

OUR PROJECT

Our team was tasked with actively supporting H.R. 4647 – Recovering America’s Wildlife Act (RAWA) during the 2018 Congressional session. This bill represented a once-in-a generation opportunity to create a new funding model for wildlife conservation in the 21st Century, and the Texas Chapter of the Wildlife Society (TCTWS; hereafter the Texas Chapter) has identified it as a vital opportunity for conservation in Texas. We supported RAWA last year by building upon the work of other professionals within the Texas Chapter including the 2016 JGTCLI Cohort, as well as many other organizations. By generating engagement and support within the Texas Chapter membership, as well as within Congress, our team was ultimately successful in generating more cosponsors for H.R. 4647.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Our team formed project vision and goals by generating ideas that were accomplishable given our limited time frame (~1 year), our resources (creativity, time, and our position within the membership), and our limited knowledge of policy engagement and advocacy. We felt it was best to start generating broad-based engagement within the organization in which we had the most connections: the Texas Chapter. Rather than spending too much time establishing relationships within other organizations, we could use existing networks within the Texas Chapter and leverage this base of membership support to encourage engagement outside of the organization.

In considering Texas Chapter membership engagement, our assumption was that there was a small minority of the membership that was already heavily involved in generating support, educating about, and campaigning for the passage of RAWA, with the rest of the membership either knowing very little about it, or unsure how to how to get involved. With this basic assumption, supported by the experiences and impressions of other professional members within the Texas Chapter, our team began to formulate strategies to address this knowledge gap and to encourage a wider base of membership engagement and support.

For our team to consider ourselves successful, we wanted to increase the number of Texas Chapter members that were aware of RAWA, and the number of members actively engaging U.S. Representatives in support of RAWA. We brainstormed numerous strategies that we did not ultimately pursue, including: a widespread social media campaign, surveys of member awareness, creation of a forum and message board, direct non-member organizational engagement, and a targeted marketing campaign. However, after further assessment, we felt that these strategies were not feasible given our timeframe, resources, and abilities.

To give an example, with two of our group members working in communications, one feasible strategy that we explored was a social media and communications plan. However, while it would have been easy to implement a limited impersonal outreach campaign, we did not feel that the impact of that social media strategy alone would move the needle as much within the Texas Chapter as our group intended. This is especially true considering the currently limited involvement that most of our membership has with the Texas Chapter social media platforms. Instead of focusing on this aspect of the project, we created a simple communications plan, utilizing a variety of communications and media tools to supplement our other communication efforts within the Texas Chapter.

A similar conclusion was made when considering reaching out to the Texas Chapter members through surveys and email updates. Many organizations and companies clutter email accounts, so the likelihood of a significant percentage benefitting from this impersonal outreach seemed low again. We believed our time and energy would be better spent on personal engagement with members.

With these conclusions, and the goal of increasing knowledge and engagement within the Texas Chapter, our team initiated three strategies, (1) the creation of a RAWA engagement package, (2) direct engagement and activation of student chapter members, and (3) direct engagement and activation of professional members. The first strategy was intended to support our other efforts within the Texas Chapter. The engagement package would be a tool kit that included presentations, letters of support templates, one-page information sheets, and a RAWA ArcGIS Story Map. Although some of these materials were available online and in other places, we planned to group them all together in one place for ease of access. Our intention was that the toolkit would allow members to go from knowing nothing or very little about RAWA to speaking confidently about the bill, its status, why it would be so impactful if passed, and what people could do to support it.

The two-pronged approach of our membership engagement would allow us to target both influential members, which represent a relatively small group within the Texas Chapter, while simultaneously attempting to generate a broader base of support by targeting student chapters, which represent approximately half of the membership. At the key influencer level, we asked the Texas Chapter Executive Board to identify 21 members they considered to be a high priority target within the profession or within natural resource policy. We then asked those influencers to activate their personal and professional networks including congressional donors, committees on which they serve, other influential professionals, direct Representative contacts, etc. Additionally, they served as our resource for introductions to other groups or individuals in support of our fourth and final strategy outlined in the following paragraph. At the student level, our team asked students to engage and educate their university chapters, spread information amongst their personal networks, organize letter-signing events, conduct presentations to local interest groups, and host information booths. We also proposed creating an incentivized competition for students, which would reward those university chapters that were most engaged. The winner of the competition would be awarded based on activities completed (i.e., number of presentations, number of letters sent, number of signatures on a petition of support, etc.), and be recognized in the plenary session at the TCTWS annual meeting.

