

Peer Review: Relevancy reimagined: Exploring ways to broaden support for fish and wildlife conservation in the United States

Lara Mengak¹, Haley K. Netherton-Morrison², Lincoln R. Larson³, Rich von Furstenberg³, & Kelly G. Guilbeau⁴

Collaborators: Michelle Lute + 4 other reviewers

¹ Department of Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Sciences, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon, USA

² Human-Environment Systems, Boise State University, Boise, Idaho, USA

³ Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism Management, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

⁴ Natural Resource Program Center, National Wildlife Refuge System, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Lafayette, Louisiana, USA

Accepted by 4 of 5 reviewers

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Publishing History

Submitted September 23 2025

Accepted May 1 2026

Published July 17 2026

Corresponding Author

Lara Mengak

lara.mengak@oregonstate.edu



Open Access



Peer-Reviewed



Creative Commons

Transparent Peer Review

- [View reviewer summaries](#)
- [View resubmission with reviewer comments and author responses](#)
- [View initial submission with reviewer comments and author responses](#)

Recommended Citation

Mengak, L., H. K. Netherton-Morrison, L. R. Larson, R. von Furstenberg, and K. G. Guilbeau. 2026. Relevancy reimagined: Exploring ways to broaden support for fish and wildlife conservation in the United States. Stacks Journal: 26008. <https://doi.org/10.60102/stacks-26008>.



Reviewer Summaries

Michael Joyce

Initial Submission

Do you have any conflicts of interest that could bias your ability to provide an independent review?

No

What did the authors do a good job with?

I think the topic is broadly important to conservationists, ecologists, and policy makers. This is particularly true in an era where many factors have given legitimacy and voice to anti-scientific interests. Maintaining trust and relevance with stakeholders and politicians is central to achieving conservation goals.

How do you think this research will contribute to the field?

I am not sure. One limitation of this manuscript is that it does not represent research scholarship very well. As many reviewers pointed out, the handling of many topics is cursory and lacking a rigorous literature review. Additionally, there are many claims and ideas presented as fact without proper justification (in the way of analytical methods) or citation. If these shortcomings can be addressed, this manuscript could help guide structural changes to improve relevancy. If not, then it will have little impact.

Regarding the study design and methods, what do the authors need to fix or improve upon to be fit for publication?

There really isn't any study design or methods -- at least not that were explicitly described in the initial draft. The first improvement I suggest is to flesh out and better organize the content of the manuscript. A close second is to make methods and results a bit clearer (e.g., how did they solicit and analyze audience feedback at the conference symposium? What is the quantitative breakdown of participants rather than a quick list of participant groups?).

Regarding the analysis and interpretation of their findings, what do the authors need to fix or improve upon to be fit for publication?

Again, there isn't really any hard analysis presented, but lots of interpretation. I am not super familiar with the field being reviewed, but the citations and conclusions seem cursory at best. I strongly encourage the authors to reorganize their manuscript to improve clarity (e.g., by providing definitions), depth, and provide clear examples to illustrate their many suppositions.

Is there anything else you think the authors need to fix in their article to be fit for publication?

The Stacks is a research publication. I am not certain that this type of article is appropriate without a large overhaul. This reads more like an opinion piece -- I happen to like when journals publish such pieces, but this manuscript lacks the rigor needed to be publishable.

Do you have any concerns about the ethics of this research?

No

Do you believe the article, in its current form, is fit for publication?

This paper needs major revisions and another round of peer review



Revised Submission

Do you have any conflicts of interest that could bias your ability to provide an independent review?

No

How well did the authors respond to your comments?

4/5

What - if any - feedback do you feel the authors did not adequately respond to?

I think the authors addressed all major concerns

Based on your review, what should happen next?

This paper requires minor revisions but does not need further peer review

Would you like to be listed as a Collaborator on the final publication?

No, I do not want to be listed as a Collaborator

Megha Khanduri

Initial Submission

Do you have any conflicts of interest that could bias your ability to provide an independent review?

No

What did the authors do a good job with?

