Louisiana Wildlife Federation

January - June 2026

LWF

LOUISIANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

January - June 2026

Since 1940, Louisiana Wildlife Federation has been the voice for Louisiana's wildlife and natural resources. Join us to protect Sportsman's Paradise for future generations.

Principles:

- Conserve Louisiana's natural resources with emphasis on wildlife and their habitats
- Engage outdoor enthusiasts who reflect the unique diversity of Louisiana
- Advance sound, scientifically established resource management principles
- Promote conservation management and policies through education and advocacy

This newsletter covers January-June 2026. All updates on LWF activities can be found on our website and social media pages.

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Cover Photo: Bonnie Taylor Barry
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NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION

LWF is an affiliate organization of National Wildlife Federation and together we form a powerful network for wildlife conservation locally and nationally.

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Rick Owens, Advocacy Director
Kelsy Yeargain, Development Director
Angela Hirstius, Membership & Operations Manager
Jayla West, Communications Coordinator

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Affiliates (as of June 2026)

Acadiana Native Plant Project
American Sportsmen Against Poachers, Inc.
Baton Rouge Audubon Society
Bayou Chapter of the Ozark Society
Bayou Vermilion Preservation Association
Caddo Lake Institute, Inc.
East Ascension Sportsman's League
For the Birds of Acadiana
Friends of the Atchafalaya
Friends of Black Bayou
Friends of Grand Isle, Inc.
Friends of the Red River National Wildlife Refuge
Louisiana Association of Professional Biologists
Louisiana Native Plant Society
Louisiana Ornithological Society
Louisiana Trappers & Alligator Hunters Association
Moncus Park
New Orleans Power Squadron
Orleans Audubon Society
Pontchartrain Conservancy
Rapides Wildlife Association
Shreveport Society for Nature Study
Toledo Bend Lake Association
Woodlands Conservancy

MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

As the new president of LWF, I am honored to serve an organization that has been at the forefront of conservation leadership in Louisiana for 86 years. I am also honored to know and work with the dedicated conservation stewards who are part of LWF. The members of our organization, both past and present, have worked tirelessly to advance conservation in our state.

Here are some of the issues we have worked on this year:

- Helping save Kisatchie National Forest from having land taken away
- Advocating for the protection of the Rice's whale
- Working to address Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) affecting white-tailed deer
- Initiating a bill to designate Atlantic tarpon as a game fish
- Co-sponsoring a forest management resolution at the NWF Annual Meeting
- Supporting a bill that became law to prevent the mass release of helium balloons
- Supporting responsible solar, wind, and other renewable energy projects
- Addressing carbon capture and sequestration projects

These and many other conservation-related issues have kept our staff and members busy and actively engaged in conservation. We are the leading organization when it comes to advocating for the protection of wildlife and our environment. We are very proud of the work we are doing in Louisiana and across our nation to advocate for and help protect our natural resources.

It is my belief that the good Lord blessed us with such bountiful natural resources, and we are obligated to be good stewards of our lands and wildlife. Nevertheless, even with all the good work LWF is doing, much more remains to be done. At no other time in history has conservation been more important. The world's population is now approximately 8.2 billion people and continues to grow. Along with that growth, we are placing increasing demands on our natural world—more land to grow food, greater pressure on our oceans through fishing, increased extraction of fossil fuels, more industrial development, and more. All someone has to do is watch one of David Attenborough's documentaries to see the impact we have on our planet.

It is imperative that, as good stewards, we take care of our natural resources so that our children, grandchildren, and future generations can have clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, and a continued abundance of natural resources. LWF is doing just that. We are the tip of the spear when it comes to conservation leadership and advocating for our natural resources. I am proud to be part of this organization, and I hope you are too.

Thank you all for what you do to help protect our natural resources, our environment, and for your advocacy on behalf of conservation. ❖

~ Jonny Fryar

NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

One of the benefits of membership with LWF is participation in our committees. You can offer valuable feedback to leadership and learn more about how we do our work. Our staff works hand in hand with volunteer leaders on the board and in committees. Message me at lwf@lawildlifefed.org if you're interested in volunteering to be a member of one of our policy or program committees.

On behalf of the board and especially myself, I offer our deepest appreciation to our "boomerang" immediate past president Martin "Marty" Floyd. Marty was LWF president from 2018 to 2020 and led us through that critical time in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. During Marty's presidency, we updated our strategic plan, kicked off the Edgar Veillon Conservation Leadership Corps, and addressed issues that we still work on today: whooping crane shootings, Catahoula Lake lawsuit, and coastal restoration planning.

After that term, Marty continued to represent us at NWF's Annual Meeting as he has done for several years. He also initiated LWF's collaboration with the Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana to produce two native wildlife coloring books that he also illustrated. These books have been a good partnership and an inspiration for other projects. You can download either the Tunica-language or the Biloxi-language coloring book from the LWF website. Marty received National Wildlife Federation's Volunteer of the Year Award in 2024.

Marty stepped up to be LWF president again, serving from August 2024 to February 2026. This return to our top leadership came during LWF's expansion of staff and priorities that I hope you are noticing when you read this newsletter or see our messages online. Some priorities included pushing back against the cancellation of the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion project and plans to add another dam on the Pearl River, addressing the spread of chronic wasting disease in deer, advocating for needed maintenance at White Lake, and protecting public lands.

The LWF presidency can be rewarding and highly engaging. Our thanks to Marty for stepping into leadership roles not only at LWF when asked, but also at other organizations where he volunteers, including Louisiana Ornithological Society, Rapides Wildlife Association, Master Naturalists, and Louisiana Association of Professional Biologists. ❖

~ Rebecca Triche

LWF BOARD MEMBER DR. VIRGINIA BURKETT ELECTED TO NWF BOARD AT ITS ANNUAL MEETING

The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) held its 90th Annual Meeting in Providence, Rhode Island, June 14–17, 2026.

Congratulations to LWF Board Member Dr. Virginia Burkett for being elected to serve as a Region 8 Director on the NWF Board. We are confident she will do a great job representing the Louisiana Wildlife Federation, Texas Conservation Alliance, and Conservation Coalition of Oklahoma, which make up NWF's affiliates in Region 8.

Geralyn Hoey, NWF Director of Conservation Partnerships, was awarded the Charlie Shaw Conservation Partnership Award at the banquet. Geralyn has been LWF's main liaison with NWF and a source of support for 16 years. Congratulations to Geralyn for her great work with NWF's affiliates. LWF has a new Director of Conservation Partnerships, John DeFillipo, and we enjoyed a great meal in Rhode Island with him and members from Arkansas Wildlife Federation and Tennessee Wildlife Federation.