As part of our training and personal goal to become better leaders within the Texas Chapter, and within the larger conservation community, we felt we could not ask others to engage with Congress without doing the same ourselves. Our assumption, supported by conversations with professionals already engaged with RAWA, was that support for H.R. 4647 in Congress was limited because Representatives had not heard of the bill, not because of any organized opposition. Therefore, our fourth and final strategy was to educate Representatives and their staff, by sending letters of support, and by having meetings over the phone or in-person to introduce H.R. 4647, and to encourage them to cosponsor. We felt that this final strategy was our best opportunity to directly influence the number of cosponsors and to lead by example, particularly for other Texas Chapter members who like ourselves, had no previous experience with advocacy or congressional engagement.

Once we finalized these four strategies, we proposed them to the Texas Chapter Executive Board with key measurable goals and time lines for achievement (Appendix A). After review of our proposal from the Executive Board, three strategies were accepted as proposed. However, based on feedback from the Executive Board and the Student Activities committee, we decided against forming a separate formal student competition. It was decided that since the student chapters were already working on their student chapter of the year applications, an additional competition would be a burden on their already limited

time. It may have been more feasible if introduced earlier in the academic year. However, several advisors also pointed out that the student chapter of the year award already provided a framework for rewarding student work, and so an additional competition may be redundant. Given this information, we decided to forgo a separate competition and push forward with engaging the student chapters and encouraging their action in supporting RAWA on behalf of the Texas Chapter.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND ACHIEVEMENTS

ENGAGEMENT PACKAGE

As mentioned above, our team had initially brainstormed a variety of ways to communicate with the Texas Chapter Members, both professional and student, as well as the general public. Overall, we determined that creating an engagement package comprised of general information and communication materials about RAWA would allow us to direct interested members and individuals to the same set of tools. This communications package consisted of materials put together by our team, both the National and Texas Alliances for America's Fish and Wildlife, the National Wildlife Federation, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and other partners committed to ensuring the passage of RAWA. Materials included facts sheets, PowerPoint presentations, letters of support, a RAWA promotional video, and clear direction for what was currently needed from the Texas Wildlife Alliance. We were able to send these materials to student chapter members and professional members interested in engaging with the bill. We also created an ArcGIS StoryMap as tool that could be used to spread this information to wide audiences, including email blasts to the Texas Chapter and the Texas Wildlife Alliance audiences, and through Facebook to wider audiences. We also worked directly with the Texas Chapter to put out newsletter articles in the TCTWS quarterly newsletter. This strategy allowed the membership to be aware of the efforts our team was making on this bill. These materials can be found at <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1kGHIO6uA3zdTaI7gzYIIVd0Z3TS77wDh?usp=sharing>.

STUDENT CHAPTER

Our team started by initiating contact with student chapter advisors to gauge their chapters' potential interest. Once advisors had been contacted and any advice or suggestions incorporated into our approach, we contacted the student chapter presidents and boards to introduce RAWA, pitch our plan, and encourage them to get involved. Most meetings with student chapters were over the phone, a few in-person meetings were held, and in some cases, we facilitated meetings between student chapter members and other influential professionals who could assist them. Many of the student chapter presidents or board members were eager to get more involved so we equipped them with our engagement package which included guidance on specific actions they could take to support RAWA. By far, the strategy that was most adopted and successfully implemented was the letter writing/ signature events. In these student-organized events, student chapters used letter-of-support templates to generate signatures from other students and community members, or to create personalized appeals to their own Representatives. Other activities included presentations to local interest groups, social media engagement, advocacy articles in local and school newspapers, and partnerships with other conservation organizations in contacting Representatives. Additionally, one of the materials in our toolkit that proved most useful to the student chapters was a simple PowerPoint presentation that made it easier to communicate the basics of RAWA.

