

**USDA National Wildlife Services Advisory Committee (NWSAC)**  
**October 4 - 5, 2023**  
**Washington, DC**



**Wednesday, October 4, 2023, 8:30am – 5:00pm EST– USDA Whitten Building  
(Williamsburg Conference Room)**

Welcome and Introductions: Janet L. Bucknall, Deputy Administrator (DA), Wildlife Services (WS)

The NWSAC meeting was called to order at 8:36am EST. WS DA, Janet Bucknall, introduced herself and provided a brief overview and history of the NWSAC meeting and WS program; describing the program's mission area within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). DA Bucknall thanked everyone for coming and expressed her eagerness to hear from the NWSAC members. DA Bucknall asked everyone to introduce themselves and tell their story.

NWSAC Members in Attendance:

- Andrew Prosser, Industry/Producers (MS)
- Bernard Joseph Petersen, Industry/Producers (NV)
- Calvert Curry Campbell, Industry/Producers (TX)
- Catherine Denise Urbigkit, Industry/Producers (WY)
- Christopher William de Nijs, State/County Government and Associations (CA)
- David Lynn McEwen, Industry/Producers (MT)
- Harry Owen Snelson, Non-Government Organization (NC)
- James E. Higgins, Airport Wildlife Management (FL)
- Jerrold Lowell Belant, Academia (MI)
- John Michael Tomecek, Academia (TX)
- Joseph A. Kipp, Industry/Producers (MT)
- Mark Dean Smith, Academia (AL)
- Lisa Ann Murphy, Academia (PA)
- Ronald James Regan, State/County Government and Associations (MD)
- Sherri Wilson Russell, State/County Government and Associations (MO)
- Suzanne Asha Stone, Non-Government Organization (ID)
- William Bowman Seeley, Non-Government Organization (MT)

NWSAC Members Not in Attendance:

- Burton Patrick Pfliger, Industry/Producers (ND)
- Ellary Tucker-Williams, Non-Government Organization (ID)

WS Staff Present:

- Janet L. Bucknall, Deputy Administrator

- Jessica Fantinato, Associate Deputy Administrator
- Dr. Donna Lalli, Associate Deputy Administrator
- Jason Suckow, National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) Director
- Keith Wehner, Eastern Region Director
- John Steuber, Western Region Co-Acting Director
- Wendy Anderson, Western Region Co-Acting Director
- David Reinhold, Operational Support Staff (OSS) Director
- Jenny Washburn, WS Field Liaison/Airport Wildlife Hazard Program (AWHP) Staff Wildlife Biologist
- Rich Chipman, National Rabies Management Program Coordinator
- Dr. Dana Cole, National Feral Swine Management Program Coordinator
- Mike Begier, AWHP Coordinator
- Kim Clapper, WS Chief of Staff, Office of the Deputy Administrator
- Marnie Pepper, Staff Wildlife Biologist (OSS)
- Kevin Williams, Travel Program Specialist (OSS)
- Carrie Joyce, Management Analyst (OSS)

Additional Attendees/Presenters:

- Jenny Lester Moffitt, MRP Under Secretary
- Dr. Michael Watson, Acting APHIS Administrator

Public Visitors Present:

- Erica Gandolfo, Animal Welfare Institute
- Tim Cansler, California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association (CACASA)
- Kathy Kipp, Blackfeet Nation member and spouse of NWSAC member, Joseph Kipp
- Carolina Herrera, Capitol Hill Consulting Group

Administrator's Remarks: Dr. Michael Watson, Acting Administrator (APHIS)

Acting Administrator Watson started by thanking everyone for their time and participation in the committee and commended WS staff for their role in assisting the Secretary in assembling such a diverse committee with members representing 15 states and wide-ranging interests, such as: ranching, farming, animal health, land management, academia, and government. He talked about the WS program, One Health, and some of the important areas of service WS provides.

