

Science Policy Report
Lee Van Wychen
WSWS Annual Meeting, Tucson, AZ
March 2 - 5, 2026

2026 Science Policy Committee Members

Stanley Culpepper	Chair	WSSA
Cameron Douglass	Vice Chair	WSSA
Lee Van Wychen	Executive Director Science Policy	WSSA
Hilary Sandler	Past President	WSSA
Ian Burke	President	WSSA
Dawn Refsell	President-Elect	WSSA
Jacob Barney	Vice President	WSSA
John Byrd	EPA Liaison	WSSA
Todd Baughman	NIFA Fellow	WSSA
John Wallace	CAST Rep	WSSA
Bart Clewis	Public Awareness Chair	WSSA
Bill Chism	WSSA Regulatory Contractor	non-voting
David Belles	US HRAC Committee Chair	WSSA
Becca Haynie	CropLife America Science Policy Dir.	WSSA
Janis McFarland	At-Large	WSSA
Jill Schroeder	At-Large	WSSA
Mark VanGessel	At-Large	WSSA
Ray McAllister	At-Large	WSSA
Lyn Gettys	President	APMS
<u>Rob Richardson</u>	<u>APMS Rep</u>	<u>APMS</u>
Brett Miller	President	NCWSS
<u>Erin Burns</u>	<u>NCWSS Rep</u>	<u>NCWSS</u>
Katelyn Venner	President	NEWSS
<u>Claudia Bland</u>	<u>NEWSS Rep</u>	<u>NEWSS</u>
Eric Palmer	President	SWSS
<u>Peter Dotray</u>	<u>SWSS Rep</u>	<u>SWSS</u>
Carl Coburn	President	WSWS
<u>Lisa Rew</u>	<u>WSWS Rep</u>	<u>WSWS</u>
Aleah Butler-Jones	Science Policy Fellow	non-voting
Cole-Woolard	Science Policy Fellow	non-voting

Science Policy Fellows

Hilary Sandler, Janis McFarland and I reviewed and selected two Science Policy Fellows for 2025-2026.

- **Aleah Butler-Jones** is a third year Ph.D. student at Cornell studying under the direction of Dr. Lynn Sosnoskie.
- **Matthew “Cole” Woolard** is a second-year Ph.D. student at Texas Tech pursuing his doctorate degree with Dr. Peter Dotray.

- The applications for the 2026-2027 Science Policy Fellows are due **March 27, 2026**.
- Database of Congressional Contacts
 - Ongoing work to provide high profile staff contacts both in DC and in local field offices.
 - Goal is to invite these contacts in field offices to field days & other weed science events

Weed Science Related Conferences and Meetings Attended (virtually or in-person):

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| • APMS- Providence, RI | • Friends of ARS - 2 virtual |
| • NCWSS- Grand Rapids, MI | • IR-4 Commodity Liaison Committee - 4 virtual |
| • NEWSS- Hershey, PA | • AAPCO/SFIREG – 1 in-person |
| • SWSS- Charleston, SC | • PPDC – 1 virtual |
| • WSWS- Tucson, AZ | • NCFAR- 1 virtual; 1 in-person |
| • Pesticide Policy Coalition: 1 in-person, 6 virtual | • FICMNEW – 2 virtual |
| • ESA Tour in NC/VA from Sep. 22-24 | • NAISMA Legislative Com. – 6 virtual |
| • AFRI coalition - 4 virtual | • ISAC/NISC – 2 virtual |

WSSA Committee Work

- **Public Awareness Committee:** advised, reviewed and edited 34 weed science related press releases as of Dec. 14. Attended 20 Zoom meetings. Identified and nominated “Excellence in Journalism Award” recipients
- **Research Priorities Committee:** Continue to disseminate and highlight the 2023 weed research priorities survey (*Weed Sci.* 71: 330–343.).
 - Working on a proposal to develop a database of current status of human resources committed to weed science (last update was Derr & Rana 2011), as well as the economic return to the US GDP on federal weed science funded research
 - List and describe success cases of weed management
 - Communication materials such as one-pagers, booklets, and powerpoint presentations that summarize the results of the studies including the statistics and success cases
 - Recommendations of approaches to recruit graduate students and encourage them to consider academia and industry positions that prioritize weed science
- **Website Committee-**
 - Continue work to update and refresh the WSSA science policy website with both regulatory and research issues, a newly developed [WSSA Policy Priorities “one pager”](#), science policy newsletters, Farm Bills, etc... Many thanks to Refsell, Sandler, Burke and the regional weed science presidents for their input on the policy priorities one pager. <https://wssa.net/society/science-policy/>