This year's meeting included consideration of six resolutions on forest stewardship and active management, data center safeguards and best practices, pesticide regulations, and defending science and historical integrity on public lands. Several of us joined field trips to learn more about local conservation work in the area.

Attendees included Marty Floyd, LWF's Representative to NWF; LWF President Jonny Fryar and LWF's Alternate NWF Representative, who also served as co-chair of the Forest Resolution Committee; LWF Board Member Zac Burson; LWF Executive Director Rebecca Triche; and LWF Advocacy Director Rick Owens. ❖

LWF CELEBRATES 60TH ANNUAL CONSERVATION AWARDS BANQUET

By Kelsy Yeargain, Development Director

On April 11, Louisiana Wildlife Federation hosted its 60th Annual Conservation Achievement Awards Banquet at Juban's in Baton Rouge. Conservation leaders, public officials, partners, and supporters gathered to honor 11 individuals and organizations whose work in 2025 advanced conservation, wildlife protection, environmental education, and stewardship across Louisiana.

LWF also recognized the 2025 Youth Hunters of the Year Natalie Perkins and Madden Dowden. Natalie attended the banquet and received her award from Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Secretary Tyler Bosworth.

Guests enjoyed dinner, time together, and a special visit from the LSU Raptor Rehab team, who brought birds of prey for attendees to see up close.

For 60 years, the Conservation Achievement Awards have celebrated the people and organizations protecting Louisiana's wildlife, natural resources, and outdoor heritage. Congratulations to this year's honorees, and thank you to everyone who joined us.

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!

Silver

LIPSEY'S

Bacopa Services, LLC

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CENAC MARINE SERVICES, LLC HOUMA, LA.

NWF NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION

Rapides Wildlife Association

FRIENDS OF RED RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Dr. Virginia Burkett

ULC

Youth Hunter of the Year

HARRISON LAW, LLC
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

DELTA WATERFOWL
Baton Rouge Area Chapter

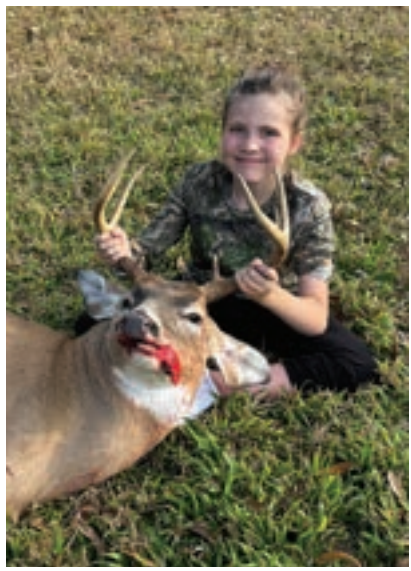
LWF HONORS 2025'S YOUTH HUNTERS OF THE YEAR

By Kelsy Yeargain, Development Director

Each year, the Louisiana Wildlife Federation, in partnership with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, recognizes two young hunters who reflect the best of Louisiana's outdoor traditions through the Youth Hunter of the Year program. The contest is open to Louisiana residents 15 years old and younger. Young hunters submit stories and photos about their hunting adventures and one boy and one girl are selected by judges.

The Youth Hunter of the Year program is about more than a harvest. It is about mentorship, time spent outdoors, and the passing down of values that have long defined Louisiana's outdoor heritage. The 2025 winners were recognized at LWF's 60th Annual Conservation Achievement Awards banquet on April 11, where their stories stood out as powerful reminders of why these traditions matter. We appreciate Harrison Law LLC and the Baton Rouge Chapter of Delta Waterfowl for continuing to support this outreach.

Natalie Perkins, DeRidder



At just 11 years old, Natalie Perkins experienced a milestone moment that reflects determination and the importance of access to the outdoors. She harvested her first deer during her very first hunt after a quiet morning in the stand. That afternoon, a doe stepped out, followed by a buck, and with guidance from her father and support from her stepmother, Natalie lined up the shot and made it count. Reflecting on the moment, Natalie shared, "The buck came out right after and started chasing the doe... I pulled the trigger and hit him." Her family described the experience as unforgettable, adding, "She doesn't let her disability stop her." Natalie's story speaks to perseverance, strong support systems, and the importance of ensuring that Louisiana's outdoor opportunities are accessible to all.

LDWF Secretary Tyler Bosworth and LWF Board President Jonny Fryar presented Youth Hunter of the Year Female winner Natalie Perkins with her award at LWF's 60th Annual Awards Banquet in Baton Rouge.

Madden Dowden, Elm Grove

Ten-year-old Madden Dowden's winning hunt took place during Thanksgiving break, when he harvested a 200-pound buck. After spotting the deer through his scope, he immediately recognized the size and

significance of the moment, saying, “I found him in the scope and said holy moly because of how big he was.” With his father’s encouragement, Madden took the shot and watched as the buck ran into the trees before falling. The recovery that followed required teamwork, persistence, and problem-solving, as the two worked together to bring the deer out of the woods. Madden later summed up the experience simply: “That hunt was the best hunt of my life.” His story highlights the role of family, mentorship, and hands-on learning in building the next generation of conservation stewards.

Former LWF President Zac Burson presented Youth Hunter of the Year Male winner Madden Dowden with his award in his hometown of Elm Grove. ❖

LOUISIANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION ANNOUNCES 2025 CONSERVATION ACHIEVEMENT AWARD WINNERS

By Kelsy Yeargain, Development Director

Louisiana Wildlife Federation presented awards to 11 recipients of the 60th Annual Conservation Achievement Awards on April 11, 2026. The program recognizes individuals and organizations whose work in 2025 advanced conservation, wildlife protection, and environmental education across Louisiana.

Established in 1965, the awards celebrate educators, policymakers, volunteers, businesses, organizations, and youth leaders conserving Louisiana's natural resources.

"These awards highlight the people whose work protects wildlife habitat, strengthens communities, and preserves Louisiana's outdoor recreation opportunities," said LWF President Jonny Fryar, who presented the awards to each winner on behalf of LWF.

2025 Louisiana Conservation Achievement Award Winners

Conservationist of the Year:
Louisiana Native Plant Society, Boyce

Louisiana Native Plant Society was recognized for expanding access to native plants and advancing habitat restoration and conservation education through training, habitat certification programs, and advocacy.