Deputy's Remarks: Janet L. Bucknall, Deputy Administrator (WS)

During the Deputy's remarks, DA Bucknall, cited the diversity in WS' work, noting that many of the presenters are wildlife biologists and that wildlife conservation is a passion of the program. She discussed programmatic areas and WS' innate ability to collaborate and work with many different stakeholders to protect agriculture, natural resources, human health & safety, and property from wildlife damage. Prior to thanking the WS staff for their efforts to schedule the meeting, she urged the NWSAC to consider the following when determining their recommendations:

- Wildlife Disease / One Health
- Communication-How best to tell the WS story? How best to hear other's stories and incorporate those stories into the WS mission?
- How to balance traditional or core needs of the WS program, with new ideas and concepts, and create an even better public service program?

Following DA Bucknall's remarks, the full group met for a picture.

MRP Remarks: Jenny Lester Moffitt, Under Secretary (U/S), Marketing and Regulatory Programs, (MRP)

U/S Moffitt started by thanking DA Bucknall for introducing her and for her leadership of the WS program, noting WS' critical importance to farmers, ranchers, and various stakeholders. She thanked and congratulated the NWSAC members, noting that the committee was one of USDA's 7 Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) groups. U/S Moffitt discussed her personal background in agriculture, noted several positive WS-related news reports over the past year, and mentioned WS' emergency response role. She concluded by mentioning the NWSAC's important role in advising and preparing WS for challenges and opportunities.

Eastern Region Update: Keith Wehner, Director (Raleigh, NC)

WS Eastern Region Director, Keith Wehner, provided an overview of the Eastern Regional (ER) program. The program area, consisting of 31 states, provides many services including damage management of feral swine, beaver, white tailed deer, migratory birds (Canada geese, vultures, double-crested cormorants, etc.), and invasive species. He noted the growing issues with black vulture population expansion and the variety of damage they can cause from livestock depredation to removing clogging out of dams. Additionally, the ER protects aquaculture facilities, natural resources (threatened and endangered species), airports/airfields, etc., from wildlife damage, and provides various services (rabies management/protection, and wildlife biosecurity assessments to farm / poultry facilities). Director Wehner emphasized that State Programs use a variety of tools (lethal and nonlethal) to address conflicts. Some ER challenges and/or opportunities include detector dog work, aerial work, wind turbine industry work, and managing new species such as reptiles, amphibians, and fish.

Western Region Update: John Steuber, Acting Director (Fort Collins, CO)

WS Acting Western Region Director, John Steuber, provided an overview of the Western Regional (WR) program which also includes Guam and Hawaii. He noted that they are backfilling the Western Regional Director (he is currently serving as Acting Director) as well as a handful of State Director positions. Like the ER, the program area provides many services including damage management of feral swine, migratory birds (Canada geese, vultures, ravens, etc.), and invasive species. A large component of the WR's work is livestock protection, to include management of large predators like wolves and grizzly bears. Additionally, and similar to the ER, the WR protects natural resources (threatened and endangered species) and airports/airfields, etc., from wildlife damage, and provides various services (rabies management/protection, and wildlife biosecurity assessments to farm / poultry facilities), but also has a presence within the sunflower and dairy/feedlot communities, protecting agricultural commodities against invasive species such as the European starling. Some WR challenges and/or opportunities include current limited workforce (i.e., a lot of turn over and retirements have recently occurred within the WR), maintaining the ability to cost share with federal agencies, maintaining an aerial fleet (i.e., particularly as it relates to the growing issues with feral swine), providing and better serving underserved communities (i.e., working with tribal nations and building funding for those efforts), managing raven issues, urban wildlife issues, and advancing opportunities to partner with non-government organizations (NGOs).

National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) Update: Jason Suckow, Director (Fort Collins, CO)

NWRC Director, Jason Suckow, provided a brief history of the WS program, noting how the program has evolved and that wildlife is a public trust resource. He provided an overview of the NWRC including information on the main 43-acre facility in Fort Collins, CO that houses a one-acre flight pen, animal holding facilities, diagnostic laboratories, etc., and outlined the duties of the 7 current field stations located in Fargo, ND; Sandusky, OH; Logan, UT; Gainesville, FL; Starkville, MS; Hilo, HI; and Guam. The Corvallis, OR field station is no longer active. He noted that they are still doing the work, just in different areas. The NWRC has 18 research project areas with researchers that oversee each area and associated staffs. On the support side, the NWRC has an Animal Care Unit (to include an attending veterinarian), Regulation Support Services, Laboratory Support Services, Information Services (library), and Administration staffs. Challenges

and/or opportunities for NWRC include workforce and infrastructure limitations regarding managing wildlife diseases, data modeling and computing power challenges, island conservation work, leveraging new technologies, and diagnostic capacity.