The student chapter's work was outstanding. We had eight chapters out of the nine we established direct contact with join in the effort in some fashion. These eight chapters at a minimum all joined the Texas Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife (hereafter the Texas Wildlife Alliance). There were two

chapters in particular that led the way in their efforts, creating their own internal incentives for members, and keeping up with each other's efforts: Tarleton State University and Stephen F. Austin University. While one of the difficulties of the project was trying to track the efforts of the student chapter's, some of the efforts and completed actions they have shared with us are listed below:

- Tarleton:
 - 133 letters of support sent including 300 signatures on a support petition
 - Gave 6 presentations to local organizations including Texas Master Naturalists
 - Published articles in university publications
- SFA:
 - 600+ letters sent
 - Published articles in university and local newspapers
 - Gave presentations for local rotary clubs, landowner associations, and safari club
- Texas Tech:
 - Social media posts
 - Published an article in alumni newsletter
 - Sent letters to Representatives
- TAMU-Kingsville:
 - Sent letters to Representatives
- TAMU:
 - Held letter signing events
 - Gave presentations to local conservation and student organizations
- Texas State:
 - Published articles in the school newsletter
 - Partnered with the Bat Association of Texas to send letters and make phone calls to Representatives
 - Created a committee specifically devoted to supporting RAWA into the future.

The student members, through their own efforts, helped us to achieve a broader base of support within the Texas Chapter and were recognized both within the Texas Chapter and also by the parent Wildlife society for their efforts in their professional newsletter. In the end, this portion of the Texas Chapter membership became more aware and active in supporting RAWA. Their efforts joined the larger state- and nationwide effort to increase the amount of U.S. Representatives contacted about H.R. 4647. We have also seen that this project has encouraged a number of students to pay more attention to policy. We hope that this will encourage them to engage in these efforts in the future, no matter where they are in their education or careers. Moving forward, we believe that engaging with the student membership on key "hot button" topics could be an effective way to educate the next generation of conservation professionals on the impact of wildlife and conservation policy, facilitate meetings between students and influential conservation professionals, and to generate broad-based support within the Texas Chapter.

TARGETING MEMBERS

Engaging with and activating the 21 key members identified by the Executive Board was the second prong of our membership engagement strategy. We felt that these 21 individuals would be key allies in our effort to activate the rest of the professional members, the conservation community, and Representatives. All these individuals are heavily involved within the Texas Chapter and the conservation community and come from numerous organizations and backgrounds. Our team contacted these members to gauge their interest, knowledge level, and willingness to help. The ask of these influencers was that they activate their networks and to help promote RAWA and to facilitate our own engagement with Representatives.

Our team contacted these 21 influential members and supplied them with portions of our engagement package if it was useful to them or sought out their advice and counsel in engaging with RAWA. We made a commitment to stay in contact with those members who wanted updates on RAWA's progress and provided input for members where needed to encourage additional action. Through this process, our target members provided insight into efforts they were currently undertaking to support RAWA and gave information on the reception of RAWA within committees they served or through other organizations for which they work. This process led ultimately to key partners that assisted us in meeting with Representatives, contact with political or policy liaisons, contact with Federal Agency Representatives, better targeting of messaging to Representatives, and the sign-on of other organizations such as the Texas Section of the Society for Rangeland Management to the Texas Wildlife Alliance.

Overall, the influencer contacts and engagement were a success for our team, although their impact was slightly different than we had initially anticipated. Through their time and efforts, we made more introductions to organizations, were better able to craft our own congressional outreach, and reached a larger network than we could have had we just relied on our own networks and resources. To our knowledge, direct congressional outreach as a result of our interaction with influencers was low, but our strategy still proved effective in the other ways mentioned. As RAWA is reintroduced in the 2019 Congressional session, engaging specific influential members could once again prove to have an important role in bolstering the support and knowledge of the bill. Through our work with these influencers, we were able to achieve a more informed, educated, and active Texas Chapter membership. However, our approach to engaging Texas Chapter influential members in the future would have to be more targeted, to allow influential members to engage in the way that best matches their experience.

DIRECT CONGRESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

The final strategy our team employed was direct engagement with U.S. Representatives. Our largest hurdle was our own inexperience, which made direct contact with Representatives seem daunting or maybe even impossible. This was a feeling shared by many other early-career professionals with whom we spoke, and it was this hesitancy that our influential members and those involved with the Teer Institute worked hard to help us to overcome. We are exceedingly grateful.