Professional Conservationist of the Year: Bryan McClinton, Baton Rouge

Honored for strengthening policy, modernizing LDWF systems, improving wildlife management, and expanding funding for habitat conservation and outdoor recreation.

Volunteer Conservationist of the Year: Jennifer Richardson, Baton Rouge

Awarded for mobilizing volunteers through Keep Tiger Town Beautiful to remove litter, combat illegal dumping, restore public spaces, and protect waterways.

Conservation Business of the Year: LifeCity, New Orleans

Celebrated for helping businesses reduce waste, conserve resources, and strengthen the local economy through assessments and technical assistance.

Conservation Educator of the Year: Dr. Erik Johnson, Lafayette

Recognized for advancing bird conservation, research, and education through banding, citizen science, and community outreach focused on vulnerable species.

Conservation Elected Official of the Year: Representative Kim Landry Coates, Ponchatoula

Honored for protecting Lake Maurepas and nearby watersheds, engaging communities, and safeguarding water quality, wildlife habitat, and natural resources.

Conservation Communicator of the Year: Joe Macaluso, Baton Rouge

Celebrated for decades of journalism covering Louisiana's hunting, fishing, and conservation heritage and promoting conservation through Hunters for the Hungry.

Conservation Organization of the Year: Audubon Aquarium Rescue, New Orleans

Recognized for providing marine mammal and sea turtle rescue, rehabilitation, and stranding response while strengthening statewide coastal conservation.

Conservation Youth of the Year: Eleanore Lowe, New Orleans

Eleanore Lowe was recognized for researching microplastic pollution in salt and investigating how plastics enter ecosystems and the food chain.

Conservation Youth Organization of the Year: St. Joseph's Academy Coastal Roots Program, Baton Rouge

Honored for engaging students in growing native plants and completing hands-on restoration projects that strengthen wetlands and cultivate future conservation leaders.

Lifetime Achievement Award: William "Joe" McPherson, Woodworth

William "Joe" McPherson was recognized for decades of legislative leadership and public service advancing conservation, protecting wildlife habitat, expanding outdoor recreation access, and strengthening Louisiana's natural resource management. ❖

ACT 196 PROHIBITS INTENTIONAL MASS BALLOON RELEASES

By Rebecca Triche, LWF Executive Director

Louisiana Wildlife Federation applauds the passage of HB 851, now Act 196, which restricts intentional balloon releases. It applies to a person who intentionally releases a balloon and to anyone who organizes a planned release of 12 or more balloons, with specified exceptions.

Thank you to Representative John Illg, Jr., and the bill's many co-sponsors for advancing legislation that will help reduce unnecessary litter. LWF also extends its appreciation to Lt. Governor Billy Nungesser for his continued support of Louisiana's natural resources and Commissioner of Agriculture Mike Strain for supporting the legislation.

Alternatives You Can Choose to Protect Wildlife and Prevent Litter

Here are other meaningful, wildlife-safe alternatives to mass balloon releases for celebrations and memorials:

- Flying kites
- Blowing bubbles
- Releasing floating flower petals
- Planting a tree or creating a native garden or painted-rock garden
- Hosting a candlelight vigil
- Releasing biodegradable confetti
- Ringing bells
- Celebrating with banners or flags
- Making pinwheels that children can take home
- Donating money or time to a charity in someone's name
- Organizing a commemorative walk or service project
- Creating a mural or art installation including a message to your loved one
- Organizing a food drive or community give-back

Small changes in how we celebrate and remember can have a lasting impact on protecting what makes Louisiana so special. You can help by not participating in mass balloon releases and letting people know there are other ideas they can adopt to create new traditions.❖

LOUISIANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION CONTINUES TO SUPPORT PROTECTIONS FOR ATLANTIC TARPON

By Rick Owens, LWF Advocacy Director

For generations, the Atlantic tarpon, known around the world as the legendary “Silver King,” has captured the imagination of anglers and coastal communities. Few fish in the Gulf inspire the same level of respect, challenge, and excitement as a tarpon striking a bait and launching into the air.

Louisiana’s coastal waters have long been part of that story. Each summer and fall, adult tarpon migrate into Louisiana waters, gathering near the Chandeleur Islands, Breton Sound, Venice, and Grand Isle, where they feed on schools of menhaden, mullet, and other forage species. These seasonal migrations have historically supported one of the most exciting recreational fisheries in the Gulf region.

Louisiana’s Tarpon Tradition

Louisiana waters once supported numerous tarpon clubs, tournaments, and seasonal fisheries that attracted anglers from across the Gulf Coast. While much of that legacy has faded, organizations such as the Grand Isle Tarpon Club remain reminders of a fishery that once occupied a prominent place within Louisiana’s outdoor heritage.

Today, however, tarpon are far less common in Louisiana waters than they once were. While anglers and charter captains still encounter these fish each year, the historic abundance that once allowed guides and anglers to reliably target tarpon has diminished.

HB 688 as a First Step

House Bill 688, sponsored by Representative Joe Orgeron, would have designated Atlantic tarpon as a Louisiana saltwater gamefish and prohibited the commercial harvest of tarpon in Louisiana. LWF thanks Representative Orgeron and the Louisiana Legislature for recognizing concerns about the fishery and respecting the tradition.

The legislation reflected a growing understanding across the Gulf Coast that tarpon are far more valuable as a recreational species than as a harvested

fish. Tarpon are widely recognized as having little commercial fishing value. Their greatest worth lies in the recreational opportunities, coastal traditions, and economic activity they support.

Had the bill become law, Louisiana would have joined every other Gulf and Atlantic coastal state in formally recognizing tarpon as a recreational gamefish and eliminating commercial harvest.

Broad Support, Then Veto

Governor Jeff Landry's veto of HB 688 is disappointing for many Louisiana anglers, conservationists, charter captains, and members of the state's tarpon fishing community.

HB 688 received unanimous support throughout the legislative process, encountering no organized opposition. That level of agreement is increasingly rare and reflected a broad consensus that the proposal represented a reasonable first step toward recognizing the importance of tarpon within Louisiana's recreational fishing heritage.

Many people in Louisiana believe the tarpon fishery is already being monitored and managed, but it is not.

The veto message frames HB 688 as unnecessary regulation, but the bill did not create new recreational limits, seasons, reporting requirements, or gear restrictions. It would have placed tarpon within the same general management framework Louisiana already uses for redfish, speckled trout, black bass, and other public fishery resources.