National Rabies Management Program Update: Richard Chipman, Coordinator (Concord, NH)

Rich Chipman, National Coordinator (Concord, NH), provided an update on the National Rabies Management Program. He started with the cultural history of rabies and the devastating health costs (physical and fiscal) associated with potential exposure. Chipman noted the National Rabies Management Program was the first National program in WS, working since 1995 using primarily Oral Rabies Vaccine (ORV) baits. The program distributes >8.7 million baits across 14 states. Two baits brands are used: V-RG and ONRAB. He explained the available tools and the WS' model for rabies management. The program now does 8% of rabies testing in the United States, collecting ~7,500 brain stems a year and 5,600 blood samples a year (index to herd immunity). They have documented a 70% decline in raccoon rabies.

The WS Rabies Program's goals are to prevent the spread of rabies and to eliminate rabies. So far they have:

- Eliminated dog-coyote variant from the United States (no cases since 2004);
- Eliminated Texas gray fox variant (no cases since 2013);
- NOT documented any appreciable spread of raccoon rabies west of ORV zone; and
- Documented local elimination of raccoon rabies in United States.

Additionally, the WS Rabies Program works closely with NWRC and has published 130 rabies publications from FY12 – FY22. Mr. Chipman described major challenges in managing rabies at the landscape level and noted the goal of being “raccoon rabies free by 2063”. He also noted difficulties targeting raccoons in urban environments as these animals live in a food rich environment and with Virginia opossums (non-rabies vector species) consuming baits.

National Feral Swine Damage Management Program Update: Dana Cole, DVM, PhD., Coordinator (Fort Collins, CO)

Program Coordinator Dr. Dana Cole, DVM, PhD (Fort Collins, CO) talked about the history of feral swine in the United States and how wild population established causing damaging impacts to agriculture, natural resources (including endangered/threatened species), property and human/animal health and safety (disease). Dr. Cole explained that WS established the National Feral Swine Damage Management Program in 2014 to help address the issues caused by feral swine. States have unique challenges and receive base funding based on the size of the issue (level of impact).

Dr. Cole described several projects, including the Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program funded through the Farm Bill. This 5-year program just concluded in fiscal year 2023 and involved 12 states and consisted of 34 projects. The program works with NWRC on trap/equipment loan programs and has also worked to serve underserved communities in Hawaii, in the southern United States, and on tribal lands. The Feral Swine Program is involved in conducting surveillance for African swine fever (ASF). A detection in the Dominican Republic heightened the need for these efforts, and APHIS is focusing its surveillance on borders to prevent the disease from spreading into the United States. Dr. Cole also mentioned potential entry of feral swine from Canada, coined “Canadian Super Pigs” and from uncontrolled populations along the southern border.

National Wildlife Disease Program Update: Jason Suckow, NWRC Director (Fort Collins, CO)

NWRC Director Jason Suckow presented for Program Coordinator Dr. Julie Lenoach, who was not present. Mr. Suckow explained that wildlife disease biologist positions exist in many state programs. These biologists assist the State Directors but also work closely with the State

Departments of Health, Agriculture and Natural Resources/Wildlife. Mr. Suckow described how the National Wildlife Disease Program has two parts – emergency response and surveillance and how disease biologists deploy for responses. He noted that WS is actively looking at diseases that are important to stakeholders including High Path Avian Influenza (HPAI), Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), the plague, ASF, and Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus 2. He closed by talking about the training requirements disease biologist must have to ensure they are efficient and safe when deployed.