I particularly liked how the authors have tried to account for the changing perceptions of the value of conservation. This makes the study timely as the world is currently going through many major changes and wildlife conservation may not be everyone's priority at the moment. The authors have also described the barriers to keeping conservation relevant to the society, which need to be addressed to ensure support for conservation.

How do you think this research will contribute to the field?

"The study clearly describes a framework for ensuring the relevance of conservation in a changing world, with the help of three components. The framework makes the study especially valuable in a world where engaging with local communities is growing more challenging as views change.

The study can guide not only on-ground conservation activities but also funding acquisition for conservation as many conservation funding agencies value detailed descriptions of the purpose, process and outcomes ("products" in this study) in proposals. Therefore, it is valuable for guiding both conservation planning and conservation funding acquisition."

Regarding the study design and methods, what do the authors need to fix or improve upon to be fit for publication?

"I believe the study would have had more scientific rigour if the authors had incorporated quantitative data into the conceptualisation of relevance - what percentage of participants had a certain experience, and the significance of differences in experiences and opinions, etc.

I also have a concern that this section described the symposium attendees' point of view. The fact that this was a wildlife conservation - focused symposium suggests that these results could be biased in the context of the majority of the population, who might be more concerned with social relevance"

Regarding the analysis and interpretation of their findings, what do the authors need to fix or improve upon to be fit for publication?



In its current stage, I am unsure if the manuscript is intended to be a report or a scientific study. If possible, the inclusion of quantitative data on the responses for the conceptualisation of relevance would improve the study and make it more scientific.

Is there anything else you think the authors need to fix in their article to be fit for publication?

In the section "A Path to Reimagining Relevancy", it might help to expand the individual points to add more details on how to achieve these. I feel that giving examples from case studies might help show that the proposed best practices are feasible and have been proven successful.

Do you have any concerns about the ethics of this research?

No

Do you believe the article, in its current form, is fit for publication?

This paper needs major revisions and another round of peer review

Revised Submission

Do you have any conflicts of interest that could bias your ability to provide an independent review?

No

How well did the authors respond to your comments?

4/5

What - if any - feedback do you feel the authors did not adequately respond to?

I found the authors' responses adequate

Based on your review, what should happen next?

This paper requires minor revisions but does not need further peer review

Would you like to be listed as a Collaborator on the final publication?

No, I do not want to be listed as a Collaborator

Michelle Lute

Initial Submission

Do you have any conflicts of interest that could bias your ability to provide an independent review?

No

What did the authors do a good job with?

Their topic addresses a critical need in North American wildlife conservation

How do you think this research will contribute to the field?

It serves as useful summary and guidance for agencies to increase relevance to diverse constituencies

Regarding the study design and methods, what do the authors need to fix or improve upon to be fit for publication?

More details on the methodology

Regarding the analysis and interpretation of their findings, what do the authors need to fix or improve upon to be fit for publication?

More clarity on when they're presenting results and what is literature review related to those results

Is there anything else you think the authors need to fix in their article to be fit for publication?

Some vague terminology and increased specificity and examples could root the more abstract ideas in concrete recommendations. One reviewer requested more specificity throughout the paper-- I didn't always agree that everything needs a definition, so caution against taking all those recommendations (it



would become a paper three times as long and with a much wider scope when the current focus is appropriate). But also advise not to ignore all the requested elaboration (easy to do with a "Reviewer 2").

Do you have any concerns about the ethics of this research?

no

Do you believe the article, in its current form, is fit for publication?

This paper needs major revisions and another round of peer review

Revised Submission

Do you have any conflicts of interest that could bias your ability to provide an independent review?

No

How well did the authors respond to your comments?

4/5

What - if any - feedback do you feel the authors did not adequately respond to?

None

Based on your review, what should happen next?

This paper requires minor revisions but does not need further peer review

Would you like to be listed as a Collaborator on the final publication?

Yes, please list me as a Collaborator

Adrian Treves

Initial Submission

Do you have any conflicts of interest that could bias your ability to provide an independent review?

I don't perceive any but in my worldview editors should evaluate this question with full information at their fingertips. Therefore, I have provided my CV and funding history publicly so editors can judge for themselves: <https://faculty.nelson.wisc.edu/treves/CCC.php>.

What did the authors do a good job with?

