at AMVAC Chemical Corporation; **Jerry Baron**, Executive Director of the IR-4 Project; **Janis McFarland**, retired Syngenta, WSSA Science Policy Committee chair.*

Xochitl Torres Small Nominated for #2 Post at USDA



On February 16, Xochitl Torres Small was nominated to be Deputy Secretary for USDA under Secretary Tom Vilsack. The former New Mexico congresswoman (2019 – 2021) is currently serving as the USDA Under Secretary for Rural Development since 2021.

Torres graduated from Mayfield High School in Las Cruces, NM in absentia while she earned her International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma from Waterford Kamhlaba United World College in Mbabane, Swaziland. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Foreign Service degree from Georgetown University in 2008 and her Juris Doctor degree from the University of New Mexico School of Law.

Torres Small worked as a field representative for U.S. Senator Tom Udall (D-NM) from 2009 to 2012. She served as a federal law clerk in the New Mexico District from 2015 to 2016. She also worked as a water attorney with the Kemp Smith law firm.

Kevin Shea, APHIS Administrator, has been serving as Acting Deputy Secretary since March 3 when former Deputy Secretary Jewel Bronaugh retired.

Weed Science Societies Comment on EPA's Endangered Species Act Workplan

On February 14, the WSSA, along with APMS, NCWSS, NEWSS, SWSS and WSWS [submitted comments](#) in response to EPA's request for information on the Endangered Species Act (ESA) Workplan Update. This is a major step for EPA to harmonize its obligations under the ESA and the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA).

The draft ESA Workplan Update provides more details about how EPA plans to impose various mitigation measures that will be required on pesticide labels to meet its ESA obligations when registering a pesticide. There are concerns about some of the mitigation options such as "buffers to reduce pesticide drift and water runoff" or "do not use when rain is expected in the next 48 hours" — which raises other issues such as what or how compliance might be proven or enforced.

The ESA Workplan Update also describes initiatives that, according to EPA, will help it and other federal agencies improve approaches to mitigation under the ESA and improve the interagency consultation process outlined in the ESA Workplan. These initiatives include EPA's work to identify ESA mitigation measures for pilot species, incorporate early ESA mitigation measures for groups of pesticides (e.g., broadleaf herbicides), and develop region-specific ESA mitigations.

Press Release

The WSSA has also issued a press release on April 4 "[WSSA Encourages Growers to Act Now to Understand the Impact of EPA's Endangered Species Act Compliance Initiatives](#)" trying to raise awareness of the coming changes. **The bottom line - farmers and land owners need to become familiar with the EPA's updated workplan and how to access site specific application instructions online through EPA's [Bulletins Live! Two](#).** As we found out in January 2022 on the revised ESA-compliant Enlist One and Enlist Duo labels, applications might be prohibited in entire counties.

EPA Issues Endangered Species Protections for Three Herbicides and a Soil Fumigant

On February 1, the EPA implemented measures to protect 28 federally endangered and threatened Pacific salmon and steelhead species and their designated critical habitat from the effects of **bromoxynil, prometryn, metolachlor, and 1,3-D** (also known as telone).

Biological Opinions

In June 2021, after receiving public comments, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued final biological opinions for bromoxynil, prometryn, metolachlor, and 1,3-D. NMFS's biological opinions found that registered uses of these pesticides do not jeopardize listed salmon and steelhead species or adversely modify their critical habitats. **Because use of these pesticides may result in "take"** of individuals of listed salmon and steelhead species, the

biological opinions also describe **measures to minimize the potential for take and any impacts** of take. “Take” includes (among other things) unintentionally harming or killing an individual of a listed species.

Implementation

EPA has implemented these biological opinions by issuing [Endangered Species Protection Bulletins](#), available on the [Bulletins Live! Two](#) website, and approving label amendments to protect listed species, thereby fulfilling its obligations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for these pesticides for the listed salmon and steelhead species and their critical habitat.

The [Endangered Species Protection Bulletins](#) for the four pesticides **describe geographically specific use limitations** to protect listed salmon and steelhead species and critical habitat. The Bulletins include mitigation measures such as no-spray buffers, retention ponds, and vegetated ditches to minimize potential take.

The amended labeling for bromoxynil, prometryn, metolachlor, and 1,3-D products includes instructions for pesticide users to obtain Bulletins and follow their required mitigation measures. The labeling also includes guidance on how to report ecological incidents associated with pesticide applications, should users observe any. This work aligns with the goals outlined in EPA’s April 2022 ESA Workplan and its November 2022 ESA Workplan Update to provide practical, timely protections for listed species from pesticides.

EPA Aims to Reinstate 2015 Worker Protections From Pesticides

The EPA is requesting public comment on a proposed rule that would retain various pesticide Application Exclusion Zone (AEZ) requirements under the 2015 Agricultural Worker Protection Standard (WPS) that were not implemented as part of a previous agency final rule currently under a court-ordered stay.

Unveiled February 16, the pre-proposal seeks to “improve and modernize” protections under the agency’s 2015 standard on agricultural worker protection. EPA classifies the application exclusion zone as “the area surrounding the application that must be free of all persons, other than appropriately trained and equipped handlers, during pesticide applications.”

Under the proposal, EPA would reinstate provisions including:

- Applying the AEZ beyond an establishment’s boundaries and when workers are within easements, such as for utility workers to access telephone lines.
- Establishing AEZ distances for ground-based spray applications of 25 feet for medium or larger sprays when sprayed from a height greater than 12 inches from the soil surface or planting medium, and 100 feet for fine sprays.