Airport Wildlife Hazards Program Update: Mike Begier, Coordinator (Washington, DC)

Airport Wildlife Hazards Program Coordinator, Mike Begier, presented the history of WS assistance to airports starting in the 1950s. The program currently assists 813 airports including 27 Department of Defense (DOD) bases in 14 countries and receives \$43 million through cooperative funding. Main cooperators of the program include the Federal Aviation Administration, National Association of State Aviation Officials, and the DOD. The Airport Program provides annual trainings and works closely with the NWRC Sandusky, Ohio field station on research and development. He explained the WS database is the gold standard for monitoring bird strikes, and that WS sets the example for airport wildlife management. Mr. Begier noted one of the challenges is the nationwide footprint of the damage management issues and prioritizing decisions. He also commented on the potential for additional work protecting air taxi services (still under development).

NWSAC Charter Review Chair & Vice Chair Election: David Reinhold, Director WS Operational Support Staff (OSS)

Following WS programmatic updates, the NWSAC convened to discuss who would be the committee chair. David Reinhold, OSS Director led the discussion, citing information from the committee charter. The NWSAC elected John Michael Tomeček (Academia, TX) as its chair and Sherry Wilson Russell (State/County Government and Associations, MO) as its vice chair. John led the group through a review of previous NWSAC recommendations (13 total from 2019) and upon request of NWSAC members, WS staff provided information regarding the status of those recommendations.

The meeting adjourned at 5:08pm EST, with NWSAC members agreeing to work on draft recommendations (based on the day's discussions) to have ready for the following day.

**Thursday, October 5, 2023, 8:00am – 5:00pm EST – USDA Whitten Building (Williamsburg Conference Room, switched to the Press Room 107-A, after the lunch break)**

NWSAC Members in Attendance:

- Andrew Prosser, Industry/Producers (MS)
- Bernard Joseph Petersen, Industry/Producers (NV)
- Calvert Curry Campbell, Industry/Producers (TX)
- Catherine Denise Urbigkit, Industry/Producers (WY)
- Christopher William de Nijs, State/County Government and Associations (CA)
- David Lynn McEwen, Industry/Producers (MT)
- Harry Owen Snelson, Non-Government Organization (NC)
- James E. Higgins, Airport Wildlife Management (FL)
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- Lisa Ann Murphy, Academia (PA)
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- Sherri Wilson Russell, State/County Government and Associations (MO)
- Suzanne Asha Stone, Non-Government Organization (ID)
- William Bowman Seeley, Non-Government Organization (MT)

NWSAC Members Not in Attendance:

- Burton Patrick Pfliger, Industry/Producers (ND)
- Ellary Tucker-Williams, Non-Government Organization (ID)

WS Staff Present:

- Janet L. Bucknall, Deputy Administrator
- Jessica Fantinato, Associate Deputy Administrator
- Dr. Donna Lalli, Associate Deputy Administrator
- Jason Suckow, National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) Director
- Keith Wehner, Eastern Region Director
- John Steuber, Western Region Co-Acting Director
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- Kim Clapper, WS Chief of Staff, Office of the Deputy Administrator
- Marnie Pepper, Staff Wildlife Biologist (OSS)
- Kevin Williams, Travel Program Specialist (OSS)
- Carrie Joyce, Management Analyst (OSS)

Public Visitors Present:

- Ericca Gandolfo, Animal Welfare Institute
- Tim Cansler, California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association (CACASA)
- Kathy Kipp, Blackfeet Nation member and spouse of NWSAC member, Joseph Kipp
- Carson Barlack, International Fund for Animal Welfare

Committee Discussion and Recommendations: NWSAC Chairperson

Throughout the day, NWSAC members reviewed and discussed the previous 2019 recommendations, striking 2 from the list, and revising 11 of them (see below).