They captured 3 interest groups (AFWA, TWS, WMI) and their members' concerns about modern fish and wildlife agencies' abilities to keep pace with changing societal values and needs.

How do you think this research will contribute to the field?

In its current state, it will not contribute much to the field which is international, interdisciplinary, and culturally diverse in worldviews, legal bases for nature management, and perceptions of the science-policy interface.

Regarding the study design and methods, what do the authors need to fix or improve upon to be fit for publication?

see >90 marginal comments. The work is not reproducible as currently described because the basis for numerous fact claims is not provided. Where a citation is provided to evidence, it is not peer-reviewed evidence which makes the claim dubious. The literature review shows poor knowledge of what we (the field and international scientific community) know and where gaps remain.

Regarding the analysis and interpretation of their findings, what do the authors need to fix or improve upon to be fit for publication?

see >90 marginal comments. First and foremost, the authors should strive for defining terms and second, they should aim for more clarity of argumentation. The essential words in their title, abstract, and introduction that are key to the entire paper are not defined (e.g., conservation, relevancy, stakeholders,



rights holders, management, traditional, etc.) Rather than aiming for their predetermined conclusion and picking the evidence and perspectives to match that predetermined conclusion, the authors should do what the abstract claims which is to review and summarize different views of relevancy (including different definitions) and decide how US institutions have met or failed to meet those diverse views. Then explain why they have succeeded or failed in every instance.

Is there anything else you think the authors need to fix in their article to be fit for publication?

see >90 marginal comments, there are many many improvements to make

Do you have any concerns about the ethics of this research?

Yes. It should be made clear — in the affiliations of the authors and the disclosures that come with such an article — whether any authors have paid positions or unpaid leadership positions with AFWA, TWS, or WMI. These organizations have something tangible to gain from a peer-reviewed article endorsing the roadmap and those gains must be transparently disclosed to readers. If they are not disclosed, the readers could easily be misled into thinking the authors have freedom to be critical of those organizations and the institutional edifice of US fish and wildlife management. The analogy to industry presenting its preferred research to enhance its profits is an exact one. Among the remedies, the authors should have disclosed any affiliations at first mention of the AFWA and WMI document and conference, e.g., “Some or all of the authors of this manuscript have paid positions or unpaid leadership positions with one or more of the civil sector organizations mentioned in this document.” Failure to mention this gives the impression of concealing it.

Do you believe the article, in its current form, is fit for publication?

The fundamental science is flawed and this paper should be rejected

Revised Submission

Do you have any conflicts of interest that could bias your ability to provide an independent review?

I am a member of another professional society (SCB North America) not TWS and I cancelled my TWS membership in protest of their competing interests related to alliances to the hunting, trapping, hounding industries.

How well did the authors respond to your comments?

2/5

What - if any - feedback do you feel the authors did not adequately respond to?

Multiple requests throughout the manuscript for clear definitions and clearer statements of methods and their limitations.

Based on your review, what should happen next?

The fundamental science is flawed and this paper should be rejected

Why are you rejecting this article?

Hallmarks of science are lacking. First the definitions of key terms (conservation, public) (and even relevancy is incomplete) are not defined. Relevancy is not defined scientifically so that some independent researcher following in their footsteps would be able to evaluate if the inferences and claims made are valid or robust. Second, the methods do not clearly lay out the sampling frame, who was included and excluded, and the methods by which qualitative input from those present was included or not. Therefore, I feel the authors subjectively filtered and screened the feedback they received, which does not follow the hallmarks of transparency and reproducibility. How are we to know if the small subset of authors are simply foregrounding their own preferences and strategic goals, (rather than the undefined participants). Also how is the claim that the relevancy roadmap is an effective or even efficient tool justified? Finally, the literature review is inadequate. All of these issues were raised during the first round of review.



J. Scott Yaegar

Initial Submission

Do you have any conflicts of interest that could bias your ability to provide an independent review?

No

What did the authors do a good job with?

The authors did a good job initiating an important conversation around conservation relevancy and bringing attention to the need for institutional evolution. Their effort to synthesize diverse themes and propose a forward-looking agenda is commendable, especially given the complexity of the topic. The figures distill concepts well.