Conservation Context

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries currently identifies Atlantic tarpon as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need within its State Wildlife Action Plan and has recognized the need for additional research, monitoring, habitat assessment, and a management framework for the species.

While HB 688 focused on classification, this designation would have established a foundation for future research, monitoring, and responsible management efforts.

Looking Ahead

Atlantic tarpon are a migratory species that move through waters across the Gulf and Atlantic coasts, and Louisiana is part of that larger connected ecosystem. Every other Gulf and Atlantic coastal state has already recognized tarpon within a recreational management framework. Louisiana should not remain the exception.

LWF will continue working with others who believe Atlantic tarpon are an important part of the state's recreational fishing culture, history, and outdoor heritage.

HB 688 was not simply about fisheries management. It was about whether Louisiana's recreational fishing heritage deserves the same recognition and consideration routinely afforded to other aspects of our coastal culture and economy. That question remains. ❖

WHAT THE "GOD SQUAD" LAWSUIT MEANS FOR LOUISIANA'S GULF WATERS

By Rick Owens, LWF Advocacy Director, and Rebecca Triche, LWF Executive Director

The Endangered Species Act, passed in 1973, is one of the most important conservation laws in the United States. At its core, the ESA is designed to do something simple but critical: ensure that federal actions do not push endangered wildlife closer to extinction.

For decades, the law has helped protect species across the country, including several that call the Gulf home.

Endangered Species Act Success Story: Brown Pelican

The brown pelican, Louisiana's state bird, nearly disappeared from the state after the pesticide DDT caused eggshell thinning and widespread nesting failure. Federal protections, the ban on DDT, habitat restoration, and reintroduction efforts helped the species recover. In 2009, the brown pelican was removed from the endangered species list, becoming one of the Gulf Coast's clearest examples of how the Endangered Species Act can help bring a species back from the brink.

Now, a rarely used provision of that law, often referred to as the "God Squad," is drawing renewed attention. How it is used could have real implications for Louisiana's coast, fisheries, and wildlife.

What Is the "God Squad"?

The Endangered Species Committee, nicknamed the "God Squad" or Extinction Committee, was created by Congress in 1978 as a last-resort option. It allows federal officials to grant exemptions from ESA protections in very limited and extraordinary circumstances.

This authority is intentionally difficult to use. Historically, the committee has been convened only a handful of times, with exemptions granted just twice. That rarity matters. It reflects Congress's intent that ESA protections should not be easily set aside.

What Happened in the Gulf

In March 2026, the Endangered Species Committee met to consider an exemption related to offshore oil and gas activities in the Gulf. The Committee approved the exemption, allowing a broad exception from Endangered Species Act requirements for oil and gas activities in the Gulf of Mexico.

Several aspects of this decision raised concern. The meeting was largely closed to the public. The Committee did not seek or hear expert testimony, despite doing so in prior convenings. The exemption applied not to a single project, but to a broad class of activities across a wide geographic area. The justification for the decision remains unclear.

This represents a significant departure from how this process has historically been used.

LWF Joins Legal Challenge

Louisiana Wildlife Federation joined National Wildlife Federation, National Parks Conservation Association, Florida Wildlife Federation, and Texas Conservation Alliance in a lawsuit to challenge the Trump administration's attempt to bypass compliance with the Endangered Species Act for oil and gas activities in the Gulf of Mexico.

On April 15, 2026, the Southern Environmental Law Center filed the lawsuit on behalf of the groups in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. The lawsuit challenges a broad exemption that purports to allow the oil and gas industry to operate without regard for impacts to listed species, including the highly endangered Rice's whale and numerous species of listed sea turtles.

Why This Matters for Louisiana

Louisiana's coast and offshore waters are home to some of the most productive ecosystems in the country. They also support species that are already under pressure and rely on careful management to survive.

The Gulf is home to an abundance of wildlife, including several species of sea turtles, migratory birds, Gulf sturgeon, and the Rice's whale, all of which are protected by the ESA. Oil and gas drilling activities, including noise, vessel strikes, and spills, are some of the biggest threats to Gulf wildlife but can be managed and mitigated through the ESA's review process.

Right now, the ESA requires federal agencies to evaluate how offshore activities affect endangered species and to take steps to avoid or minimize harm. With the exemption granted through the "God Squad" process, those protections could be reduced or bypassed.

Where LWF Stands

The Louisiana Wildlife Federation supports responsible energy development, but we also believe that development must be balanced with established protections for wildlife and habitat. The ESA has provided that balance for over 50 years.

LWF will continue to monitor developments and work with partners across the Gulf to ensure that Louisiana's interests, and its wildlife, are represented.❖

BUILDING RESILIENT FORESTS IN LOUISIANA

By Rick Owens, Advocacy Director

Louisiana's forests are vital to wildlife, water quality, and rural communities. Yet many are managed as short-rotation, single-species systems that may not provide lasting ecological or public benefits.

Louisiana Wildlife Federation (LWF) supports biodiversity-based forest management that combines different species, age classes, and forest structures. Diverse forests are better able to withstand pests, disease, storms, and climate variability while supporting more wildlife and healthier ecosystems.

Beyond Single-Species Management

No single tree species, including longleaf pine, is a universal solution. Longleaf restoration remains valuable because of its importance to wildlife habitat and fire-dependent ecosystems. However, healthy forests also need a broader mix of shortleaf pines, hardwoods, bottomland and riparian forests, mature trees, and cavity trees. This diversity provides habitat for a wider range of wildlife.

Biodiversity-based management requires practices that sustain ecosystem health. Prescribed burning, maintaining varied age classes, protecting riparian areas, and retaining mature and cavity trees can preserve critical habitat while reducing forests' vulnerability to pests, disease, and extreme weather.

Protecting Forest Ecosystems

Loblolly pine monocultures and some intensive forestry practices can simplify ecosystems and reduce habitat diversity. Emerging biomass markets, if not carefully managed, could reinforce these trends by prioritizing uniform production over ecosystem function.

LWF encourages state agencies, landowners, and forest-based industries to incorporate biodiversity into management plans by protecting wildlife corridors, maintaining habitat connectivity, and conserving riparian and bottomland systems.

A Vision for Biodiverse Forests

Managing Louisiana's forests as complex, functioning ecosystems rather than single-purpose commodity systems supports stronger wildlife habitat, healthier watersheds, and greater long-term resilience.

Biodiversity is the foundation of resilient, productive, and sustainable forests. By prioritizing diversity in species, structure, and age, Louisiana can protect wildlife, strengthen ecosystems, and ensure its forests continue to benefit nature and people for generations.