EPA issued a final rule in October 2020 revising the AEZ requirement. However, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York last year extended its stay of the rule, which initially was granted on Dec. 28, 2020 – the day before the final rule was to have taken effect.

The prepublication version of the proposal states that “since the 2020 AEZ rule has not been implemented due to the court-ordered stay,” the 2015 WPS “continues to provide the operative regulatory language for the AEZ requirements during the current stay and any future extensions of the stay.”

Still, the agency proposes to keep elements of the 2020 rule, including:

- Exempting farm owners’ immediate family members from the requirement.
- Establishing clarifying language stating that pesticide applications suspended as a result of individuals entering an exclusion zone may be resumed after the individuals have left the area.

EPA officially issued the proposed rule titled “Pesticides: Agricultural Worker Protection Standard; Reconsideration of the Application Exclusion Zone Amendments” on March 13, 2023.

The proposed rule is available at [EPA-HQ-OPP-2022-0133-0002](https://www.epa.gov/pesticides/pesticides-agricultural-worker-protection-standard-reconsideration-application-exclusion-zone-amendments). **Comments are due on or before May 12, 2023.**

Dr. Chris Boomsma Selected as New CAST EVP/CEO



The Council for Agricultural Science and Technology (CAST) announced on March 8 that Dr. Chris Boomsma will be their next Executive Vice President and Chief Executive Officer (EVP/CEO). Kent Schescke, the current EVP/CEO, will retire at the end of August after eight successful years with CAST.

Dr. Boomsma is currently serving as the Director of Education for the American Society of Agronomy, the Crop Science Society of America, and the Soil Science Society of America (ACSESS). In addition, he is the Director of Science and Strategy for Decode 6 educational platform. Prior to joining ACSESS, he worked as a research director for Purdue

University and a strategist and scientist at Dow AgroSciences (now Corteva). More details at <https://www.cast-science.org/cast-announces-dr-chris-boomsma-as-next-evp-ceo/>

2023 National Invasive Species Awareness Week (NISAW) Recap

NISAW was held virtually from February 20-26 and organized by the North American Invasive Species Management Association (NAISMA). Sponsors included the WSSA, Wyoming Weed and Pest Council, Washington Invasive Species Council, SePRO, UPL, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, and Bayer. [NISAW](#) included:

- 5 Webinars
- 36 webinar presenters
- 65 events on the NISAW calendar
- 759 attendees
- 1,045 advocacy letters sent to members of Congress
- 11,000+ people reached via email marketing

NISAW 2024 is scheduled for **February 26 – March 3, 2024** in Washington DC. This will be the 25th anniversary and planning is already under way. My hope is that all the invasive species stakeholder groups traveling to Washington DC will make **establishing an invasive species management fund** their #1 priority.

Establishing an Invasive Species Management Fund

A common theme during the Invasive Species Advisory Committee (ISAC) meeting held virtually on March 6 – 8, and the first ISAC meeting since 2019, is that we need a consolidated all-purpose **source of funding for invasive species prevention, research, and management.**

Global trade provides many benefits to us as consumers, but there is no question that one of the indirect costs is the importation of invasive species. I have begun work on Capitol Hill discussing legislation similar to what Hawaii passed into law in 2008 ([HB2843](#)) where an inspection, quarantine, and eradication service fee was assessed on the net weight of freight, computed on the basis of **50 cents for every 1,000 pounds of freight** brought into the state.

As an example, there would be a \$3 fee assessed for a 6,000 pound SUV imported into the U.S. A rough estimate of U.S. import data suggests that this inspection, quarantine, and eradication service fee would generate about \$1 billion per year for a federal invasive species management fund. Please email me with any thought, concerns or suggestions.

China Battles Smooth Cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) at Unprecedented Scale

Science. 8 MAR 2023. By Erik Stokstad.

Along its 18,000 kilometers of coastline, China has been taken over by a green invader. Smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) grows tall and thick across tidal mudflats, depriving endangered migratory birds of habitat, clogging shipping channels, and ruining clam farms. Now, China aims to beat back 90% of the weed by 2025. “This is a mammoth undertaking,” says Steven Pennings, a coastal ecologist at the University of Houston. “It’s audacious.”

Spartina, native to eastern North America, was brought to China starting in 1979 to stabilize tidal mudflats and turn them into land for agriculture or development. The plan worked, but the *Spartina* kept spreading and now covers about 68,000 hectares, about the area of New York City. The government has realized, says Yihui Zhang, a wetland ecologist at Xiamen University, that “the harm of *Spartina alterniflora* outweighs its benefits.” It dominates native salt marshes,

outcompeting native plants that provide food for indigenous species such as the reed parrotbill, which has declined as a result. [Continue reading in Science](#).

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National and Regional Weed Science Meetings

Jul. 24 - 27, 2023 Aquatic Plant Management Society (APMS), Indianapolis, IN www.apms.org
Dec. 11 - 14, 2023 North Central Weed Science Society (NCWSS), Minneapolis, MN www.ncwss.org
Jan. 8 - 11, 2024 Northeastern Weed Science Society (NEWSS), Gettysburg, PA www.newss.org
Jan. 22 - 25, 2024 Southern Weed Science Society (SWSS), San Antonio, TX www.swss.ws
Jan. 22 - 25, 2024 Weed Science Society of America (WSSA), San Antonio, TX www.wssa.net
Feb. 26–Mar. 3, 2024, 25th National Invasive Species Awareness Week, Washington DC www.nisaw.org
Mar 4 - 7, 2024 Western Society of Weed Science (WSWS), Denver, CO www.wsweedsociety.org