We began our Representative engagement by identifying Representatives in our communities – Austin, Dallas, and San Antonio. Our strategy was to target districts where we were constituents first, and then to target neighboring districts if and when we had some success. To coordinate our efforts with other organizations we maintained close contact with the Texas Wildlife Alliance. They supplied us with a list of potential target Representatives and helped to coordinate our messaging with other community members as well as to avoid duplication of effort. Briefly described below are four examples of our Representative engagement actions and achievements:

- Met with staff at Representative Lloyd Doggett's staff in San Antonio, TX. The Representative had been unaware of the bill before our meeting. By scheduling the meeting, we precipitated review by staff, as well as a round of contact by Texas Wildlife Alliance community members.
- Met with Representative Joaquin Castro's District Coordinator and secured a promise to show some of our RAWA engagement materials to D.C. policy staff. However, after some weeks of inaction we were put in touch with another member of the Texas Wildlife Alliance within San Antonio, the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance who had a personal relationship with the Representative and facilitated the meeting. We met with Representative Joaquin Castro for a brief

meeting during which he tentatively suggested he would cosponsor after further review of the bill.

- Although we never had a face to face meeting, we were able to make contact with former Chairman Lamar Smith. We had a series of conversations through email and over the phone in which we shared elements of the engagement package including the Texas Chapter letter of support and discussed the possibilities that RAWA represented. Chairman Smith eventually sent the bill and the Texas Chapter letter on to his D.C. policy staff for review. Especially important in Representative Smith's support of the bill was its introduction by Representative Fortenberry, whom Rep. Smith admired.
- We contacted Representative Kenny Marchant's staff to encourage his support of H.R. 4647. Staff responded that the Representative would not cosponsor the bill until it had left committee.

Our direct Representative engagement contributed to an additional three cosponsors to H.R. 4647 within Texas and included Rep. Lloyd Doggett, Rep. Joaquin Castro, and Rep. Lamar Smith. Time and persistence were key in contacting these Representatives; by far our largest challenge was securing meetings and responses that ensured actual engagement of the Representative. With the exception of Representative Marchant, the idea of "preventative maintenance," or "proactive conservation," that prevents federal listing through conservation, was a selling point. Rep. Castro was interested in getting some specific examples of how funds could be used within the San Antonio area. The introduction of the bill by a Republican was an important selling point for at least one member (Rep. Smith).

Given that our team had no policy or advocacy experience we feel that our success shows that any investment in training professionals to engage with Representatives can yield results. Our largest initial barriers to action were our own perception that we were not experienced enough or skilled enough to engage. It was the training we received as part of the Teer Institute, and the support of many other members which encouraged us to engage. If the four of us could help to gain an additional three cosponsors, we believe that additional investment in advocacy training could yield impressive results if applied more broadly within the chapter.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, our team was tasked with actively supporting H.R. 4647 – Recovering America's Wildlife Act in the 2018 Congressional session. To successfully meet this challenge, we had to develop a plan and execute it with the goal of increasing Texas Chapter member awareness and support of RAWA with the hope of creating more cosponsors to the bill and having a majority of the Texas Chapter's membership engaged in supporting RAWA. We did this by creating a RAWA engagement package in support of direct Texas Chapter membership engagement at two levels – students and key influencers. Our efforts led to more engagement within the Texas Chapter. We also directly engaged with Representatives which led to an additional three cosponsors to H.R. 4647. Our team feels that we accomplished our goal of a more aware and active Texas Chapter membership and were successful in "moving the needle" on conservation. Since H.R. 4647 did not pass, we hope that our efforts can be improved and better targeted in the future, to yield more results and to create a culture of engagement within the Texas Chapter that will help to get RAWA passed when it is re-introduced this session.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In moving forward, we feel that the work and successes of our teams' efforts can be duplicated, improved, and expanded in the future to generate more support for RAWA or other "hot button" issues as they arise. Based our experiences, we make the following recommendations to improve efforts in the future.

- *ENGAGEMENT PACKAGE*
 - Continued updating of the engagement package, including the Texas Chapter Support letter, informative materials, presentations that can be shared and modified, and the ArcGIS Story Map, that can act as a key engagement piece for education on RAWA and where it stands in the process.
 - Advice and guidance on engaging with Congress should be added to the engagement package.
- *STUDENT CHAPTERS*
 - Students view their social media presence as an integral part of their long-term personal and professional development. Working with students in the future, rewarding and recognizing their work on social media platforms should be considered crucial in the planning stages of a student engagement strategy.
 - Generally, a broader, more active social media presence by the Texas Chapter on these types of issues would be helpful. Since students are (1) actively engaged and familiar across many social media platforms, and (2) are far more interested in developing social media content and engagement than many current professional members, we suggest that students should be given an active role in updating and creating the Texas Chapter's social media pages. This may also be an opportunity to increase their contact with professional members in order to create content.
 - Guidance on how and when student chapters can engage directly with Representatives and their staff on behalf of the Texas Chapter could facilitate more engagement. We suggest a process by which students could propose meetings to their advisors, and advisors could coordinate with the Conservation Affairs Committee.
- *PROFESSIONAL MEMBERS*
 - A simple step-by-step instruction for professional members to have their first meeting with a Representative. Once a professional has even just one experience with a Representative or their staff we believe that they will be far more willing to engage in the future.
 - Influential members were crucial throughout our process and provided assistance in getting started. We suggest exploring additional opportunities to pair experienced members with inexperienced members to encourage congressional engagement.