Scan the QR code to read LWF's 2026 position: Pine Forest Management in Louisiana: Advancing Biodiversity-Based Forest Landscapes for Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat. ❖

CWD UPDATE: WHERE LOUISIANA STANDS AND WHAT COMES NEXT

By Rick Owens, LWF Advocacy Director

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is present in Louisiana, and how the state responds now will help determine whether the disease remains at a low, manageable prevalence or becomes an entrenched, long-term threat to our deer herd, hunting traditions, and rural communities. Several legislative efforts in 2026 reflected very different approaches to addressing this complex issue.

The Legislative CWD Task Force was created in 2025 to evaluate Louisiana's current management strategy and provide recommendations for the future. Louisiana Wildlife Federation has been a participating member of the Task Force, offering recommendations focused on early detection, strong surveillance, the ability to respond quickly, coordinated responsibility, strengthened enforcement, and reducing preventable transmission pathways.

CWD is a slow-moving but unforgiving disease. Once prevalence rises beyond relatively low thresholds, evidence from other states shows that spread can accelerate and population declines can follow.

Over the course of the Task Force meetings, the conversation increasingly centered on weighing disease management against economic impact concerns, particularly those affecting agricultural interests and feed sales. While these concerns are part of the broader discussion, CWD remains a fatal, transmissible disease with no treatment. Management decisions should continue to reflect that reality and be grounded in the best available science and Louisiana-specific conditions.

SCR 24 emerged as the primary legislative vehicle coming out of the Task Force process. SCR 24 proposed significant changes to Louisiana's

current management framework, including reducing containment zones and establishing a 1.5% prevalence threshold, based on testing data, before feeding and baiting restrictions are triggered.

From LWF's perspective, while SCR 24 fell short of our recommendations for a stronger, science-based management approach, it retained a structured framework tied to disease prevalence, surveillance, and geographic conditions. At a minimum, it maintained a science-based foundation for continued management.

HCR 4 took a fundamentally different approach. HCR 4 proposed removing feeding and baiting restrictions within CWD zones. LWF strongly opposed HCR 4.

This resolution acknowledged that CWD is a fatal cervid disease that persists in the environment yet proposed removing one of the primary tools used to manage its spread without replacing it with a structured, science-based framework.

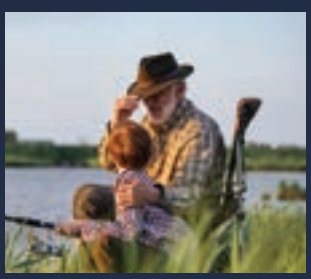
HCR 4 was not tied to disease prevalence. It was not tied to surveillance data. It did not provide a path forward if conditions changed.

CWD management is already a complex and evolving issue for Louisiana hunters. As regulations change, clarity and consistency are critical. Advancing conflicting approaches only increases confusion and makes it more difficult for hunters to understand and comply with the rules.

HCR 4 represented a complete disregard for science-based management and ultimately did not receive a hearing in the Senate Natural Resources Committee. SCR 24 passed and will now represent a reset in the management of CWD in Louisiana.

CWD is not a short-term issue. LWF will remain actively involved in those conversations and continue to advance our recommendations as part of that process. ❖

WHAT COULD YOUR CONSERVATION LEGACY MAKE POSSIBLE?



The conservation choices we make today shape the Louisiana we leave for future generations. A legacy gift to LWF helps protect the wildlife, habitats, and natural resources that generations of Louisianans will inherit, enjoy, and depend on.

For over 85 years, LWF members have made a lasting impact on Louisiana's conservation future by trusting LWF with their legacy. The Edgar Veillon Conservation Leadership Corps is one lasting result of that trust. Created through an estate gift, EV-CLC has equipped more than 180 college students since 2018 with the knowledge, experience, and connections to become the next generation of conservation leaders in Louisiana.

From your will to your IRA, there are flexible, tax-wise ways to make a legacy gift to LWF.

Contact Kelsy to start a conversation about what your legacy gift could make possible for Louisiana conservation.

504-439-3425 • kelsy@lawildlifefed.org

WATER MANAGEMENT AND WHAT LOUISIANA IS LACKING

By Rebecca Triche, LWF Executive Director

Louisiana may seem to have abundant amounts of water to serve all our needs for drinking water, agriculture, and industrial use. But do we?

Frankly, we cannot be sure. Louisiana lacks a comprehensive and consistent water resource monitoring network. We need a full audit of groundwater and surface water. The state needs to develop a water "budget."

What Is a Water Budget?

A water budget accounts for how much water is available, how much is being used, and how much is needed for people, wildlife, agriculture, industry, and healthy ecosystems.

What Louisiana does have is a patchwork of laws and inadequate regulations to manage our water resources, with no comprehensive statewide water code. How is the state making commitments about water use without knowing how much water is available or already being used?

Overuse and lax monitoring must be addressed

Louisiana's groundwater resources are being overused. Since 1951, groundwater depletion rates have increased 578.7% across the Gulf Coastal Plain Regional Aquifer System, which includes Louisiana.

The Department of Conservation and Energy has authority to restrict groundwater withdrawals in designated areas of concern but lacks similar authority for surface water withdrawals, which remain under a voluntary program.

The reality is that any entity can withdraw surface waters without permission and without a required fee. At best, a user may enter into a voluntary agreement with the state to report the withdrawal and pay an amount of their own choosing. What business would operate like this for its most precious asset?

"[Water] is a public trust resource and should be managed prudently on the people's behalf."

~ Rebecca Triche, LWF Executive Director

A top priority for Louisiana Wildlife Federation

Louisiana's wildlife needs sustainable habitat, and that includes adequate surface water in rivers, bayous, swamps, and estuaries. What's good for wildlife is good for people.

More questions than answers

How should we manage water resources in times of drought? How many users can Louisiana's water resources support, and at what volume? How can we respond to demands from other states to buy, use, or divert water we may need here?