- Status of previous recommendations discussed:
  - **2019 NWSAC Recommendation #1:**  
*The NWSAC recommends to the Secretary of Agriculture that APHIS Wildlife Services (WS) continue the process of development and registration of wildlife toxicants and expedite the process where possible.*
    - Motion to retain/revise, passed.
  - **2019 NWSAC Recommendation #2:**  
*The NWSAC recommends to the Secretary of Agriculture that APHIS Wildlife Services (WS) communicate program activities proactively to constituents and stakeholders especially including non-traditional audiences in communities where WS is providing services. We encourage the use of econometrics in National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents, research, and informational materials, including the positive economic impact of livestock and resources conserved through integrated wildlife*

*damage management; and to communicate the relevancy and value of WS activities to the public's quality of life in keeping with the WS' focus on building public trust.*

- Motion to retain/revise, passed.
- **2019 NWSAC Recommendation #3:**

*The NWSAC recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture seek additional appropriations to increase funding for the management of rabies in the United States in the interest of human and animal health and safety, especially but not limited to raccoon rabies in the east and canine rabies on the Texas-Mexico border. Additionally, the NWSAC recommends a continuation of research, development and use of more efficient and effective vaccines with the goal of being raccoon rabies free by 2053.*

  - Motion to retain/revise, passed.
- **2019 NWSAC Recommendation #4:**

*The NWSAC recommends to the Secretary of Agriculture, in reference to Double Crested Cormorants (DCCO), APHIS Wildlife Services (WS) be provided with increased resources in partnership with other wildlife agencies to include staffing and budget.*

*The NWSAC also recommends an increase in resources and efforts to assist farmers with lethal and non-lethal management of DCCO and other migratory birds that prey on aquaculture.*

*Additionally, the NWSAC recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture communicate with the Secretary of Interior the following actions to protect the aquaculture industry:*

  - *To expedite the completion of an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to support the re-creation of a DCCO Aquaculture Depredation Order.-*
  - *Recommend an increase to the allowable take from 51,571 to at least 91,175 for individual permits to be allocated across the states as recommended by USDA Wildlife Services.-*
  - *Bring back the use of decoys by permittees to target problem birds that are unaffected by hazing.*
  - *Bring back the use of nest and egg destruction by permittees as a management tool.-*
  - *Instruct regional offices to issue individual permits for DCCO for a 12-month period as before instead of seasonal dates.-*

*The NWSAC also recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture discuss with the Secretary of Interior the pursuit of restoring the DCCO Public Resources Depredation Order in consultation with state fish and wildlife agencies.*

  - Motion to strike, passed.
  - Andrew Prosser (aquaculture industry) reviewed the previous recommendation and made the proposal to strike.
- **2019 NWSAC Recommendation #5:**

*The NWSAC recommends the Secretary of Agriculture engage the Secretary of Interior to seek additional Department of the Interior (DOI) funding for APHIS Wildlife Services (WS) through an existing interagency agreement framework for conflict resolution involving large predator management in furtherance of restoration of*

*species listed under the Endangered Species Act. The NWSAC specifically recommends additional resources be allocated for conflict resolution involving large predators, including but not limited to grizzly bears and wolves.*

- Motion to retain/revise, passed.
- **2019 NWSAC Recommendation #6:**

*The NWSAC recommends to the Secretary of Agriculture that administrative reforms be adopted to enhance the efficacy and customer service of APHIS Wildlife Services (WS) program delivery including the following:*

  - a. *Amend billing documents to process changes at no added cost to Wildlife Services.*
  - b. *Provide more detailed accounting from the Agency feeder system and allow Wildlife Services to review and correct bills prior to submission to the cooperator.*
  - c. *Reform and simplify policies pertaining to the use of volunteers to enable the rapid and efficient recruitment of volunteer Wildlife Services workers at the field level.–*
  - d. *Enable immediate access to vehicles by Wildlife Services field personnel for the fulfillment of their duties. Exempt Farm Bill funded and cooperator provided/funded vehicles from USDA vehicle caps.-*
  - e. *The NWSAC recognizes and appreciates the APHIS Administrator and Under Secretary’s support for Wildlife Services Fleet needs and active fleet management.*
- Motion to strike, passed.
- **2019 NWSAC Recommendation #7:**

*The NWSAC encourages the Secretary of Agriculture to continue working with the Secretary of the Interior to mitigate livestock depredation and property damage by vultures and eagles.*
- Motion to retain/revise, passed.
- **2019 NWSAC Recommendation #8:**