- I also work to update and maintain the common and troublesome weed survey webpage: <https://wssa.net/weed/surveys/>
- **Invasive Plants Committee:** Advocating and planning for National Invasive Species Awareness Week (NISAW). See below. Maintaining a strong presence in the invasive weeds community and promoting the Invasive Plant Science and Management journal. I'm also on the North American Invasive Species Management Association's (NAISMA) legislative committee
- **Endangered Species Act Committee:** Helping assimilate and circulate information on how the Endangered Species Act (ESA) will impact weed management in agriculture and the environment.
 - AcreBlitz will have a product for sale regarding ESA requirements to view as an example. Primary focus is on ESA issues for aerial applicators
 - WSSA has an excellent ESA section: <https://wssa.net/endangered-species/>
 - CLA outreach and implementation material: <http://www.croplifeamerica.org/esa>
 - Culpepper and Chism highlighted in four Youtube videos
 - WSSA selected Chism as its first ever "Regulatory Contractor". This role provides a stipend for travel so he can travel to different conferences and meetings to present on various regulatory issues related to ESA herbicide strategy and uniform pesticide labels.

FY 2026 Appropriations and Government Shutdown

- Longest government shutdown in US history ended after 43 days
- Overall, USDA Research and Extension funding did well, if you consider level funding a success (which it is in this budget climate).
- USDA-ARS increased by \$5million while USDA-NIFA decreased by \$10 million
- Hatch Act, Smith Lever 3(b) and 3(c), IR-4, and Crop Protection and Pest Management (CPPM) remained at the same levels as FY 2025. Three of those programs faced severe cuts in the Presidents skinny budget.

Weed Science Presidents Travel to DC to Promote Ag Research Funding

May 2025 Congressional Visits with Weed Science Society Presidents: Hilary Sandler, Ian Burke, Dawn Refsell, Thierry Besancon, Eric Palmer, and Carl Coburn. Mark Bernards participated virtually.

- Constituent coffees with Sen. Roger Wicker (MS), Sen. Joni Ernst (IA), Sen. Amy Klobuchar (MN), and Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith
- Meetings with over 30 Congressional staffers.
 - Key issues included the MAHA report, the implications of a "skinny Farm Bill" and funding for USDA capacity programs, IR-4 and Crop Protection & Pest Management. (CPPM)
- Meetings with the National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research (NCFAR), CropLife America (CLA), American Soybean Association (ASA) & the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF).

- Ag staffers wanted examples of how federal funding cuts and probationary staff terminations at USDA were impacting local stakeholders.
- WSSA held its first virtual town hall on July 25. It was a chance to share pros and cons of federal impacts, with the hope of passing the information gained onto the congressional representatives

MAHA report

- Released Sep. 2025. Definite improvement on pesticide policy over first draft released in May.
- Secretary's Rollins, RFK Jr, and Dr. Oz made a MAHA announcement at USDA on Dec. 11 launching a \$700 million regenerative ag pilot program based on existing NRCS EQIP and CSP programs. \$400 million from EQIP and \$300 million from CSP. The \$700 million is not new money, just a carve out of existing mandatory funds (\$2 billion). Lee is setting up a meeting with Aubrey Bettencourt, Chief of the NRCS during the week of March 16 to discuss the possibility of getting a weed scientist on the 15 person advisory panel.
- No federally accepted definition of regenerative ag, but focus is on soil health, water retention, ecological vitality. Weed management and cover crops will be critical.
- [TSPs include](#) individuals, private businesses, American Indian tribes, nonprofit organizations, and public agencies.
California and Vermont have legal definitions of regenerative agriculture. We are in favor of the [Vermont definition](#)

USDA Reorganization Proposal

- The Weed Science Societies expressed our opposition to any proposal that would result in the closure or downsizing of USDA-ARS labs. It was endorsed by six national and regional weed science societies. [The letter can be accessed here.](#)
- The administration indicated they will be closing the USDA ARS Beltsville over the next 3 years, but how that will happen is uncertain. Steve Mirsky was recently promoted to the Director of Digital Ag (unofficial title) which reports directly to the USDA ARS Administrator Joon Park.
- Recent USDA action indicates that USDA will be moving forward with their reorganization plan. Once the school year ends, they will begin to relocate employees to one of the five regional hubs: Raleigh, NC; Indianapolis, IN; Kansas City, MO; Fort Collins, CO; and Salt Lake City, UT.

Dicamba

EPA announced a proposed decision to approve the use of three dicamba products for application on dicamba-resistant cotton and dicamba-resistant soybean in August.