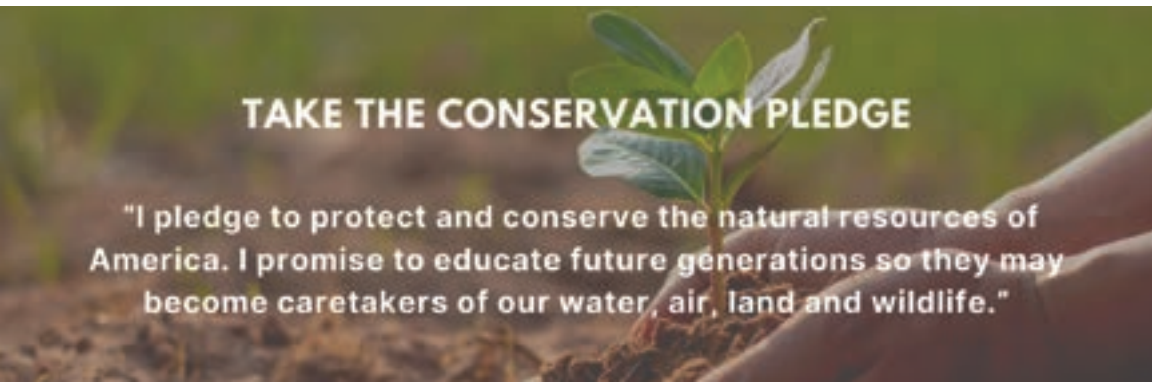
These questions require answers from legislators and clear rules from agency administrators.

Talk with your legislators and urge them to make comprehensive water management a priority for the state.

Moving Water Policy Forward

LWF supported bills addressing the sale of Louisiana's running surface water for use outside the state, water use by data centers, and surface water withdrawals. While those bills did not become law, one proposal became a study resolution.

Moving forward, LWF will make statewide water management a stronger focus of our advocacy. We will continue pushing for better monitoring, clearer laws, and responsible management of Louisiana's water resources for people, wildlife, and the future of our state. ❖



KISATCHIE NATIONAL FOREST SAFE FROM PROPOSED TRANSFER: PUBLIC ACTION MADE A DIFFERENCE

By Rebecca Triche, LWF Executive Director

Thank you to everyone who told Louisiana's congressional delegation that you do not support transferring land in Kisatchie National Forest in Grant Parish to local or private control. LWF forwarded messages from more than 1,400 people in Louisiana to our delegation. Because of you and others who took quick action, the Grant Parish Restoration Plan no longer includes transferring Kisatchie National Forest land.

After the Grant Parish Police Jury discussed the proposal at its May 14 meeting and voted to oppose it, more people became aware of the issue and became increasingly concerned that this valuable public land could be at risk for changes in long-term use.

When Senator Cassidy filed S.4584 in Congress, he committed to not including the proposed federal asset transfer. We appreciate him listening to concerns about protecting Kisatchie National Forest.

What Was at Stake

- About 140,000 acres in Grant Parish
- Nearly 24% of Kisatchie National Forest
- Public access for hunting, fishing, hiking, and recreation
- Wildlife habitat and endangered species recovery
- Watershed protection and open space
- Long-term, science-based federal forest management

A Proposal to Transfer Public Forest Land

The “Grant Parish Restoration Plan” proposed transferring all Kisatchie National Forest land in Grant Parish to the Grant Parish Police Jury, Grant Parish School Board, or another eligible entity.

The Grant Parish Police Jury stated on May 8, 2026, on its Facebook page that it was not seeking this proposal or endorsing taking over management of Kisatchie National Forest land in Grant Parish.

Old Idea, New Tactic

Proposals to transfer federal or state public lands to local or private management are not new. Last year, a proposal to transfer millions of acres of public lands in western states was strongly opposed and ultimately withdrawn.

This proposal would have amended the Internal Revenue Code to expand eligibility under the federal New Markets Tax Credit program. It was framed as an effort to support rural economic development in low-income areas where traditional development opportunities may be limited. However, embedded within that broader tax framework was a separate and significant provision directing the transfer of federal public lands in Louisiana and other federal assets.

This Is Not Idle Land

Kisatchie National Forest is Louisiana's only national forest and a critical part of the state's natural resource base.

The Catahoula Ranger District is extremely popular for hunting and fishing. The area also features hiking and motorized trails, with people traveling from across Louisiana to enjoy its recreational areas. Kisatchie National Forest is well-managed and valuable for wildlife, recreation, and public access.

Just as important, Kisatchie is part of the identity of Grant Parish. Many residents live, work, and raise families in this area because of the forest, its open space, access to public land, and the quality of life that comes with it. This is not idle land. It is used, valued, and relied upon by the public every day.

Keeping Public Lands Public

Louisiana Wildlife Federation remains firmly opposed to any transfer of Kisatchie National Forest lands out of federal ownership and management. Kisatchie National Forest belongs to the American public and the citizens of Louisiana, not any single parish government or localized policy experiment.

The forest is already actively managed for forestry, wildlife habitat, prescribed burning, recreation, hunting, fishing, watershed protection, endangered species recovery, and public access. It is crucial that it remain that way.

LWF and our members will continue watching. Thank you again for being a voice for wildlife, public lands, and Louisiana's natural resources. ❖

LOUISIANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION SUPPORTS NATIVE PLANTS THAT BENEFIT WILDLIFE!

Learn more about our partnership with the National Wildlife Federation's Certified Wildlife Habitat program at: lawildlifefed.org/certified-wildlife-habitat

Or contact kelsy@lawildlifefed.org

ROLLING BACK MENHADEN BUFFER PROTECTIONS IS THE WRONG MOVE FOR LOUISIANA

By Rick Owens, LWF Advocacy Director

Louisiana's coastal waters support commercial fishing, recreational fishing, charter businesses, wildlife habitat, and coastal communities. These resources must be managed in a way that recognizes both economic value and ecological responsibility.

Menhaden are a critical part of Louisiana's coastal ecosystem, serving as a primary forage species. At the same time, the fishery is one of the largest in the nation, harvesting hundreds of millions of pounds annually and generating significant economic activity.

The question is not whether the industry should exist. It is how the fishery should operate within a shared public resource.

"Protecting critical habitat, maintaining sustainable fisheries, and supporting responsible industry are not competing goals. They are part of the same solution."

Why Buffer Protections Matter

In January 2026, Louisiana Wildlife Federation commented in opposition to a proposal to weaken Louisiana's nearshore menhaden buffer zones. These buffers were adopted in 2024 after years of public concern over conflicts between large commercial menhaden vessels and recreational anglers, beachgoers, and sensitive coastal habitats.

In 2024, the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission adopted a compromise regulation establishing a half-mile coastwide buffer for menhaden fishing, along with expanded buffers in high-conflict areas such

as Grand Isle and Holly Beach. While LWF supported a stronger one-mile coastwide buffer, we accepted the compromise as a meaningful step forward.

