Women’s Mining Coalition Meets with More Than 225 Congressional Offices at Fly-In

By Lynne Volpi, Women's Mining Coalition

Forty members of the Women’s Mining Coalition (WMC) from over 16 states traveled to Washington D.C. for its 23rd annual Fly-In for meetings on Capitol Hill this spring. The women work in the hardrock, coal and industrial minerals industries and for companies that provide goods and services to mining companies. Since its inception in 1993, WMC has made annual trips to Washington, D.C. to advocate for a robust U.S. mining industry and to discuss issues of importance to the domestic mining industry with members of Congress and Congressional staff.

This year’s fly-in focused on building support for Congressman Amodei’s National Strategic and Critical Minerals Act of 2015, which was introduced today, and the Stewart-Gardner Greater Sage-Grouse Protection and Conservation Act, S. 1036, which was introduced in the Senate today and will be introduced tomorrow in the House. As a result of the WMC meetings, additional co-sponsorships were obtained for both bills.

WMC members also brought clarity to the concerns of administrative overreach on issues like carbon emissions and ozone rules by the EPA and the stream buffer zone rule by the Office of Surface Mining. EPA CERCLA 108(b) financial assurance rulemaking was discussed with Hill staffers and members; such rulemaking is duplicative and unnecessary. WMC Fly-In participants asked members to support Congressman Gosar’s H.R 594 “Waters of the United States Regulatory Overreach Protection Act of 2015”, which addresses concerns and uncertainties caused by the proposed rule (Definition of Waters of the United States’ Under the Clean Water Act.

The 2015 WMC Fly-In efforts yielded 228 face-to-face meetings with Congressional offices and in 32 cases, meetings with elected officials themselves. Additionally, 76 drop-off information packets were distributed to offices where schedules conflicted and personal meetings were not possible. WMC continues to bring insight to the importance of modern mining, to advocate for a strong and productive domestic mining industry, and to showcase the professionalism of women who work in the mining industry.

WMC’s mission is to deliver the message to our legislators that a strong mining industry is vitally important to our nation, our communities, our families, and our livelihoods, and that today’s regulations and modern technologies ensure responsible stewardship of our lands. WMC facilitates and provides the opportunity for our grassroots members to band together for a stronger voice with their congressional delegation. For more information, visit www.wmc-usa.org.
EDITORIAL: Pollinator Decisions Should Be Based on Science, Not Hype

Editor's note: This editorial was originally published on Agri-Pulse Communication’s website, agripulse.com.

By Sue McCrum, AAW President

The White House recently released its National Pollinator Health Strategy, charting a path forward with policies that may affect popular farm products.

Because pollinators play a critical role in maintaining diverse ecosystems and supporting agricultural production, President Barack Obama outlined ambitious federal goals for reducing honeybee colony overwintering losses, increasing the Eastern population of the monarch butterfly and restoring or enhancing habitat.

As American women and leaders involved in agriculture, American Agri-Women understands the value of pollinators. Clearly product stewardship and best-management practices are more critical than ever to protect bees and other pollinators around farm operations and fields. However, we call on the Administration to ensure that all potential pollinator issues raised in the report are looked at carefully with sound science at the core of any investigations and subsequent decisions. Furthermore, we ask that the science not be swayed by emotions, especially when it comes to the use of approved pesticides on our farms, including neonicotinoids which have recently come under fire. As the Strategy notes, we need to “balance the unintended consequences of chemical exposure with the need for pest control.” Neonicotinoids — commonly referred to as neonics — play an important role in many farmers’ pest control management plans.

We must recognize that, to date, emotions have played a role in the discussion about pollinators, including overestimating any decline of honeybees. The White House Strategy acknowledges this fact when it points out that there have been no declines in the overall population of honeybees in the United States since neonicotinoids were introduced to the market in the mid-1990s. The declines the report points to started much earlier, right after World War II, when the face of farming was changing dramatically and many small farmers, each with their own bee hives, were vanishing from the landscape.

We all share concerns that beekeepers face in keeping their hives healthy, and overwinter losses, while declining, are still too high. But as the Strategy rightfully highlights, the number one problem for bees since the 1980s has been the parasitic varroa mite, which vectors in all sorts of diseases and makes beekeeping an increasingly difficult operation. For one thing, beekeepers are forced to use insecticides inside the hive to try to control for varroa without killing the bees themselves. That’s why support for new and innovative solutions to control varroa, as the report points out, is so terribly important.

But despite the facts included in the Strategy, the movement to restrict neonics seems to be moving forward on its own momentum. Farmers know the products by their popular names, Poncho, Cruiser, and Gaucho. Most often used as a seed coating, they get taken up into the plant to become part of its internal defense system, killing only insects that attack the growing crop. They provide higher crop yield to farmers by reducing the loss of plants to invasive pests.

Last fall, the EPA surprised farmers with a seemingly rushed report claiming that neonics did not provide economic benefits to soybeans, an assertion that has been completely rejected by many national farm organizations, who point out that soybean farmers have no other defense against below ground pests. Meanwhile, econometric studies demonstrate neonics improve soybean yields by 3 percent, which any farmer knows is a very real benefit.

Even the USDA weighed in, calling the report “premature” and “incomplete.” But many widely saw it as a first step toward imposing restrictions. In fact, in April of this year, the EPA announced that it would not allow any new or modified uses of neonics until it completes an accelerated review process on them.

We hope and trust that this re-review will adhere to the highest standards of sound science and will not, like the EPA’s soybean study, be unduly rushed. We hope too that it will not be influenced by emotions, and the inflated claims and political pressure being exerted by activist groups. Time and again, we have seen their claims punctured by the facts. For example, recently a leaked memo revealed that researchers for the prestigious environmental group the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) agreed ahead of time to fabricate their studies as part of a campaign to get neonics banned. Unfortunately, this wasn’t discovered until after the European Union banned neonics completely. Since then, rapeseed crops in Germany and Great Britain raised without neonics have experienced massive flea beetle infestations. It’s thought that the output of rapeseed may fall to a three year low in 2015. In other words, politics first, science second — or not at all.

We need to ensure that the same thing doesn’t happen here in the United States. As the regulatory process goes forward, we need to be sure that these decisions — which can dramatically impact our ability to grow food and fiber — are made on the basis of sound science, and only sound science.
2015 ‘White Papers’ Position Statements

**Agriculture Labor**  
**H-2A / H-2B**

**Position Issue:** In an effort to address the labor shortage, more and more growers are looking hard at the only agricultural visa programs in the country in hopes of supplementing their workforce with temporary agricultural employees from foreign countries.

**American Agri-Women Request to Ask:** Congress to insure a reliable, lawful agricultural worker program and supports a future agricultural visa program to bring workers in as needed and to keep in place the skilled workforce that is already here.

**Background of Issue:** The current Agricultural Visa Programs in place need to be streamlined and less complicated. The processes involved are very slow and cumbersome, with too many restrictions/caps which are unrealistic.

**Talking Points:**
- In order to apply for an H-2A visa, a worker must have a job offer from a US employer. It is illegal under US law for employers for recruiters to charge workers fees for job placement.
- Unlike the H-2B program, the H-2A program comes with additional employer requirements such as providing
  - (Growers who use H2A say it is cumbersome and needs more flexibility to get workers to the fields when needed. Signed applications must be sent by mail to Chicago where they are processed. It can take too long for such a costly process. Use is largely in the southeast and AZ and far south counties of CA.)
  - H-2A workers with transportation, housing and specific wage rules.
  - The landscape industry is the largest user of the H-2B visa program, the only legal option for admitting seasonal workers from other countries is to fill temporary or seasonal non-agricultural jobs that have gone unfilled by American workers. Some of the types of work include landscape, tree trimming, plant installation, laying sod, building hardscape, digging trenches, and maintenance like pruning, edging, mowing, etc. in landscape setting are all H-2B.
  - But, there is an arbitrary cap of 66,000 on how many visas can be issued each year. The cap is split into two halves; the first 33,000 visas are allocated for the first half of the federal fiscal year, which starts October 1; the second 33,000 are allocated for jobs beginning after April 1.
  - Due to the many seasonal industries who rely on H-2B, the cap becomes a huge problem. When companies cannot get the seasonal workers needed, this ripples down through the industry supply chain, affecting growers and distributors as well.

**Endangered Species Act (ESA)**

**Position Issue:** Under the auspices of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the federal government is claiming unreasonable acres of land to protect species deemed to be endangered (or threatened?) these lands are currently providing food and economic security for the nation and should not be taken out of productive use without careful review.

**American Agri-Women Request to Ask:** American Agri-Women asks for your support FOR REPRESENTATIVE Hastings’ bills to balance “reform” of ESA overreach.

**Background of Issue:** These bills were presented April 2014:
- **H.R. 4315** – the 21st century endangered species transparency act would require federal wildlife agencies to post online the data underlying each proposed and final listing decision.
- **H.R. 4316** – endangered species recovery transparency act would require frova to track, report to congress and make available online: funds expended to respond to esa lawsuits, the number of employees dedicated to litigation and attorney’s fees awarded in the course of esa litigation
- **H.R. 4317** – state, tribal and local species transparency act would require federal government to disclose to affected states all data used prior to any esa listing
- **H.R. 4318** – endangered species litigation reasonableness act would prioritize resources towards species protection by placing reasonable caps on attorney’s fees and make the esa consistent with other federal law.

**Talking Points:**
- These four pieces of legislation enhance the Endangered Species Act.
- American people would actually see what data is being used to make key listing decisions.
- Transparency of funds is actually documented.
- H.R. 4317 would require that best available scientific and commercial data used by the federal government include data provided by affected states, tribes and local governments.
- The equal access to justice act limits the hourly rate for prevailing attorney fees to $125 per hour. However, no such fee cap currently exists under the ESA, and attorneys have often been awarded huge sums of taxpayer-funded money.

**Specific to:** Sage Grouse Protection and Conservation Act –

**Please Support:** Senator Corey Gardner’s Bill SB 1036 and
Representative Chris Stewart’s companion Bill HB 1997. These bills are crucial to the survival of our western economy. They have been introduced regarding State’s rights to manage the sage grouse habitat issue. They would provide the State’s time in order to show the conservation methods are effective. This is a common-sense approach to ensuring the protection of this species without destroying western economy.

We believe states can effectively manage sage-grouse populations and should be allowed to retain management authority for the species. Western states are currently developing conservation plans that provide a sensible approach to manage the species based on local conditions, while allowing responsible economic activities to occur. The Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service are currently updating nearly one hundred federal land management plans across the range of the species with very restrictive measures for sage-grouse. Many of the measures in these plans do not balance conservation with continued economic activity; are unnecessarily restrictive; lack proper scientific justification; and are not tailored to local conditions.

**E-Verify**

**Position Issue:** The House Judiciary Committee has marked up the mandatory E-Verify legislation. A group of nearly 60 Republicans sent a letter to Chairman Goodlatte and GOP Leadership indicating they could not support the bill without a fix for agriculture labor.

**American Agri-Women Request to Ask:** Congress to insure a reliable, lawful agricultural worker program which supports a future agricultural visa program to bring workers in as needed and to keep in place the skilled workforce that is already here. The E-Verify program needs to work in concert with this agricultural worker visa program to ensure a reliable agricultural workforce.

**Background of Issue:** A comprehensive program, which provides a reliable, legal agricultural workforce, is getting harder and harder to achieve. E-Verify is a step in the right direction. We must be careful though, E-Verify without an Agricultural Visa program providing a legal workforce could ultimately cause American Farmers to potentially lose 40% of their entire labor force.

**Talking Points:**
- Agriculture opposes mandatory E-Verify legislation WITHOUT A SOLUTION that addresses our current agricultural workforce and creates a new guest-worker program to meet future needs.
- An enforcement-only or enforcement WITHOUT REFORMING our broader immigration system approach will have a devastating impact on rural economies across America.
- Based on a farm labor study conducted by the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) in 2014, the impact of an enforcement-only approach to immigration that causes agriculture to lose access to its workforce would result in agricultural output falling by $30 to $60 billion.
- Agriculture wants A SOLUTION for our current workforce and a redesigned guest-worker visa program for future needs that will serve all U.S. producers, NOT an exemption from mandatory E-Verify.
- Without first addressing agriculture’s labor crisis with a solution that meets agriculture’s workforce needs, no amount of phase-in time is adequate for our industry.

**Pollinators**

**Position Issue:** Presidential Memorandum – creating a federal strategy to promote the health of honey bees and another pollinators; JUNE 20, 2014 and how the agriculture industry will be impacted.

**Background of Issue:** 1. The need to protect pollinators is vital to U.S. food industry. 2. Need to protect from disease, parasites, pests and undesirables. EPA opened docket for all neonicotinoid treatment on soybeans, but final decisions must be made on sound scientific research from credible sources.

**Talking Points:**
- Bee population up worldwide in 2014
- Bee populations have experienced periods of decline. During 18th century Ireland, 1906 on the Isle of Wright and 1975 in Mexico (disappearing syndrome).
- Environmental stressors affect the health of bee colonies such as parasites, queen failure, beekeeper practices, colony collapse (CCD) and pesticide use – off label use inconsistent with labeling recommendations.
- Bee health is best addressed, developed and strategies implements within the States: 1. States Authority over natural resources within their boundaries places bee care in their charge; 2. Public and private research and application resources are locally focused; 3. Land managers provide knowledge, understanding and experience in implementing agronomic practices to the process; and 4. Specific environmental factors can be addressed.
- Locally determined practices lead to practical solutions. This is more beneficial than a one size fits all plan.
**Clean Water Act (CWA or WOTUS)**

**Position Issue:** Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) Proposed Rule and Guidance on Identifying the Waters of the United States (WOTUS).


**Background of Issue:** The Clean Water Act of 1972 limits jurisdiction to “NAVIGABLE WATERS” to the federal government and that the federal government is to work with the states to better manage our waters. The Supreme Court has, on two separate occasions, upheld this limit of jurisdiction on the federal government to “NAVIGABLE WATERS.” EPA, Environmental Groups, and their lobbyists have failed to get legislation passed to change the Clean Waters ACT; therefore, they are attempting to gain the jurisdiction they want through the regulatory process and against the courts and Congress.

**Talking Points:**
- The rule infringes on the state’s rights relating to land use and planning, will be costly, and hurt our economic growth. Doesn’t give insight on the resources for permitting, oversight, and enforcement.
- Expands EPA and Army Corps jurisdiction to groundwater, ditches, culverts, pipes, erosional features, farm and stock ponds, and prior converted cropland affecting many acres of private property. Giving them essentially no limits under the CWA.
- Can also cause costly litigation tying up our courts and burdening our farmers, ranchers, timber industry, businesses, and local government entities.
- The rule fails to clarify as it leaves many determinations to the agencies “best professional judgement” which could result in many perceived definitions.
- By Proposing this Rule and Guidance the EPA and Army Corps have bypassed Congress to accomplish their agenda that they could not do through legislation. The federal agencies need to be held accountable to Congress so Congress can fulfill its duty in overseeing the executive branch.

**Air Quality Standards**

**Position Issue:** EPA wants to further tighten the air quality standards when many regions have yet to meet the current standards.

**American Agri-Women Request to Ask:** American Agri-Women strongly support H.R. 1388 – Clean Air, Strong Economies Act and S-751 CASE Act. These bills would “prohibit EPA from lowering the national ambient air quality standards until at least 85% of counties that are in non-attainable areas counties that are exceeding the limit have attained the current standards.”

**Background of Issue:** Nov 26, 2014 EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy announced the EPA would be revising the current ambient air standards from 75 parts per billion to 65-70 parts per billion and would be taking comment on lowering it to 60 parts per billion. Many regions have not yet met the current standards that were set in 1997 so the new standards would probably be unattainable in these same regions.

**Talking Points**
- We do not approve of more regulations that curtail agricultural activities. Some of these activities include restricting pesticide applications, eliminate pesticide availability, restricting animal agricultural feeding operations due to emissions from animal waste handling and storage, prescribe costly control measures for animal agriculture, and require wasteful control measures for certain food and agricultural processing industries.
- New costly technologies for the ethanol and biodiesel industries, making the product more expensive and non-competitive.
- In all businesses that use energy the cost will go up and be passed on to the consumer. The trickle-down effect and less money for all families.
- Agriculture is a very energy reliant industry and relies highly on reliable and affordable sources of energy for the day to day operations.

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The Facts about Honey Bees and Pesticides

Fact: Honey bees help keep our grocery shelves stocked with nutritious food.

It is estimated that honey bees pollinate one out of every three bites of food that we eat. Much of our food is wind pollinated, including most of the grains we eat, but honey bees play an important role in pollinating many of our fruits, nuts and vegetables. These foods help contribute to a healthy, nutritious diet.

Fact: The number of honey bee colonies is increasing.

Most people are surprised to learn that honey bee colonies actually increased by 45 percent worldwide over the past 50 years.1 And in the past five years, as awareness of honey bee health has grown, the number of colonies in the U.S. and Canada has increased by 13 percent and 18 percent, respectively.2 Annual surveys conducted by the USDA show that the number of honey bee colonies has risen steadily over the past 10 years.3

Fact: Neonicotinoid insecticides do not impact colony health when used according to the label.

Hundreds of studies on neonicotinoids and bees indicate that when used according to label instructions, “neonics” are not harmful to bee colonies. Large-scale studies in Europe and North America show that poor bee health correlates well with parasites and diseases, but not with pesticides, including neonicotinoids.4,5,6,7,8,9

Fact: Toxicity and hazard are not one in the same.

When used in typical field applications and according to label instructions neonics do not pose a significant hazard to bees, even though some neonics, like many insecticides, are toxic to bees. This is because at normal field doses, the potential exposure to bees is far below levels that would cause concern.10 Distinguishing toxicity from hazard is a routine activity performed by most of us, although we may be unaware that we are doing so. For example, caffeine is more toxic than many pesticides, and yet we drink it in coffee without fear because the levels are so low (e.g., the hazard is very small).

Fact: A tiny parasite is one of the biggest threats to honey bee health today.

In the late-1980s a parasite called the Varroa mite invaded North American bee colonies and beekeeping has never been the same since. The Varroa mite is the “single most detrimental pest of honey bees,” according to the USDA.11 This parasite weakens bees and helps transmit diseases that can wipe out entire colonies. Beekeepers try to control the mite with insecticides, but effective control is difficult to achieve.
Fact: Farmers and beekeepers have worked together for decades.

Lost in the discussion of bees and farming practices is the simple fact that farmers and beekeepers depend on each other where bees are needed to help pollinate crops. The farmer gets greater crop productivity and the beekeeper earns a fee for pollination services (and increases the colony’s honey production). Even when bees are not needed, such as in cotton or citrus, farmers routinely make their fields available to beekeepers.

Fact: Beekeeping is a big business and bees are moved all over the country.

Modern beekeeping is principally aimed at crop pollination, rather than honey production. While many people enjoy keeping a few beehives as a hobby, commercial beekeepers manage hundreds or thousands of hives, often packing them on tractor-trailers and transporting them thousands of miles to help pollinate various crops throughout the season. Transporting hives under these conditions can be stressful for the colonies, so it is important to ensure they are well-fed and kept free of pests and diseases.

Pollinator movement and crops in the U.S.

Fact: Many groups are working to improve bee health.

Fortunately, there are many groups working to protect and improve the health of honey bees, including universities, industry, government, beekeepers, farmers and consumers. Programs to help honey bees range from protecting against parasites and diseases to improving the amount of available food that can sustain bees before and after key crop seasons. Many backyard bee enthusiasts are doing their part by planting a variety of bee-friendly plants around their homes and gardens. While honey bees are not native to America, they have become an integral part of our food production. With a little help, we can make sure they thrive.

REFERENCES
2. Syngenta (January 19, 2015), Bee population rising around the world, AgProfessional.