Proposed mitigation measures:

- A single use maximum application rate of 0.5 lb. a.e., max 1 lb per yr.
- No aerial applications.
- Maintaining a 240-ft downwind buffer.
- The spray solution must include approved drift reduction and pH buffering agents
- No applications above 95 F. Temperature dependent restrictions below 95 F
- Three points of mitigation required based on the [runoff/erosion mitigation menu](#).

- Users must access and follow any applicable endangered species bulletin from “[Bulletins Live! Two](#)” web-based system. Six points of runoff/erosion mitigation will be required in some pesticide use limitation areas (PULAs)
- WSSA Board voted not to submit any comments, but encouraged individual weed scientists to comment

FWS & NMFS Proposal to Rescind “harm” from Endangered Species Act (ESA)

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) proposed to rescind the regulatory definition of "harm" (indirect habitat disruption) under ESA, which included habitat modification that injures species, aiming to align with the ESA's text and narrow the scope of the statutory "take" definition (direct killing or injuring), removing permit requirements for certain habitat impacts.
- Science policy committee viewed it as a legal battle vs scientific and agreed not to comment. Consensus was that the proposal was going to be adopted regardless of public input. However, several weed scientists thought we should comment and they were encouraged to submit individual comments.

Refilling federal weed science positions: USDA OPMP, ARS

- Need to refill weed science positions for ARS. Also for ARS to hire a National Program Leader for Weed Science. Steve Mirsky was just promoted to a new position roughly titled Director of Digital Ag Systems that reports directly to the ARS Administrator Joon Park. Jeff Silverstein is the Associate Administrator for National Programs. We need the support of the commodity groups to push research on herbicide resistance.
- We need to put the pressure on ARS about weed management challenges, especially herbicide resistance, through our colleagues in the commodity groups. This includes soybean, cotton, corn, sugarbeet, sorghum, and any other commodity group that feels threatened.
 - Joon Park is the new ARS Administrator. Joon.Park@usda.gov
- Four of nine USDA Office of Pest Management Policy (OPMP) staff left OPMP due to the federal staffing cuts and hiring freezes, including their director, Kim Nesci. Clayton Myers is the acting lead. Cameron Douglass is doing contract work for them through Compliance Services International.

EPA Pesticide Label Reform

EPA is working to adopt digital pesticide labels that will make labeling information clearer, more consistent, and more accessible to users. EPA’s plan for digital labels covers the creation of both a structured label—which would provide a framework for consistently placing and ordering label information—and a digital label, which would organize the label information as electronic data. Currently, the pesticide product label registration process is mostly manual, with EPA staff reading through long, detailed label submissions to pull out specific information, like application rate, to enter into the EPA’s [Pesticide Product and Label System](#).

Stanley Culpepper and Bill Chism have been leading this effort with advice and support from a distinguished group of Extension Weed Scientists.

- EPA is supportive of the structured herbicide label: <https://wssa.net/wp-content/uploads/WSSA-Structured-Label-Format-Example-ESA-10.3.25.pdf>
- There is a current label from ADAMA under the tradename of Brevis that is a fruit thinner. First label to adopt the new format
- They are working with a couple other companies on new structured labels
- A standardized label format provides a consistent organization to labels, a table of contents, and concise information in standardized boxes (tables) instead of describing key information in the middle of a paragraph.

FWS Proposes Monarch Butterfly Be Listed as “Threatened” Species

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) published a 12-month finding on the endangered species listing status of the monarch butterfly as “threatened” on December 12, 2024. The USFWS sought public input on a proposal under section 4(d) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). <https://www.regulations.gov/document/FWS-R3-ES-2024-0137-0001> The USFWS is evaluating the comments and any additional information on the species and will determine whether to list the monarch butterfly as “threatened”.

If monarchs are listed as “threatened” (as compared to “endangered”), the USFWS can issue a more flexible 4(d) rule, including special rules to tailor protections to the specific needs of the threatened species. Based on public comments received, a 4(d) rule can modify or exempt certain species protections to balance conservation efforts with economic impacts. It allows flexibility to incentivize positive conservation actions. No rule has been finalized as of Jan. 1.

WSSA NIFA Fellow

- Todd Baughman, Texas A&M was approved as the next WSSA NIFA Fellow to replace Jim Kells

USDA NIFA- Jaye Hambe is the new NIFA Administrator. Todd Baughman and Lee met with him.