Less than eighteen months later, the industry sought to reverse that agreement without presenting new evidence that the buffers were harming the fishery.

Accountability Progress and Management Gaps

LWF's comments also pointed to a larger management issue: Louisiana has no total allowable catch for menhaden. Without an overall harvest cap, bycatch limits are difficult to evaluate, and cumulative impacts on other fisheries remain unclear.

LWF believes buffer zones and a total allowable catch should work together as complementary tools to reduce conflict, improve accountability, and modernize menhaden management.

The 2026 legislative session produced some progress on accountability and transparency. Several bills advanced to strengthen enforcement, improve vessel tracking, and make harvest data reported to the Legislature publicly available. These measures reflect clear legislative support for improving oversight within the fishery.

While accountability measures advanced, important science-based management questions remain unresolved. Measures that would have more directly addressed nearshore impacts, bycatch, and total allowable catch did not fully advance. These outcomes left an important gap. There is broad agreement on the need for accountability and transparency, but more work remains to build consensus around science-based management measures that directly address bycatch and habitat impacts.

Sensitive Coastal Habitat Needs Protection

Special concern is warranted for sensitive areas such as the Chandeleur Islands and the broader Breton National Wildlife Refuge, which contains some of Louisiana's last remaining seagrass beds and critical wildlife habitat. LWF supports enhanced buffer protections in these areas and urges regulators to recognize the full refuge footprint, not just individual islands.

Louisiana's recreational fishing and charter industries also depend on the same coastal resources. These stakeholders have already absorbed conservation measures, including restrictions on the harvest of bull redfish, to help sustain the fishery. When one user group is asked to make sacrifices for conservation, it is reasonable to expect that all sectors operating on the same public resource are held to standards that reflect the best available science. ❖

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2025-2026 CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP CORPS MEMBERS!

Members of the EV-CLC cohort with LWF staff and board members at LWF's Annual Convention in Lafayette. ❖

A RARE SNAKE RETURNS TO LONGLEAF PINE HABITAT IN KISATCHIE NATIONAL FOREST

By Kelsy Yeargain, Development Director

One of the rarest snakes in North America is getting help from a dedicated group of conservation partners. Recently, 100 Louisiana pine snakes were released in Kisatchie National Forest as part of an ongoing effort to restore wild populations of this seldom-encountered species.

The snakes were hatched at Audubon Zoo as part of the Louisiana Pine Snake Recovery Program. The USDA Forest Service has been working with Audubon and other zoos for years to restore wild populations of this fascinating species.

Before release, each snake received a microchip that can be used to identify individual snakes in the future when they are encountered or recaptured. These microchips can help biologists learn more about snake movements over time. Each snake also received a health evaluation and was weighed, measured, and photographed to help with future identification.

On June 3, 2026, the Forest Service and partners gathered at Fullerton Lake Recreation Area to plan the day's release of 80 snakes into Kisatchie National Forest in Vernon Parish. An additional 20 snakes were released in Kisatchie National Forest in Grant Parish.

A Species Tied to Longleaf Pine Habitat

The Louisiana pine snake spends much of its life in pocket gopher burrows. Pocket gophers are a primary food source for the snake, and their burrows provide underground shelter. The longleaf pine ecosystem of Kisatchie National Forest provides important habitat for both species. Longleaf pines towering over grassy areas with sandy soils create the type of habitat needed by gophers and snakes alike.

Partners in Recovery

This collaborative conservation initiative involves professionals from several agencies and institutions. The Forest Service has worked closely with partners to provide funding for the zoo's Louisiana pine snake propagation efforts. Kisatchie National Forest has several additional prime release sites identified and will continue working with zoos hatching snakes for release into suitable habitat. ❖

FROM NEST TO FIRST FLIGHT, WATCH LOUISIANA'S BALD EAGLES LIVE

Louisiana Wildlife Federation is proud to sponsor the Kisatchie Eagle Cam, bringing viewers a live look at bald eagle nests in Kisatchie National Forest.

Each fall, eagles return to their Louisiana nests, and through the Eagle Cam, people from across the country and around the world can watch the season unfold. From nest building and egg laying to hatching, feeding, and the first flights of young eaglets, the Eagle Cam offers a rare view of Louisiana's wild places in real time.

LWF is grateful to the dedicated Eagle Cam viewers whose donations help keep this experience available to the public.

Thank you to our Eagle Cam supporters: Jean Stock, Amanda Carroll, Satheeja Velayudhan; and Terri Green, who donated "In Memory of Fallen KNF Eaglet E3-04" on March 20, 2025.

Want to help keep the Eagle Cam live? Contact Kelsy@lawildlifefed.org to learn more about sponsoring the Kisatchie Eagle Cam.

Scan the QR code or visit www.lawildlifefed.org/eaglecam to watch live.

SAVE THE BIRDS

Migration: August 15 - October 31

Lights Out for Fall Migration

Each fall, millions of birds migrate through Louisiana, many traveling at night along the Mississippi Flyway.

From August 15 through October 31, LWF encourages Louisianans to turn off lights from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m.

How You Can Help

- **Turn off non-essential indoor and outdoor lights overnight.**
- **Close blinds or curtains to reduce light spill.**
- **Use motion sensors, timers, shields, or downward-facing lights for essential lighting.**

A darker night can mean a safer flight.

LWF 2026 REGULAR LEGISLATIVE SESSION SUMMARY

By Rick Owens, LWF Advocacy Director

The Louisiana Wildlife Federation entered the 2026 Regular Session with an active agenda and maintained a presence throughout the process, tracking more than 70 bills, engaging across multiple committees, working directly with bill authors, and providing testimony on a wide range of issues affecting wildlife, fisheries, water resources, and public lands. LWF also participated in Coastal Day, sponsored the annual Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus, and hosted a luncheon for the Legislative Black Caucus, building relationships that support our conservation mission well beyond any single session.

Prohibiting the intentional mass release of Mylar and helium balloons has become law as Act 196 without the Governor's signature. You may recall that a similar bill was vetoed last year. LWF again supported this year's HB 851, sponsored by Rep. Illg and many co-sponsors. This is meaningful action to prevent the documented impacts from balloons ending up as litter and impacting birds, marine life, and other wildlife through ingestion and entanglement.

HB 688, which sought to establish a **management framework for the Atlantic tarpon under state authority, was vetoed by Governor Landry.** LWF worked directly with Representative Joseph Orgeron, who sponsored the bill at LWF's request, and it passed both houses with unanimous support. The Governor cited his view that the lack of harvest pressure did not warrant action. LWF believes the science, including LDWF's own State Wildlife Action Plan, which lists tarpon as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need, tells a different story, and we remain committed to pursuing tarpon management in future sessions. Thank you to Rep. Orgeron for his leadership on this.