How do you think this research will contribute to the field?

This effort has the potential to make a meaningful contribution by prompting conservation professionals to engage in deeper reflection about the evolving social context of their work. By raising questions around relevancy, identity, and public perception, it encourages practitioners to move beyond technical expertise and consider how diverse audiences, constituents, rights-holders, and communities, experience and interpret conservation efforts. Ideally, this work would foster greater introspection within agencies and organizations, helping them to challenge assumptions and evolve in ways that are more inclusive, responsive, and aligned with the values of a broader public. If refined and clarified, the manuscript could serve as a valuable catalyst for dialogue and presumably support institutional change.

Regarding the study design and methods, what do the authors need to fix or improve upon to be fit for publication?

"The manuscript relies heavily on insights from a single conference (TWS 2022), yet it does not explain why this event was chosen as the primary source of data. Readers need to understand its relevance, representativeness, and how it connects to broader trends in conservation.

It's unclear how workshop data were collected, analyzed, or synthesized. The workshop summary lacks detail; sometimes reading as meeting notes of participant(s) and lacking description of the survey/poll (e.g., what questions were they asked?) or how responses were quantified (many, most?). It was difficult to assess the rigor or validity of the findings.

The manuscript lacks an acknowledge the limitations of drawing conclusions from a single event and clarify whether the findings are intended to be exploratory, representative, or prescriptive."

Regarding the analysis and interpretation of their findings, what do the authors need to fix or improve upon to be fit for publication?

"Clarify foundational terms and assumptions. Key concepts such as "conservation," "relevancy," "constituents," and "rights-holders" could use clear definitions, to improve reader comprehension, especially for an international and interdisciplinary audience.

Focus the narrative. There are many broad themes included, that subsequently lack the supporting background or story arc to carry the reader through. Consider restructuring the manuscript. For example, you might center more explicitly on the TWS 2022 relevancy workshop to provide a clearer narrative arc. E.g., elaborating more on why the workshop was needed, who convened, what was discussed, what insights emerged, could provide a more coherent and compelling foundation for the recommendations.



The manuscript generally reflects a singular organizational or U.S.-centric view of relevancy. A more balanced review of perspectives might include Indigenous knowledge systems, non-consumptive users, and international conservation paradigms to strengthen the manuscript's credibility and inclusivity.

Assertions about hunter decline, agency challenges, and historical patterns are presented without sufficient data or contextual framing. The manuscript would benefit from an elaboration or clearer articulation of causal relationships, more robust sourcing, and a deeper exploration of why agencies have struggled to adapt.

Clarify audience and intent. If the goal is to support agency evolution toward broader societal relevance, this should be stated explicitly. If the focus is on a specific professional constituency, that too should be clarified to avoid misalignment between the manuscript's framing and its actual scope."

Is there anything else you think the authors need to fix in their article to be fit for publication?

"I applaud the authors for their ambitious effort to tackle this deeply complex topic. The attempt to synthesize diverse ideas and propose a path forward is commendable.

While I appreciate the intent and share many of the sentiments expressed, the manuscript currently reads as a collection of ideas often lacking sufficient grounding in concrete definitions, evidence, or actionable pathways to guide the reader through its central arguments. As a result, it risks feeling inflated and inaccessible to readers unfamiliar with the specific frameworks referenced, particularly the Relevancy Roadmap, which could be better contextualized. While I do not disagree with the overarching perspectives, the narrative often left me, as a reader, feeling adrift. ""Where are they going?"" ""How is this relevant?"" ""Did this concept link to and support the next statement?"". I found the effort grammatically well written, however, struggled with the flow/story arc."

Do you have any concerns about the ethics of this research?

No

Do you believe the article, in its current form, is fit for publication?

This paper needs major revisions and another round of peer review

Revised Submission

Do you have any conflicts of interest that could bias your ability to provide an independent review?

no

How well did the authors respond to your comments?

5/5

What - if any - feedback do you feel the authors did not adequately respond to?

I did not note any. Well done.

Based on your review, what should happen next?

This paper is ready for publication

Would you like to be listed as a Collaborator on the final publication?

No, I do not want to be listed as a Collaborator