



**An independent voice for Arkansas wildlife.**

## **Arkansas Wildlife Federation 2023 Legislative Policy Action Agenda**

### **Background**

America is in the midst of a wildlife crisis. In Arkansas, 377 species have been identified by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC) as “species of greatest conservation need”, including the Eastern collard lizard, Ozark hellbender, red-cockaded woodpecker, lake sturgeon, and Northern bobwhite quail.

To best serve its mission *to ensure a thriving future for Arkansas wildlife*, the Arkansas Wildlife Federation (AWF) prioritizes policy actions that will have the most direct and significant impact on the conservation and protection of wildlife.

AWF’s board of directors approves its annual policy action agenda.

### **Federal Policy Priorities**

AWF is active in working with our Arkansas members of Congress to advance the following legislative priorities.

#### **Recovering America’s Wildlife Act**



Ozark big-eared bat  
Pedro Ardapple, USFWS

Wildlife species are in crisis due to habitat loss, invasive species, emerging diseases, and changing climate conditions. More than 1,600 U.S. species are already listed under the federal Endangered Species Act, including [37 species in Arkansas](#).

The **Recovering America’s Wildlife Act** is a bipartisan bill that would provide approximately \$1.4 billion annually throughout the nation for proactive, on-the-ground efforts to help species at risk by protecting and restoring habitat, controlling invasive species, addressing emerging diseases, and reconnecting wildlife movement corridors.

**Arkansas would receive approximately \$15 million annually to support statewide species of greatest conservation need** through implementation of the Arkansas Wildlife Action Plan, administered by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. The current amount of annual funding to support the plan is \$600 thousand – an inadequate investment to reverse our wildlife crisis.

Congress should pass the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act as essential to reversing the biodiversity crisis, recovering at risk species, and preventing new species from becoming endangered.

## **2023 Farm Bill**

90% of land in Arkansas is in private ownership. This means that the future of wildlife is, to a great extent, in private hands. The **Farm Bill** offers the single largest source of funding for conservation programs benefiting wildlife on private lands.

The Farm Bill is a comprehensive package of legislation passed by Congress every five years that sets national policy on agriculture, nutrition, forestry, and conservation - **including voluntary programs that benefit wildlife.**

Farm Bill conservation programs provide solutions to farmers and ranchers through technical advice, cost sharing, and payments to reduce the environmental impacts of agriculture. Agriculture is a major source of income to Arkansas and an important part of our heritage and way of life – just like wildlife.



Congress should double the funding for conservation programs in the Farm Bill, promote climate-smart agriculture practices, conserve native grasslands and wetlands, increase opportunities to enhance carbon sequestration on private forestlands, and find solutions to track and contain PFAS (“forever chemicals”) for public health and farm viability.

## **North American Grasslands Conservation Act**



Most of Arkansas’ native grasslands have disappeared. Grasslands provide habitat to a wide array of wildlife species, including elk, bobwhite quail, and the Western meadowlark which teeters at the edge of extinction.

Over the past decade, millions of acres of grasslands have been lost or degraded in the U.S. These lands are critical to agriculture, hunting, and recreation, and provide important cultural and economic benefits.

Native grasslands and healthy working grasslands not only provide soil, water, and wildlife benefits, but they sequester a significant amount of carbon, making them a natural climate solution. **The North American Grasslands Conservation Act would invest \$290 million in voluntary initiatives to collaboratively conserve and restore native grasslands.**

Congress should pass the North American Grasslands Conservation Act to invest in the urgent recovery and protection of grassland habitat and the wildlife species that depend on them.

## **State Policy Priorities**

During the **2023 Arkansas General Assembly**, the Arkansas Wildlife Federation (AWF) will serve as a legislative watchdog, tracking bills and responding with our statewide conservation partners to any issues that may be of interest or concern to our mission of ensuring a thriving future for Arkansas wildlife.

AWF will attend priority state agency meetings, pay close attention to conservation-related political appointments, and continue to educate around wildlife issues and build relationships statewide.