Appendix A: Project Proposal sent to TCTWS Executive Board

Our Jim Teer group was tasked with “moving the needle forward” on current efforts for the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act (RAWA), a bipartisan bill that will implement a new funding model for wildlife conservation in America. To form our project goals, we made the assumption that a majority of Texas Chapter of the Wildlife Society (TCTWS) membership (as well as the general public) either are unaware of RAWA or do not know how they can actively support current legislative efforts.

After much thought and consideration, we recommend a two-pronged approach. The first strategy is to engage the active university student chapter members through the student chapter competition, which will culminate in student presentations at the Texas Chapter Annual Meeting in February 2019. Our second strategy is to educate and engage top influencers of the TCTWS membership, as selected by the board, to spread awareness and action through their networks.

With two of our group members working in communications, a feasible strategy seemed to be a social media and communications plan at first. However, we concluded that although easy to implement an impersonal outreach campaign, the potential impact of a social media strategy alone would not move the needle as much as the group intended. While this will not be the focus of the project, we do intend to create a simple communications plan, utilizing a variety of communications and media tools to communicate with the TCTWS membership.

A similar conclusion was made when considering reaching out to the TCTWS members through surveys and email updates. Many organizations and companies clutter email accounts, so the likelihood of a significant percentage benefitting from this impersonal outreach seemed low again. We believe our time and energy would be better spent on personal engagement with members.

Instead of reaching out to the entire TCTWS with one easy strategy, our group decided to focus on personally interacting with select groups and individuals to educate them with the goal of activating their extensive and influential networks. We will personally email, call, or meet them in-person if feasible. Ultimately, we decided to focus our efforts on two groups that could potentially make the most impact on the RAWA effort: the student chapters and select influential TCTWS members.

For the student chapters, we plan to first reach out to the student chapter advisors, who will be essential in influencing and motivating students while the students are on summer break (August 2018). We will organize and initiate a competition between student chapters by educating them on current RAWA agenda and needs. We will remain up to date with the current Texas-wide RAWA effort by coordinating with the Texas Alliance for America’s Fish and Wildlife (TAAFW), the group spearheading efforts for the bill in Texas. This will direct our efforts where they will be most effective and avoid duplication of effort. For example, if the Alliance says they need more signatures from organizations, we will present the students with project examples in September that involve reaching out to local organizations for letters of support. The students will then present their projects/posters at the TCTWS Annual Meeting, and the winning chapter will be recognized at the plenary session.

To reach top influencers, we plan to engage a group of ~20 of the most influential TCTWS members. Ideally, these individuals will have a large network of influential stakeholders that they could reach out to after we have informed them of RAWA. We will personally reach out to these individuals, see if they know about RAWA, and educate them on what they can do to help the effort through direct and measurable action. We hope this will help keep the legislation moving forward by allowing our influential members to indirectly activate the private sector, industry, and NGOs. Again, we will stay informed on the most beneficial actions by staying in contact with Texas Alliance.

We will educate and inform TCTWS members by organizing and distilling the large amount of information already available from several organizations into an easily consumable TCTWS engagement packet, which we will prepare in July. This will be in the form of a living online document that will be updated as the legislation moves forward.

To keep the general Texas Chapter membership updated, we will also incorporate RAWA materials in a general Communication Plan that includes writing articles for the TCTWS newsletter and creating posts for the TCTWS Facebook page.

If this strategy is approved, we ask that the board supply us with two items by June 30:

- A list of 20 influential Texas Chapter members, as identified by the board, that the board members feel that their involvement will aid in our efforts to “move the needle” forward by generating support for the passage of RAWA
- Approval for the initiation of a student chapter competition on hot button topics, with this year’s focus on RAWA, as a portion of the overall Student Chapter of the Year Award. These projects will culminate in oral presentations within a concurrent session at the annual meeting.