Menhaden fisheries management saw multiple bills addressing enforcement, transparency, and bycatch accountability. LWF supported legislation that advanced through the process: HB 757 strengthened penalties for buffer zone violations; HB 872 required AIS tracking on all menhaden vessels to improve

enforcement capability; and HB 886 required that harvest data reported to the Legislature be made publicly available. The most direct science-based measures, HB 855, which would have established a depth restriction based on the state's own bycatch study, and SB 186, which would have created a total allowable catch framework, did not advance. We expect this to remain a hot topic in future sessions.

LWF supported the **CPRA FY 2027 Annual Plan** as it was approved via SR 7 and HR 1. It included significant projects for White Lake Wildlife Conservation Area, Marsh Island State Wildlife Refuge, and the Chandeleur Islands. LWF also supported HB 890, which would have imposed additional coastal use permit requirements for Lake Maurepas and Lake Pontchartrain, but the bill failed to advance after a fiscal note significantly increased the projected cost of the permits.

LWF supported **funding for the Louisiana Outdoors Forever (LOF) program** through direct testimony and engagement in the appropriations process, advocating for both the initial $1 million budget allocation and an additional $1 million through the supplemental process that resulted in funding for the upcoming LOF grant cycle. Thank you to Representative Zeringue for his continued championing of this conservation program.

In response to the **seismic activity affecting northwest Louisiana,** HR 344 calls for a study report on the seismic activity affecting that area. LWF engaged on a **package of resolutions calling for state study of seismic events and the creation of a monitoring strategy.** After a late amendment to SCR 84 removed LWF from the proposed task force, LWF worked to ensure that HR 345, by Representative Schamerhorn, which preserved LWF's participation in a task force, was advanced and passed. As the final resolution adopted, HR 345 took precedence and LWF was afforded a seat on the Seismic Activity Task Force.

Water management policy was a consistent and growing theme throughout the session. LWF testified in support of HB 599, which would have prohibited the sale of Louisiana's running surface water for out-of-state use, and HB 1209, which addressed surface water withdrawal and funding for the aquatic vegetation program. Both bills passed the House but failed to advance in the Senate Natural Resources Committee. HB 1209 was ultimately converted into HR 374, a study resolution that passed and creates a pathway for state agencies to evaluate the issue. LWF also testified in support of HB 1206, which would have monitored water use by AI data centers but was deferred in committee.

LWF used the session to broadly circulate its two-page statewide water management position paper, advancing the broader conversation even where specific legislation fell short.

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) policy remained a contentious issue during the 2026 session, with HCR 4 and SCR 24 reflecting continued pressure to shift management away from science-based approaches. HCR 4 would have removed baiting regulations from LDWF's management plan entirely and failed to receive a Senate hearing. SCR 24, a reduced version of the existing plan already scaled back by stakeholder pressure, did pass and will serve as the new baseline for CWD management in Louisiana, an outcome that falls short of LWF's recommendations but maintains a minimal science-based framework. LWF continues to represent conservation interests on the state CWD Legislative Task Force.

LWF opposed HB 1171 by Representative Mack, which would have broadly **expanded unrestricted airboat use on the Maurepas Wildlife Management Area.** Following LWF's testimony in the House Natural Resources Committee and continued engagement, the bill's author worked with LDWF, LWF, and other stakeholders to substantially narrow the proposal before it ultimately failed to pass. Agreement was reached that the author, LDWF, and Senator Lambert would continue evaluating whether designated routes could be addressed through the department's administrative process, a more appropriate path for this type of management decision.

LWF **opposed changes to the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission.** SB 249 and SB 296 sought to expand the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission from seven to nine members and restructure appointments in a way that would have shortened staggered terms and increased the number of members serving concurrently with the Governor's administration. LWF testified in opposition and published a position statement that drew coverage from outside media, helping elevate the issue beyond the Capitol. Both bills advanced through the Senate Natural Resources Committee but were not brought before the full Senate for a vote.

SB 331 sought **exemptions within the Scenic Rivers program for portions of the lower Pearl River.** LWF met with the bill author on multiple occasions and secured significant amendments, including removal of provisions for commercial development, reservoir construction, and residential development, and a reduction of the exemption period from eight to five years. While LWF does not support scenic river exemptions as a matter of principle, the final bill was significantly narrowed through our engagement. The bill passed into law.

LWF supported SB 244, which **establishes a recreational alligator hunting season in Louisiana.** This measure is grounded in science-driven population management and creates an additional hunting opportunity for Louisiana sportsmen. The bill was heavily contested by the Louisiana Landowner Association and required significant amendment before ultimately being signed into law.

HB 508 would have removed **hunting license requirements** for individuals taking wild quadrupeds on their own property, effectively opening broad recreational hunting activity without state licensing participation. LWF testified in opposition and recommended narrowing the exemption to the immediate curtilage of a residence. The bill was amended to a 300-yard standard before ultimately failing to receive a hearing in the Senate Natural Resources Committee and not advancing.

LWF supported a package of resolutions — HCR 86, HCR 87, and HCR 54 — **requesting a federal study on the relationship between flooded agricultural crops and waterfowl,** consistent with LWF's 2026 waterfowl habitat resolution that supports an earlier request by Senator Kennedy to USFWS. LWF provided testimony in each committee hearing and all three resolutions passed.

HR 343, filed in direct response to LWF's **Protect Kisatchie National Forest** public lands campaign, urged Congress to oppose any sale or transfer of the forest from federal ownership. This resolution is a strong example of how LWF's advocacy translates directly into legislative action, and it passed without opposition. Thank you to Representative Firment.

LWF also **engaged on a range of additional issues** during the session, including legislation that protects location data for sensitive species from public-records disclosure and delays the release of hunting-lottery information. LWF opposed pipeline liability bills that would have weakened landowner and habitat protections and monitored more than 30 carbon capture and storage bills, the majority of which never received a committee hearing. LWF also engaged on charter guide licensing, mottled duck recognition, and oyster lease reform.

The 2026 session reflected the growing scope and complexity of conservation policy in Louisiana. LWF will remain at the table on these issues as they continue through future legislation, agency rulemaking, and stakeholder negotiations. **Thank you to our members and supporters** who responded to action alerts and helped make LWF's voice heard at the Capitol. ❖

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