*The NWSAC recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture provide adequate resources to support preparedness and sustained infrastructure for emergency response to natural disasters, disease outbreaks, or any other declared emergency, as well as disease surveillance, prevention, and control of animal disease. The NWSAC further recommends APHIS Wildlife Services (WS) collaborate with USDA-APHIS-Veterinary Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to obtain additional funding for increased wildlife disease operations.*
- Motion to retain/revise, passed.
- **2019 NWSAC Recommendation #9:**

*The NWSAC recommends the Secretary of Agriculture advocate for the creation and sustainment of a Wildlife Services Aviation Center of Excellence in Cedar City, Utah. Support should be commensurate with the growth and expansion of the Wildlife Services Aviation Program, the modernization and standardization of the Wildlife Services aircraft fleet, and the development and implementation of new and innovative training techniques and pilot recruitment and retention.*
- Motion to retain/revise, passed.
- NWSAC member, Suzanne Asha Stone requested that the committee provide background information with the recommendation, detailing specifically what the aircraft will be used for.



○ **2019 NWSAC Recommendation #10:**

*The NWSAC recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture continue to support the use of the M-44.*

- Motion to retain/revise, passed.

○ **2019 NWSAC Recommendation #11:**

*The NWSAC recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture encourage the development of studies and reviews that integrate economic and ecological effects of wildlife damage management for the protection of American agriculture and natural resources, including objective science-based reviews that consider the value of wildlife management for the promotion of healthy ecosystems.*

- Motion to retain/revise, passed.

○ **2019 NWSAC Recommendation #12:**

*The NWSAC recommends to the Secretary of Agriculture that APHIS Wildlife Services (WS):*

- Work collaboratively with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Geological Survey to assist state and tribal agencies tasked with managing Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD).*
- Designate the National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) as the primary research facility for applied research on CWD in wild cervids.*
- Seek new funding for research including: methods to increase the timeliness of test results for both live and dead specimens, vaccine development, and other research priorities related to CWD.*

- Motion to retain/revise, passed.

○ **2019 NWSAC Recommendation #13:**

*The NWSAC recommends to the Secretary of Agriculture to expedite the development and registration of a sodium nitrite feral swine toxicant (Please refer to sodium nitrite toxicant research update in the response to Recommendation #1). We also urge the Secretary of Agriculture to explore new technologies for feral swine damage management and eradication.*

*APHIS Wildlife Services (WS) is encouraged to work with state feral swine task forces, tribal agencies, and the National Wild Pig Task Force to deliver state specific and national objectives for feral swine damage control and eradication.*

*Also, the NWSAC recommends the Secretary of Agriculture works with Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) to examine the safety of feral pork for human consumption as feral hogs have been shown to be the hosts for numerous zoonotic disease and parasites.*

- Motion to retain/revise, passed.

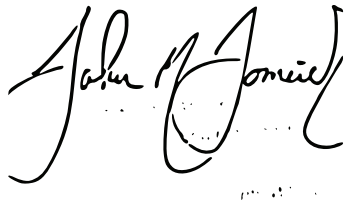
The committee developed 8 new recommendations (see below), for a total of 19 recommendations (11 previous, to be retained/revise, and 8 new) for provision to MRP U/S Moffitt and USDA Secretary Vilsack. NWSAC Chair Tomeček will review and refine the recommendations to send to MRP and USDA.

- New recommendations discussed and agreed upon:
  - 2023 New Recommendation #1: Increase in Baseline Funding
  - 2023 New Recommendation #2: Tribal Relations
  - 2023 New Recommendation #3: Aquaculture
  - 2023 New Recommendation #4: Vulture Summit
  - 2023 New Recommendation #5: Resources for Retainment and Recruitment
  - 2023 New Recommendation #6: Data Science Support
  - 2023 New Recommendation #7: Coexistence
  - 2023 New Recommendation #8: Emergency Response

Following the recommendations discussion, the NWSAC briefly discussed the next meeting date/location (TBD). NWSAC Chair Tomeček will send a survey to members to determine the final date/location of the meeting. Tomeček thanked WS for their work and for setting up the meeting and the Council for a productive session.

The meeting adjourned at 4pm EST.

Reviewed and Approved by NWSAC Chair, John Michael Tomeček:

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John Michael Tomeček". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".