- He is very knowledgeable about agriculture in general and pest management in particular. He has many years of experience in industry.
- Past National FFA Officer. Farmer from TN.
- The NCWSS President-Elect Fritz Koppatschek has been working to schedule him as a keynote speaker for the NCWSS/NEWSS joint meeting in Columbus, OH.

WSSA CAST Representative

- The new WSSA CAST Rep following Jill Schroeder will be John Wallace, Associate Professor/Extension Specialist at Penn State.

Comments on proposed USDA-ARS Biocontrol and Bio-Based Tools Research Roadmap

- [Submitted on Nov. 5](#). Excellent review and input from the WSSA Science Policy Committee members including Mark Bernards and Dawn Refsell.
- This is the first step in the process. USDA will review comments and convene stakeholder meetings this year.

Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) Aquatic Plant Control Program Funding- Great News

- Met with new Energy & Water staffers on both House and Senate Appropriations Committee in charge of USACE-CW funding.
- Compared to **zero** funding for the USACE aquatic plant control program in FY 2025, the following appropriations were made for FY 2026:
 - Up to \$3,000,000 shall be for activities related to monitoring, surveying, and control of hydrilla verticillata and flowering rush;
 - Up to \$7,500,000 shall be to address infestations of hydrilla in Lake Champlain and the Connecticut River Basins;
 - Up to \$2,500,000 shall be for nationwide research and development to address aquatic invasive plants, within which the Corps is encouraged to support cost-shared aquatic plant management programs.
- Within available funds, the Corps is encouraged to partner with Reclamation in developing effective removal methods for water stargrass in the Yakima Basin. The Corps is encouraged to enter into a cost-share agreement with the State and local partners to manage and treat infestations of hydrilla broadly in the region.
- The agreement provides \$1,000,000 for the Corps to establish a pilot program to remove invasive plant species in riparian areas that contribute to drought conditions in the Lower Colorado River Basin, the Rio Grande River Basin, the Texas Gulf Coast Basin, and the Arkansas-White-Red Basin
- Working on a meeting with Adam Telle, new Asst. Secretary of USACE-CW

National Invasive Species Awareness Week (NISAW)

- February 23 to 26, 2026
- <https://naisma.org/programs/nisaw/>

Annual Survey of the Most Common and Troublesome Weeds

- The 2025 data for common and troublesome weeds in broadleaf crops has been compiled and summarized. <https://wssa.net/weed/surveys/>
- A [press release](#) on the 2025 survey results was sent out on November 25.

Federal Advisory Committees Need to be Re-Chartered due to Gov't Shutdown

- EPA Pesticide Program Dialogue Committee (PPDC) & Invasive Species Advisory Council (ISAC) federal charters have expired
 - PPDC will likely reconvene first, but with fewer members and a refined focus
 - Currently 43 members. We would like to see it narrowed to 27.
 - Culpepper and Chism will have a meeting with EPA leadership soon.

- Jill Schroeder and Aaron Hager are the nominees to serve on the 2026-2027 PPDC panel. However, their nomination packets will need to be resubmitted once PPDC rechartered.
- ISAC may not be re-chartered until a new administration is in place
 - Jacob Barney serves as the current weed science rep.

Science Policy Fellows Visited Washington DC- Nov 12-14, 2025

- Aleah Butler-Jones and Cole Woolard had visits with their Representatives and Senators (NY & TX, respectively), as well as committee staff from Ag and Energy & Water
- Visits with stakeholder groups (CropLife, National Cotton)
- Diverse set of issues discussed
 - Ag Research funding
 - DJI drones
 - Pesticide Labeling Uniformity
 - Army Corps of Engineers Aquatic Plant Control funding

2026 Proposed Science Policy Activities

- Promote and advocate funding for USDA weed research, extension and integrated programs in FY 2027 (ARS, AFRI, IR-4, Crop Protection and Pest Management (CPPM), Hatch Act (experiment stations), and Smith Lever 3b & 3c (extension)
- Maintain funding for Department of the Interior (DOI) programs that support invasive weed research, prevention and management within BLM, USGS, NPS, FWS and USFS.
- Support the Army Corp of Engineers (USACOE) Aquatic Plant Control Research Program
- Work to reinstate weed science positions with USDA ARS and OPMP
- Meet with USDA NRCS leadership about weed science and regenerative agriculture
- Monitor and provide input to improve EPA's Herbicide Strategy for ESA mitigations.
- Support the science behind FIFRA Section 24(b) and uniform labels.
- Reinstate the federal charter for the EPA PPDC
- Conduct and report the results of the 2026 National Weed Survey for Most Common and Troublesome weeds that will focus on weeds in Grass Crops, Pasture, and Turf