



SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

*"Hunting provides the principal incentive and revenue for conservation.  
Hence it is a force for conservation."*

## World Conservation Force Bulletin

www.conservationforce.org November 2017

### Analysis of Preliminary National Survey Says Big Game Hunting in Decline

The US Census Bureau at the request of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies has performed the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation Report every five years since 1955. Preliminary findings of the 2016 National Survey were issued in August 2017. The final, more detailed report of estimates will be available online in December at <http://wsfrprograms.fws.gov/home.html>. Conservation Force has always monitored the reports closely because of misrepresentations and misinterpretations of the reports. This time there seems to be reason for concern that big game hunting, which hit a high point in 2011, is now in decline.

The new report estimates that in 2016 there were 11.5 million hunters as a class who spent an average of 16 days pursuing wild game and expended \$25.6 billion hunting at an average of \$2,237.00 per hunter. The reported 20 percent decline in the number of big game hunters, a decline of 2.362 million, is the focus of this article. Analysis of expenditures, time in nature, fishing, and the broader wildlife-associated recreation will better come from the "final" report in December.

No one spends more time afield or money on their nature-related activity than hunters. So a decline in the number of hunters is concerning. The number of hunters has gone from 13.034 million in 2001, down to 12.510 million in 2006, up to 13.674 million in 2011, and now down to 11.5 million in 2016. The surprise increase from 12.510 million to 13.674 million from 2006 to 2011 has now dropped off to 11.5 million in 2016. That is 2.174 million down from five years ago. It can be viewed as a smaller loss of 1.310 million in 10 years if one prefers to compare this new survey with 2006 for the longer 10-year trend.



John J. Jackson, III

The most popular form of hunting continues to be big game hunting (like deer, elk, moose, bear, and wild turkey). Until recently, it had a long history of growth. That important category has shown a decline in participants in three of the four most recent survey periods, whereas it had never before decreased. Of the 11.5 million hunters, 9.2 million are big game hunters (80%), 3.5 million are small game hunters, 3.5 million hunt migratory birds, and 1.3 million hunt "other animals" such as coyote, groundhogs, and raccoons. When all added, the total sum is greater than the total number of hunters (11.5 million) because many hunters hunt more than one category of game. Overall hunting participation declined 16% largely because its biggest component, big game hunting, declined 20%, but also because small game hunting participation declined 27%, and the "other animals" category declined 39%.

Big game hunters continue to spend more time in nature and more money on average per participant than any other category of hunter, angler, or wildlife watcher. They are the largest segment of hunters and the greatest participants in activities in nature when measured by expenditures and time afield in nature. The percentage of big game hunters to hunters was 76% in 1996, 84% in 2001, 85% in 2006, again 85% in 2011, but down to 80% in 2016. The estimated number of big game hunters were 11.288 million in 1996, 10.911 million in 2001, 10.682 million in 2006, up 8% to 11.570 million in 2011, and now down to 9.208 million in 2016. In short, the 2016 report

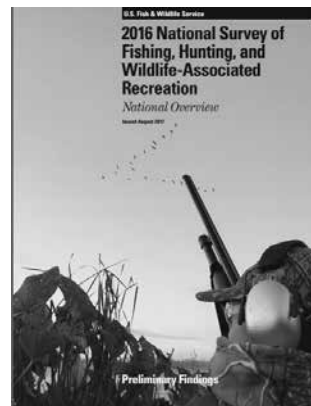
estimates there are 2.362 million fewer big game hunters than in the prior 2011 survey. If we compare 2016 to 2001, the decrease of big game hunters is a reduction of 1.703 million over the past 15-year span.

Since big game hunting is the backbone of hunting and the greatest force for conservation of wild game (and even most non-game), this decline is a concern. Big game hunting has only declined three times since the surveys began in 1955. Those declines were 5% during the decade of 1996 to 2006 and a mere 229,000 (2%) in the five-year period 2001 to 2006. Still, the 2006 report concluded big game hunting was considered to be "stable," and it was again on the increase in the 2011 report.

The historic trend increase in big game hunting before the estimate methodology was changed in 1991 was 4.414 million in 1955, 6.277 million in 1960, 6.566 million in 1965, 7.774 million in 1970, 11.037 million in 1975, 11.047 million in 1980, and 12.576 million in 1985. The trend was positive each reported period and nearly tripled from 1955 to 1985 but those estimates are not statistically comparable in absolute numbers to survey results after 1985.

I have been fond of pointing out that in 2011 there were more big game hunters than any time in recorded history. Though that was true in 2011, it is no longer true today after this record 20% decline. Big game hunting is still the most popular hunting by far, 80% of all hunters in America. In summary, the number of big game hunters grew for decades, stabilized and is now in decline.

It is important to appreciate that the "preliminary" report estimate is not the true total number of hunters or big game hunters. The reports in the past have expressly pointed out that the estimate excludes all those millions of hunters



that hunt every second or third year. It also excludes the nearly two million hunters from six to fifteen years of age (an estimated 1.8 million in the 2011 report). The final report in December will no doubt cite that information and

perhaps provide an explanation for the decline in the most popular and most important form of hunting—big game hunting. We suspect big game hunters are aging and recruitment is not keeping up with that attrition. ■



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## Grand Opening of Johnny Morris' Wonders of Wildlife National Museum and Aquarium

Johnny Morris has opened a national museum and aquarium like no other. The structures fittingly are connected to the Springfield, Missouri Bass Pro "Grand Daddy" of all the Bass Pro stores. The 350,000-square foot experience is larger than the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. It is represented to be the "largest, most immersive wildlife attraction in the world." What is even more important, it showcases the conservation role of hunters and anglers like no other institution of its magnitude anywhere or at any time. It serves as a monument in unabashed celebration of the wholesome sporting way of life we hold so dearly, and the conservation role of sportsmen and women. Johnny "is committed to celebrating the rich history of hunting and angling in America and the vital role sportsmen and women have played and continue to play in conservation."



*Wonders of Wildlife National Museum and Aquarium is a monument to the conservation role of sportsmen and women.*

Wonders of Wildlife gives much more than lip service to the essential conservation role that hunters and anglers have played in perpetuating our natural world. The facts are demonstrated throughout in thousands of historical photographs, documents, and artifacts. In Johnny's words, "Wonders of Wildlife is an inspirational journey around the world that celebrates the role of hunters and anglers as America's true conservation heroes."

The Museum is more than a collection of animals, fish, and memorabilia of the American hunting and fishing heritage. It is the new home of many other museums that have been wholly or partially relocated to the giant plaza. That includes the NRA

National Sporting Arms Museum with a special section on "A Golden Age of Hunting." Another is the Archery Hall of Fame and Museum with everything from Geronimo's bow to Fred Bear's record Alaskan brown bear. There is the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Room, which includes an original 1907 personal letter on White House stationery from President Roosevelt to the president of NRA, with \$25.00 for a Life Membership and strong words of endorsement. The museum houses the Hemingway Hall, with many of his safari and marlin fishing pictures and relevant quotes. The museum houses a fishing section devoted to the fishing escapades of Presidents of the United States, and two presidents spoke during the opening ceremonies and a third by video recording. Another section is the International Game Fish Association Fishing Hall of Fame, which includes fascinating personal memorabilia of

all the Hall of Fame award winners, including those of William (Bill) Poole, who was so renowned in both the safari hunting and fishing world and is part of its greater Heritage Fishing Hall. