

WILDLIFE

FOR THE

21ST CENTURY

VOLUME V

PRESENTED BY THE
AMERICAN
WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION
PARTNERS

AWCP

American Wildlife Conservation Partners

ESTABLISHED IN 2000

WILDLIFE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY: VOLUME V IS THE FIFTH IN A SERIES of recommendations from the American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP) beginning in 2001. AWCP is a consortium of 45 organizations that represent the interests of America's millions of dedicated hunter conservationists, professional wildlife and natural resource managers, outdoor recreation users, conservation educators, and wildlife scientists.

AWCP came together in 2000 to combine the energy and wisdom of our individual organizations. While individual organizations have their own primary areas of interest, collectively we all are dedicated to ensuring the vitality of our wildlife resources and providing for sustainable public use and enjoyment of those resources under the science-based management of the state and federal fish and wildlife agencies, in cooperation with habitat and land management by the federal, state, county, and local governments. This system of wildlife conservation is known as The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

We work together towards a future in which we envision...

- all wildlife and private and public habitats are abundant, maintained and enhanced;
- hunting, trapping and other outdoor interests are supported by the public to maintain America's great wildlife conservation heritage and cultural traditions;
- natural resources policies encourage, empower, and reward stewardship and responsible use;
- all citizens are committed to principles of scientific wildlife management, where wildlife is held in public trust, and where the use of resources is shared equitably and sustained for present and future generations.

Previous volumes were provided to Presidents Bush and Obama. Now we present these recommendations to help inform the next administration about the pressing issues facing wildlife conservation and our sporting heritage. These recommendations for improving wildlife conservation are offered in the spirit of the hunter conservationists our organizations represent. Each recommendation is based on sound science and builds on the historical achievements of hunter conservationists in making this country's wildlife resources the envy of the world.

These recommendations represent a general agreement of the partners. Each partner organization reserves the right to establish independent positions on any issue as we research, debate, and act on these ideas for the next 5 years of the 21st century. In the tradition of the hunter and angler conservationists, we look forward to working with you to conserve our fish, wildlife, and habitat resources long into the 21st century.


Joel Pedersen, 2015 Chair

American Wildlife Conservation Partners
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Our members live in your backyard—in every county of every state in the nation.

The nation's 15.5 million hunters over age 6, outpaces the number of Americans over age 7 that play soccer. **Hunters and anglers vote.** If every sportsman and sportswoman had voted in the 2012 election, they would have represented 30% of all votes cast. **Hunting is important to our economy.** Hunters spent \$38.3 billion in 2011, including \$11.8 billion in local, state, and Federal taxes. Sportsmen and sportswomen—and hunters in general—are an important segment of our society. **Their needs and opinions cannot be ignored.**

HOW SPORTSMEN AND SPORTSWOMEN SUPPORT THE AMERICAN SYSTEM OF CONSERVATION FUNDING

LAST YEAR ALONE... \$2.95 BILLION

\$823
MILLION

generated by the Pittman-Robertson Fund, from hunting and recreational shooting-related excise taxes

\$821
MILLION

generated from hunting licenses



\$686
MILLION

generated from fishing licenses



\$624
MILLION

generated by the Dingell-Johnson/Wallop-Breaux Fund, from fishing and boating-related excise taxes

Since 1939 state fish and wildlife agencies have received over

\$56.9
BILLION

from sportsmen and sportswomen

80%


of funding for state fish and wildlife agencies is paid for by sportsmen and sportswomen

Information provided by the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

AMERICAN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION PARTNERS

ARCHERY TRADE ASSOCIATION
ASSOCIATION OF FISH & WILDLIFE AGENCIES
BEAR TRUST INTERNATIONAL
BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB
CAMP FIRE CLUB OF AMERICA
CATCH A DREAM FOUNDATION
CONGRESSIONAL SPORTSMEN'S FOUNDATION
CONSERVATION FORCE
COUNCIL TO ADVANCE HUNTING AND
THE SHOOTING SPORTS
DALLAS SAFARI CLUB
DELTA WATERFOWL FOUNDATION
DUCKS UNLIMITED
HOUSTON SAFARI CLUB
INTERNATIONAL HUNTER EDUCATION
ASSOCIATION - USA
IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA
MASTERS OF FOXHOUNDS FOUNDATION
MULE DEER FOUNDATION
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
FOREST SERVICE RETIREES
NATIONAL BOBWHITE
CONSERVATION INITIATIVE
NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION
NATIONAL SHOOTING SPORTS FOUNDATION
NATIONAL TRAPPERS ASSOCIATION
NATIONAL WILD TURKEY FEDERATION
NORTH AMERICAN GROUSE PARTNERSHIP
ORION - THE HUNTER'S INSTITUTE
PHEASANTS FOREVER, INC.
QUAIL FOREVER
POPE AND YOUNG CLUB
PROFESSIONAL OUTFITTERS AND
GUIDES OF AMERICA
PUBLIC LANDS FOUNDATION
QUALITY DEER MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION
ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK FOUNDATION
RUFFED GROUSE SOCIETY
SAFARI CLUB INTERNATIONAL
SHIKAR SAFARI CLUB
SPORTSMEN'S ALLIANCE
TEXAS WILDLIFE ASSOCIATION
THE CONSERVATION FUND
THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY
THEODORE ROOSEVELT
CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP
TREAD LIGHTLY!
WHITETAILS UNLIMITED
WILD SHEEP FOUNDATION
WILDLIFE FOREVER
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE
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WILDLIFE *FOR THE* 21ST CENTURY

VOLUME V

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ACKNOWLEDGING AMERICA'S HUNTERS, THE TRUE CONSERVATIONISTS

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY, GIFFORD PINCHOT, Chief of the U.S. Forest Service and one of the fathers of the American conservation movement along with Theodore Roosevelt, George Bird Grinnell, and Aldo Leopold, developed the now widely accepted definition of conservation as the “wise use of the Earth and its resources for the lasting good of men.” According to Pinchot, the purpose of conservation is to produce “the greatest good for the greatest number for the longest time,” with sound science as the recognized tool to accomplish this objective.

Conservationists are people who support and/or engage in this approach to natural resource management. Hunters and anglers are among the first Americans to endorse this idea. Their legacy now spans over 100 years. Through the leadership and willing financial support of hunters and anglers, state fish and wildlife agencies were established to restore and manage our nation's fish and wildlife, to adopt laws regarding take, educate and train fish and wildlife professionals, and create programs to conserve these public trust resources. Involvement of hunters and anglers and conservation organizations are what has made the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation the most successful program of its kind in the world.

Arguably, the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration programs, key components of the American System of Conservation Funding, were the

AWCP STEERING COMMITTEE

2016 CHAIR – LEN VALLENDER
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2016 VICE-CHAIR – BEN CARTER
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TERMS EXPIRE 2016

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Gray Thornton – *Wild Sheep Foundation*

Dave Nomsen – *Pheasants Forever*

John J. Jackson III – *Conservation Force*

TERMS EXPIRE 2018

Margaret Everson – *Ducks Unlimited*

Lori McCullough – *Tread Lightly!*

Joel Pedersen – *National Wild Turkey Federation*

Paul Wilkins – *Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership*

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Joel Pedersen & Gary Taylor
National Wild Turkey Federation

catalysts to the overarching conservation design. Through this unique “user-pays, public-benefits” system, sportsmen and sportswomen are the primary funders of fish and wildlife conservation, providing upwards of 80% of the funding for state fish and wildlife agencies. They financially support conservation by purchasing hunting and fishing licenses, permits, and stamps, including duck stamps; and by paying federal excise taxes on firearms, ammunition, archery equipment and fishing tackle; philanthropy; and the creation of non-government organizations whose mission is the restoration and enhancement of fish and wildlife.

Unfortunately, the tremendous contribution made by sportsmen and sportswomen toward the restoration and conservation of our fish and wildlife resources remains largely unknown to the general public. This situation is exacerbated by the media’s broad-based use of the term “conservationist.” The media are not distinguishing between individuals and organizations which explicitly support fish and wildlife conservation financially, and those that don’t. All citizens, including hunters and anglers, pay federal, state, and local taxes which support land and habitat management at all levels through government appropriations. However, only hunters and anglers willingly pay additional fees that are explicitly dedicated to fish, wildlife, and habitat conservation by the state and federal fish and wildlife agencies. Hunters and anglers, as do many citizens, contribute financially to non-government organizations, but not all of these organizations embrace the meaning of conservation to include wise and sustainable use of our renewable natural resources. This vision of conservation held by Roosevelt, Pinchot, and Leopold is as compelling today as when first articulated decades ago.

It is critical to understand that hunting, angling, recreational shooting, and trapping are necessary to support fish and wildlife conservation. The term “conservationist” must be rightfully applied. “Conservationist” is a title sportsmen and sportswomen helped create, work hard to maintain, and are proud to rightfully claim.

CONSERVATION: WISE USE OF THE EARTH AND ITS RESOURCES FOR THE LASTING GOOD OF MEN.



Considered one of the fathers of wildlife conservation in America, Gifford Pinchot was the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service. He's pictured here with fellow conservationist Theodore Roosevelt, circa 1907.

SECURE PERMANENT AND DEDICATED
FUNDING
 FOR WILDLIFE AND
 HABITAT CONSERVATION,
 EXPAND USER PAYS – PUBLIC
 BENEFITS POLICIES,
 AND PROMOTE
 PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

ACTIONS:

1. Increase the federal investment in conservation as a percentage of the annual federal discretionary budget.
2. Create parity between hunting and angling, and other forms of outdoor recreation in the funding of conservation by expanding the categories of outdoor-related products that are subject to a federal excise tax.
3. Affirm that the Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Funds are a mandatory spending account and not subject to sequestration.
4. Encourage the use of market mechanisms to better leverage private capital for conservation.

A HISTORY OF FEDERAL CONSERVATION FUNDING. SINCE THE TIME of Theodore Roosevelt, natural resources conservation has been accepted as one of the core purposes of the federal government along with securing the national defense, administering justice, protecting property rights, and building infrastructure to enable interstate commerce. Federal funding for conservation has declined by 50 percent between fiscal year 1977 and fiscal year 2014. Federal land and state wildlife managers are less able to address the threats of human population growth, land conversion, climate change, and invasive species with fewer fiscal and staff resources.

Unless policy makers increase their commitment to existing conservation funding sources and adopt new policy approaches to better fund wildlife conservation, the traditions of American sportsmen and sportswomen will continue to suffer, as will the health of our nation's landscapes and wildlife. As such, policy makers should commit to stabilizing and increasing conservation funding as a percentage of the federal budget. Policy makers should also end the 2 percent sequestration cut imposed on the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson/Wallop-Breaux funds.

The Role of Hunters and Anglers. According to the Outdoor Recreation Foundation (ORF), 46 million Americans participate in hunting and angling. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), they directly contribute almost \$3 billion annually to fish and wildlife conservation through the purchase of state hunting and fishing license, stamp and permit fees and federal excise taxes on sporting firearms, ammunition, bows and arrows, and fishing tackle. According to the ORF, hunting and fishing's share of outdoor recreation spending (\$3 billion plus travel, clothing and other products that are not subject to a federal excise tax) totals \$58 billion annually (\$35 billion for fishing and \$23 billion for hunting). This means that the support for fish and wildlife conservation relies on less than 9 percent of the \$730 billion spent by all outdoor recreationists. Hunters and anglers shoulder the majority of fish and wildlife conservation funding through this user pays – public benefits concept. We need to increase the dialogue among all recreational outdoor users to expand the concept and bring funding parity between hunting and angling and other forms of outdoor recreation, while keeping the contributions and voices of hunters and anglers alive in fish and wildlife conservation.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, [hunters and anglers] directly contribute almost

**\$3 BILLION
ANNUALLY**

to fish and wildlife conservation through the purchase of state hunting and fishing license, stamp and permit fees and federal excise taxes on sporting firearms, ammunition, bows and arrows, and fishing tackle.

Market Investment in Conservation. Finally, policy makers should examine ways to employ market mechanisms to better leverage federal and state dollars with private money. The federal government should work with state agencies and non-profit

conservation organizations to develop policies that enable the greater use of market mechanisms such as mitigation banks that replace both the quantity and functional quality of lost habitat, water banking, and green bonds.



IMPROVE PUBLIC LAND FOR WILDLIFE WHILE ENHANCING ACCESS FOR HUNTERS AND OUTDOOR RECREATIONISTS

ACTIONS:

1. Develop intergovernmental policy that ensures that federal agencies will work with state fish and wildlife agencies to attain or sustain wildlife population goals during public land management planning and implementation.
2. Pursue the permanent authorization and full and perpetual dedication of funds to the LWCF.

continued...

THE NEED FOR ACCESS. ACCESS TO QUALITY PLACES TO HUNT AND fish is a primary concern of sportsmen and sportswomen. A survey by Southwick Associates in 2012 found that 23 percent of hunters lost access to land they hunted, and 20 percent of anglers reported losing access to certain waters. Places to pursue game and fish are a cornerstone of hunting and fishing in America and part of our nation's culture.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund History. The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is one of the country's most important tools for conserving fish and wildlife habitat. Established through a bipartisan act of Congress in 1964, the fund uses royalties paid by energy companies to drill for oil and gas on the Outer Continental Shelf. Through this fund, millions of dollars are directed annually into safeguarding native habitat, water resources, cultural heritage sites, and outdoor recreation opportunities for all Americans—including 46 million hunters and anglers.

Since its inception, the LWCF has been used to invest over \$16 billion in conservation and outdoor recreation, including the establishment of public hunting and fishing areas,

Over the life of LWCF,
Congress has
diverted more than

\$19 BILLION

from the fund for other uses.



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3. Support the “Making Public Lands Public” provision to dedicate not less than 1.5 percent or \$10 million of the LWCF to providing and enhancing access for hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation.
4. Amend LWCF to make fish and wildlife conservation a statutory purpose.
5. Ensure continued ownership of public lands by the federal government under improved statutes, regulations, and policies that guarantee a balanced use for wildlife conservation, recreation access, environmental services, and compatible development. We do not support large-scale divestiture of public lands.
6. Support legislation that allows targeted “land for land” approaches that improve recreation opportunities and protect fish and wildlife habitat such as FLTFA, the Small Tracts Act amendment, and USFS land adjustment legislation.

access into landlocked public lands, and easement acquisitions that benefit fish, wildlife, and the sporting public. However, the full potential of the LWCF remains unrealized because expenditures from the fund are subject to annual appropriations. Congress has only fully funded LWCF at \$900 million once in its 50-year history. Over the life of the program, Congress has diverted more than \$19 billion from the fund for other uses.

A broad spectrum of sportsmen and sportswomen’s groups strongly support the following recommendations:

1. The LWCF should be modernized and permanently authorized by Congress and fully funded with permanent, dedicated funds (not subject to appropriations) directed to the purposes of the LWCF.
2. Amend the LWCF to include the provision known as “Making Public Lands Public,” which specifies that a portion of LWCF dollars (not less than 1.5 percent of the requested amount or \$10 million, whichever is greater), must be used to secure recreational public access to existing public lands that currently have significantly restricted access for hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreational uses.
3. Fish and wildlife conservation should be a stated primary purpose of the LWCF, both at the state and federal levels, to allow expenditure of funds to conserve fish and wildlife habitat.

Turn the Debate on Transferring Public Lands in a Positive Direction.

The origins of the public land system and the rise of proposals to transfer these lands to the states are heavy with historical detail and legalities but boil down to a few simple facts: These lands were retained after decades of the Homestead Acts and other policies that distributed land for settlement. The purpose of public lands was envisioned as providing multiple shared benefits for conservation, jobs, and recreation; according to the USFWS, 72 percent of western hunters depend on public land for access. Hard-fought disagreements over the use of these lands are creating high levels of conflict.

The solution also involves a few simple ideas: Agencies must keep existing legal authorities for land swaps and transfers that allow them to clarify boundary issues around in-holding properties and nearby lands of conservation value. Decisions on the use of public lands and the implementation of these decisions must occur in a more timely fashion, at lower cost, and with more collaborative deliberation among all interests and stakeholders. The future of our public lands must be secured to extend an American heritage that defines this country and promotes conservation worldwide.

We support legislation that authorizes the sale of targeted public lands without high conservation value to generate funds for the acquisition of high priority conservation public lands, particularly those that improve opportunities for hunting, fishing, recreational shooting, and other recreational access, and to protect significant wildlife habitat. This includes the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act (FLTFA), Small Tracts Act amendment, U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land adjustment legislation, and other appropriate legislation that provides land management tools and generates revenue for conservation.

ENERGY DEMAND AND CONSUMPTION IS INCREASING IN THE U.S. Technological advances in energy development, such as the hydraulic fracturing of shale for oil and gas, have increased the ability to produce more of our energy domestically. The move toward energy independence has increased interest in development of renewable energy sources, which grew an average of 5 percent per year from 2001 to 2014, and comprised 9.8 percent of the total domestic energy consumption in 2014. Increased interest in renewable energy and energy self-sufficiency continue to provide federal and state wildlife managers with challenges in balancing energy demands while conserving the nation's natural resources; both high national priorities.

Energy development and the construction of the associated transmission infrastructure convert and fragment native habitats, imperil priority wildlife travel corridors, and affect water quality and quantity, providing new challenges for state fish and wildlife agencies in managing public trust resources. The development of traditional sources of energy can result in significant decrease of both habitat quantity and quality. The current scale of development has the potential to affect entire species and not just populations. For example, impacts of natural gas and oil development throughout the range of the greater sage grouse led to the largest coordinated conservation plan between state and federal governments in our nation's history. Natural gas burns cleaner than coal, but hydraulic fracturing requires tremendous amounts of water, and the disposition of the contaminated water is problematic. The U.S. cannot fully transition to renewable energy sources for decades, so our nation will continue to rely on coal, oil, and natural gas. We must work together with the energy industries to find better ways of avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating its extraction on fish, wildlife, and their habitats.

Wind and solar power have exposed gaps in current policy that fail to account for the risks to wildlife habitat. There are still significant fatalities of bats from turbines, birds are still being electrocuted by and colliding with power lines, and certain solar panels require significant water for cleaning. Development of all these energy sources should avoid, minimize or mitigate their impacts to wildlife. Biofuels have the potential to provide fish and wildlife habitat. However, widespread land conversion from native prairies to monolithic cornfields threatens the nation's waterfowl, grassland songbirds, and upland bird species. In addition, nonnative, invasive plant species are increasingly being used as the source for production. The introduction and encroachment of these plants into aquatic and terrestrial habitats is a very serious


MAKE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT COMPATIBLE WITH WILDLIFE AND HABITAT CONSERVATION THROUGH EARLY, INTEGRATED COOPERATION AMONG INDUSTRY AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

ACTIONS:

1. Develop intergovernmental policy that ensures that federal agencies will work with state fish and wildlife agencies to attain or sustain wildlife population goals while planning and developing energy and transmission projects.

continued...



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2. Review existing science to develop more specific guidelines for the location of energy projects that avoid, minimize, or mitigate the potential negative impacts on wildlife.
3. Support legislation that would dedicate a portion of federal revenue from energy development on federal lands and waters to federal, state, and local agencies to mitigate the loss of fish, wildlife and their habitat from energy development.

concern. We support thorough research and thoughtful discussion to address the impacts nonnative biofuel species have on wildlife and habitat. We encourage prudent development of renewable energy as part of our nation's overall goals toward energy security. This will require federal land management agencies, state and federal fish and wildlife agencies, and state and federal regulatory agencies working cooperatively with the energy industry to avoid, minimize or mitigate the impacts to fish, wildlife and their habitats.

Integrate state wildlife agency expertise early in project planning. Energy development

and transmission companies often collaborate among themselves and with federal agencies and state public utility agencies to negotiate critical project details. Executive orders and federal policies intended to make federal and state permitting more efficient have either not included coordination with state fish and wildlife agencies or coordination has been integrated too late in the process. Consequently, state fish and wildlife population objectives are

Advancing the nation's

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manner.

not fully considered or addressed in many federal and state processes and are sometimes viewed as impediments to progress. State and federal wildlife, land management and utility regulatory agencies must work together with the energy companies to ensure that conservation of our country's wildlife and their habitats is achieved when planning energy development and infrastructure. Early coordination between state and federal agencies and the energy industry will lead to conservation success only when the best available scientific information on wildlife and their habitats is incorporated while planning energy development or transmission.

Advancing the nation's energy independence, while maintaining diverse and thriving wildlife

populations, requires viewing energy development and wildlife management in a more integrated manner. Federal and state wildlife agencies should start integrating energy development considerations into their overall management plans on both public and private lands. This Administration should set a precedent for early, effective coordination among federal agencies, state agencies and energy sectors to integrate energy development that is compatible with natural resource conservation. This cooperative effort between all partners must include incorporating energy planning into public land stewardship, landscape-scale mitigation policies, resource management plans, and conservation actions on private lands.



INCENTIVIZE WILDLIFE AND HABITAT CONSERVATION AND ENCOURAGE ACCESS FOR HUNTING ON AMERICA'S PRIVATE CROPLANDS, GRASSLANDS, WETLANDS, AND FORESTS

ACTIONS:

1. Fully fund and implement conservation programs in the 2014 Farm Bill and encourage landowner participation in CRP, ACEP and other programs.

continued...

THE ROLE OF PRIVATE LANDOWNERS. PRIVATE LANDS SUPPORT wildlife in many areas, as well as the croplands, grazing lands, and forests which comprise over 60 percent of the rural lands in the U.S. In the eastern half of the country, private lands comprise the majority of the wetland, grassland and forest habitats.

Landowners rightfully decide how to use their land either at their discretion or out of economic necessity. That is why the core of private land conservation policy focuses on incentives. Policies that promote healthy markets for sustainably managed crops, wood products, and livestock can also help sustain habitat. Along with regulatory programs, voluntary, incentive-based programs can provide important tools for habitat conservation on private lands. Cost-share programs can incentivize initial landowner enrollment and assist with program implementation costs. Incentive-based programs can also identify and target



options for both voluntary acquisitions and permanent easements. These are important “tools in the toolbox” of a comprehensive suite of habitat conservation programs and policies for private lands.

Farm Bill Conservation Programs. The Farm Bill provides the bulk of conservation incentives on agricultural lands. Most of these programs supply rental or easement payments, cost-share for restoration or enhancement, or technical assistance to landowners to promote habitat management for fish and wildlife. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has been recognized for 30 years as one of USDA’s most successful conservation programs, benefitting farmers and ranchers, wildlife and the environment by providing wildlife habitat, land-based income, and opportunities for access by hunters.

The CRP should be enhanced to ensure that vegetation planted and managed on it provides wildlife habitat values as well as soil erosion, water quality and carbon sequestration benefits. Since 2008, the Voluntary Public Access -

Habitat Incentives Program (VPA-HIP) has opened 3 million acres of private land to public hunting and improved wildlife habitat quality on lands enrolled in public access programs.

Easement programs, such as the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) which includes the Wetlands Reserve Easement (WRE) and the Agricultural Land Easement (ALE), especially the Grassland of Special Significance, and the Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP), provide significant benefits to both wetland and upland wildlife, including federal trust species. We support efforts to fully fund these important programs, but strongly encourage that funding between ALE and WRE follow historic allocations of legacy programs. We support the flexibility provided at the state level to fund projects based on resource needs and prioritization through ranking. It is important that both ACEP and HFRP are maintained as a priority in future farm bills.

Working lands programs, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, and others



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2. Ensure that vegetation planted on CRP, and for other conservation programs, is beneficial to wildlife as well as for soil conservation, water quality and carbon sequestration.
3. Reauthorize the Farm Bill in 2018, sustaining incentive-based programs and policies for fish and wildlife conservation, including an increase to the VPA-HIP program funding which incentivizes access for hunting and fishing, on private lands.
4. Protect and enhance wetlands and streams while striving for no net loss of wetlands.
5. Initiate regional water management approaches utilizing state water planning efforts in order to appropriately manage water use for fish, wildlife, food security, cities and communities.
6. Increase and streamline quantity and functional quality mitigation banking to expand habitat conservation, improve water quality, and increase hunting and fishing access.
7. Incentivize private land forestry and grassland habitat conservation through cost-share programs and tax policies that will keep forest and grassland under active management.

enable soil, water, and wildlife conservation to be integrated with agricultural production. Easement programs promote long-term stewardship. The Working Lands for Wildlife program is helping to restore declining species including sage grouse, lesser prairie chicken, and bobwhite quail while providing landowners who invest in conservation with regulatory certainty with respect to their activities. Other voluntary programs such as swampbuster, sodbuster, sodsaver, and conservation compliance encourage landowners to plan conservation of wetlands, native prairies and other habitats, and complement the incentive programs. We support efforts to fully fund these important conservation programs and ensure that they are maintained as priorities in future Farm Bills.

Other Conservation Assistance Programs. Clear, overarching wetland policies should achieve no net loss of wetlands and associated uplands while enhancing and protecting the nation's remaining wetlands and streams. Incentive and cost-share programs for wetlands restoration, management, and protection contained in the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), state grants, and Farm Bill programs are critical to sustained conservation in North America. In particular, NAWCA and state grants should be fully reauthorized and funded to improve habitat for wetland wildlife and ensure clean water and flood protection for people.

A comprehensive assessment of regional water supply issues that impact people, wildlife and agriculture should be a joint priority of state governments with the cooperation of the federal government. These efforts should provide additional protection for our nation's drinking water, food, and wildlife resources during drought. Mitigation banks that replace both the quantity and functional quality of lost habitat, and species conservation banks should be enlarged and streamlined to expand "no net loss" of habitat, with specific incentives for increased hunting and fishing access. The arduous bureaucracy associated with establishing mitigation banks should also be reduced.

The Use of Taxes as Incentives for Conservation. About 60 percent of forest land in the U.S. is in private ownership. These private forests, when actively managed, offer a multitude of public environmental benefits, from quality fish and wildlife habitat to carbon sequestration and improved water quality. It is important that we keep these private forest lands and grasslands in wildlife habitat and provide incentives to landowners who actively manage their lands for conservation. Congress should recognize the importance of existing tax policies and preserve tax code sections that conserve and protect public benefits of forests, grasslands, and other wildlife habitats. We welcome recent Congressional enactment giving permanent status to tax incentives for landowners who dedicate conservation easements on their property. Tax policies to recover listed threatened and endangered species should be developed.

PRIVATE LANDS

support wildlife in many areas, as well as the croplands, grazing lands, and forests which comprise over

OVER 60%

of the rural lands in the U.S.

THE NEED TO ENHANCE THE ROLE OF PUBLIC LANDS. ALL WILDLIFE conservation is based on the premise that wildlife will thrive if vital habitat is available in sufficient quantity and quality. Most of the U.S. offers good prospects for habitat: Of our nearly 2.5 billion acres, about 75 percent is either held in trust by the federal government for conservation or lies outside metropolitan areas. The keys to quality habitat are the shared-use policies governing public land. The American people have access to the most extensive network of public lands in the world. Our national forests, national wildlife refuges, public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, and national parks provide vital habitat and outstanding recreational opportunities. These lands are essential to perpetuating hunting, angling, and other traditional outdoor activities. However, nearly one-third of the nation's lands held in trust by federal agencies are facing serious problems. Controversies over how the lands should be used and managed have, ironically, hamstrung the agencies in their job of caring for the lands. Conflicting direction, either by organic acts or as a result of changes in Congress and the White House, and routine conflicts in the courts have paralyzed land management or reduced agencies to haphazard programs. Worsened by declining federal funding, federal ineffectiveness is leaving habitat quality unfulfilled and is polarizing recreation and development opportunities.



PROTECT THE VITAL CONTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC LANDS TO WILDLIFE HABITAT CONSERVATION BY INCREASING ACTIVE MANAGEMENT, COLLABORATION, AND REDUCING LITIGATION

ACTIONS:

1. Enact a legislative remedy that provides access to dedicated disaster funds for catastrophic fires, protects operating conservation funds, and ensures conservation programs are reducing the risk and cost of catastrophic fires.

continued...

2. Authorize a stronger role for collaborative approaches to the design of public land management plans and utilize and expand authorities, such as the use of Categorical Exclusions, to streamline environmental analysis.
3. Explore alternative remedies to litigation, including full disclosure of all aspects of those filing lawsuits, and arbitration instead of litigation.



Sportsmen and sportswomen are committed to making this public land estate work for people and wildlife. We need it to sustain wildlife, provide access for hunting and other recreation, retain ecosystem services for our citizens, and allow careful, science-informed development that helps sustain the country's economy. These were the original purposes for setting these lands aside and it is time that 21st Century conservationists write policies that work today just as our conservation leaders did beginning in the 1870s. We are heavily invested in sustaining the public lands. To revive the American conservation legacy of these lands, the U.S. must:

Renew the Focus of Federal Agencies on Results. Public land policy has gotten lost in the process. The important and necessary tasks of environmental analysis and public involvement have bogged down, precluding instead of supporting, conservation results on the ground. U.S. Forest Service budgets are largely consumed by the cost of fighting large fires, taking money away from conservation results on the ground. Recent improvements such as the Stewardship End-Results Contracting authority and the Good Neighbor Policy (both in use by the Forest Service) need to be extended to other agencies. Environmental analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act should more often be used to clear categories of projects known to pose no significant harm through the use of Categorical Exclusions as promulgated in CEQ regulation and guidance. Environmental analysis should allow for reasonable short-term risks such as science-based timber harvesting that reduce long-term risks like catastrophic fires. To pay for fighting larger fires, proposals considered by the 114th Congress to utilize disaster funding accounts should be enacted, leaving agency funding in place for conservation projects.

Promote Collaboration over Conflict. The process of "collaboration" involves citizens working directly with each other on public land management

plans and projects. The idea is taking hold in forest management and needs to be extended to projects involving recreation access and development. The 2009 Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program and the 2014 Farm Bill both moved collaboration to a more influential role in land management. In 2015, the House passed the Resilient Federal Forests Act, and the Senate has introduced a variety of forest health bills which endorse a stronger role for collaboration.

These concepts are applicable to all public land management. In the next four years, we must enact refined legal language that places collaborative agreements on par with lawsuits in determining the direction of public land conservation. This would be a good start in transferring public land management and wildlife conservation from the courts back to professional wildlife biologists and public land managers.

Worsened by declining
federal funding,

FEDERAL INEFFECTIVENESS

is leaving habitat
quality unfulfilled and
is polarizing recreation
and development
opportunities.

Examine Environmental Litigation. Perhaps the biggest obstacle to active and productive public land policy is litigation. What began as a truly American idea that citizens could use to exercise oversight in keeping agencies honest has become an outlet for private interest groups to use the courts to satisfy their agendas with respect to public land management. The result is routine environmental lawsuits seeking to stop legitimate agency decisions in order to achieve the litigant's preferred opinion, usually by exploiting procedural technicalities, which agencies then try to remedy, further slowing progress. To remedy this problem, we support full disclosure of lawsuits, why they are filed, and the resulting reimbursement for costs as proposed in the 114th Congress as the Open Book on Equal Access to Justice Act. Disclosure of basic facts will reveal how much of this problem is agency error, litigants pushing a special interest, or flawed laws making lawsuits inevitable. Other bills in the 114th Congress have introduced the idea of binding arbitration, which should be explored so that no case goes to court that can be resolved by collaboration.

ACHIEVE GREATER CONSERVATION OF WILDLIFE SPECIES THROUGH BETTER COOPERATION BETWEEN STATE AND FEDERAL AGENCIES AND MODERNIZATION OF THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

ACTIONS:

1. Make state wildlife population objectives a formal purpose of public land management plans to ensure coordination of habitat and population objectives.
2. Enforce respect of state hunting and fishing regulations by public land agencies.

continued...

THE IMPORTANCE OF MANAGING WILDLIFE POPULATIONS. WILDLIFE conservation requires adding, removing, and relocating animals, in addition to providing habitat. This adjusts population sizes and densities according to available habitat, social tolerance, and goals for recreational and subsistence hunting. Successful management for popular game animals such as elk, deer, wolves, bear, grouse, and turkeys has made them numerous today. These species were depleted in the 19th century and then restored beginning in the 1890s through the cooperative efforts of hunters, private landowners, state fish and wildlife agencies, and the federal government. Today, wildlife conservation and management, with the exception of migratory birds and endangered species, where the USFWS and state fish and wildlife agencies have concurrent jurisdiction, are principally governed by state authority, including wildlife living on most federal lands.

Hunters still work closely with agencies in the shared mission of conservation to ensure that wildlife flourishes and remains accessible for generations. Hunters support state efforts financially through state license, stamp and permit fees and by contributing to state research and conservation programs. They also pay into federal programs—most importantly, the Wildlife Restoration Fund, which distributes revenue from a federal excise tax on sporting equipment and ammunition for wildlife management, habitat restoration, hunter safety programs and affiliated shooting ranges. The federal Duck Stamp program also channels sportsmen and sportswomen's dollars to wetlands conservation on National Wildlife Refuges. State and federal revenues work together, as state hunting revenues are used to match federal excise tax funds, both of which are protected by federal law from diversion to purposes other than conservation.

The continued success of private-state-federal collaboration requires several actions:

Align federal habitat management with state wildlife population management. What federal agencies do with habitat on public lands is essential to what state managers are doing with populations using the habitat. For example, habitat for elk on federal forest land has degraded over the same period

The ESA needs to be

MODERNIZED

and refocused on restoring and delisting species.

that expanding wolf packs have pressured elk populations. Success for the forests, elk, and wolves requires concerted, cooperative state and federal decisions. Similarly, grouse and wild turkey habitat has declined in mid-western forests and other federal habitats throughout the country. Requirements for better federal-state cooperation will likely take a combination of new and existing policy and formal agreements.



3. Provide state wildlife agencies access to public lands to conduct wildlife management actions.
4. Modernize the Endangered Species Act, starting with updates to listing and delisting decisions, increasing the role of state fish and wildlife agencies, and improving cooperation with private landowners.

Enforce respect for state authority in hunting seasons, means, and methods. The states' responsibility to manage wildlife populations is carried out largely through scientifically regulated hunting and trapping. However, some federal agencies are now ignoring these state obligations by limiting the state's ability to establish seasons, bag limits, and regulate methods of take. For example, recently in Alaska, federal land managers are issuing regulations that undermine state management authority for bears, wolves, and other predators on public lands. This disrupts the state's program for these species and the moose, caribou, elk, deer, and other prey on public lands. Clauses in federal law requiring federal and state cooperation and collaboration are disrespected or only partially heeded. Reversing this disturbing trend will take a combination of legislation and agency policy.

Open federal lands to state agencies for official wildlife management work. State managers need access to wildlife populations living on public lands for population monitoring or for conducting other professional tasks such as employing the use of telemetry. This access for species management has proven difficult, especially to Wilderness Areas and military withdrawal areas when the management work requires mechanical equipment prohibited by the Wilderness Act, or critical timing that must be coordinated with military training schedules. Surmounting these problems should be feasible with new or existing law and formal agreements facilitating cooperation between state and federal agencies.

Engage Congress to update the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This landmark law was last amended in 1988. Gridlock preventing updates to ESA are putting the law's admirable principles at risk. Many of the problems concern the listing and delisting of threatened and endangered species.

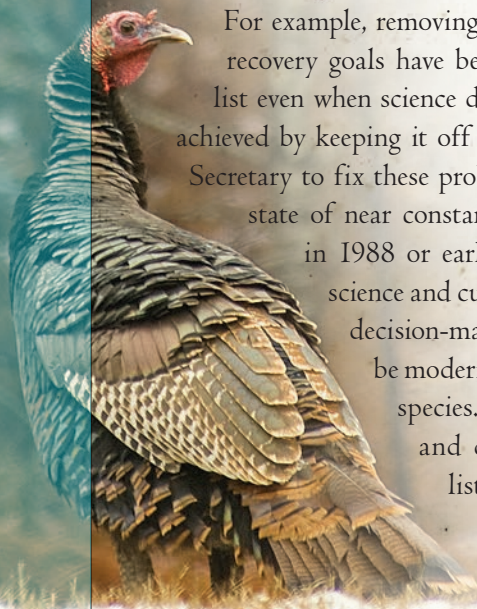
For example, removing a species from the list is difficult even after recovery goals have been met. A species can also be added to the list even when science demonstrates that greater conservation can be achieved by keeping it off the list. The Act leaves no discretion to the Secretary to fix these problems. As a result, the ESA has fallen into a

state of near constant litigation. Arguments over words enacted in 1988 or earlier, rather than decisions based on modern science and current experience, are now driving federal ESA decision-making by the federal courts. The ESA needs to

be modernized and refocused on restoring and delisting species. The clearest starting point is in the listing and delisting decisions. Species considered for listing should be chosen based on science-based priorities with great deference to state fish and wildlife agency population data.

Delisting should be justified by meeting recovery population and habitat goals.

More money should go to the recovery of species so that ultimately delisting better balances with new listings. More of the significant role Congress intended for state fish and wildlife agencies should be realized. These improvements can be achieved only by revision of the law.



HUNTING AND SHOOTING HERITAGE ON PUBLIC LANDS. THE HUNTING community has strong representation in Executive Branch decision-making. In 2008, Executive Order (EO) 13443 was issued to reaffirm the key role that hunters play in restoring and conserving our wildlife resources, to address modern challenges to conservation, and to shape wildlife conservation and wildlife dependent recreation in the 21st century.

The EO directed public land management agencies to work with the Sporting Conservation Council (Council) to “facilitate the expansion and enhancement of hunting opportunities and the management of wildlife species and their habitat.” It also called for a White House Conference on North American Wildlife Policy to facilitate the exchange of information and advice needed to fulfill the purposes of the EO. The Recreational Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Plan, known as the 10-year Action Plan, was the product of the conference and identified 58 actions to implement the EO. Additionally, the EO intended that such conferences would be convened periodically to update the 10-year Action Plan to reflect evolving hunting and wildlife policies and to recommend changes through succeeding Administrations. In 2018, the first ten years will have passed since the development of the Action Plan. The time is right for the Administration to convene a conference to update the Plan.

In 2010, the Council was renamed and reorganized as the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council (WHHCC) and, like its predecessor, this federal advisory committee provides advice to the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture on vital issues to wildlife conservation, hunters and recreational shooters. The Council and WHHCC have proven to be indispensable links between hunters and recreational shooters and the federal land management agencies.

The hunting community has strong representation in legislative decision-making as well. The Congressional Sportsmen’s Caucus, the largest bicameral caucus of any kind in Congress, provides hunters with a significant link to the development of sound wildlife conservation policies. Caucus leadership has worked with sportsmen and sportswomen to prioritize the importance of carrying forward the innovative and visionary work of hunters in the 20th century.

The hunting and recreational shooting sports community plays an active role in protecting the interests of its constituency. In 2014, the Administration



BUILD A STRONG, COLLABORATIVE FUTURE FOR HUNTING, RECREATIONAL SHOOTING AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ON PUBLIC LANDS

ACTIONS:

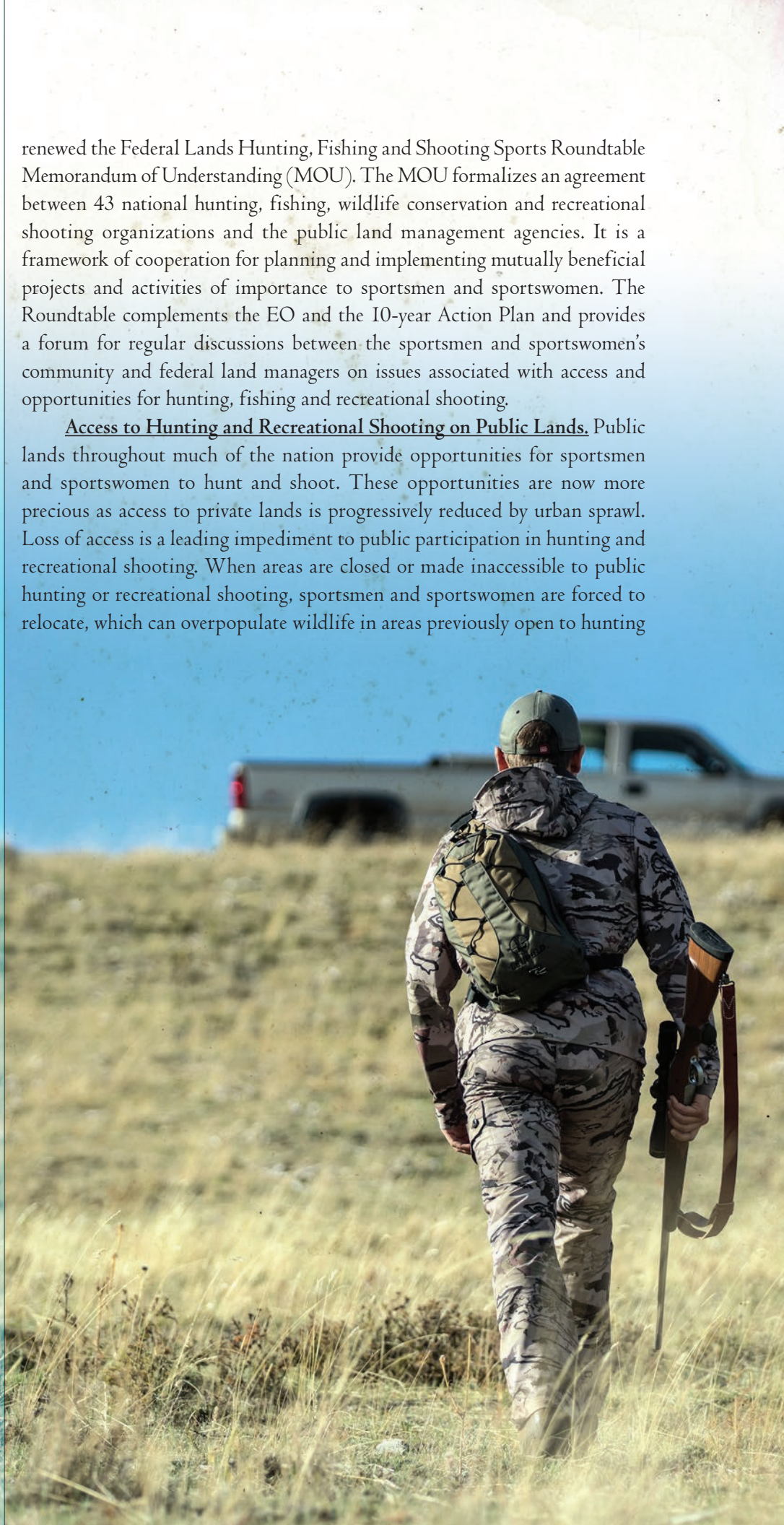
1. Permanently authorize the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council so it can continue to advise the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture on public land management issues and policies from the perspective of sportsmen and sportswomen.
2. Convene a second White House Conference on North American Wildlife Policy and update the 10-year Action Plan.

continued...

3. Utilize the bicameral interest of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus to build a strong future for hunting, recreational shooting and wildlife conservation in the 21st century.
4. Support active and meaningful participation by federal land managers in meeting the goals and objectives of the Federal Lands Hunting, Fishing and Shooting Sports Roundtable.
5. Analyze the impacts of federal land management proposals on hunting and recreational shooting access and assess opportunities for these activities in planning and decision-making.
6. Support legislation to enhance opportunities and access for hunting and recreational shooting on public lands.

renewed the Federal Lands Hunting, Fishing and Shooting Sports Roundtable Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU formalizes an agreement between 43 national hunting, fishing, wildlife conservation and recreational shooting organizations and the public land management agencies. It is a framework of cooperation for planning and implementing mutually beneficial projects and activities of importance to sportsmen and sportswomen. The Roundtable complements the EO and the 10-year Action Plan and provides a forum for regular discussions between the sportsmen and sportswomen's community and federal land managers on issues associated with access and opportunities for hunting, fishing and recreational shooting.

Access to Hunting and Recreational Shooting on Public Lands. Public lands throughout much of the nation provide opportunities for sportsmen and sportswomen to hunt and shoot. These opportunities are now more precious as access to private lands is progressively reduced by urban sprawl. Loss of access is a leading impediment to public participation in hunting and recreational shooting. When areas are closed or made inaccessible to public hunting or recreational shooting, sportsmen and sportswomen are forced to relocate, which can overpopulate wildlife in areas previously open to hunting



and cause excessive pressure on wildlife in areas where hunters are redirected. This can complicate wildlife management by state wildlife agencies and diminish the quality of the hunting experience for many. In addition, access loss places greater burdens on hunter recruitment and retention. The loss of accessible areas means fewer people are able to join mentors in learning and enjoying hunting and recreational shooting activities.

Loss of public access also has indirect impacts on recreational use. Access loss discourages participation and triggers a decline in hunting licenses, reducing revenue used by state fish and wildlife agencies for conservation. Loss of access also hinders the ability of state agencies to use hunting to maintain wildlife

THE 621 MILLION ACRES

held and managed by the federal
land management agencies

MUST CONTINUE

to be managed for the enjoyment of
the public in these traditional and
historic activities.

populations at desired levels and robs rural economies of small business income and tax revenue that hunters generate by purchasing food, lodging and gear.

The 621 million acres held and managed by the federal land management agencies—27 percent of the land area of the nation—must continue to be managed for the enjoyment of the public in these traditional and historic activities. Efforts to provide access must not

stop with the public lands. Many public lands are inaccessible as a result of being surrounded by private lands. Therefore, government purchases, from willing sellers, of conservation easements, other rights-of-way, or fee-title acquisition of these private lands must be made to improve access.



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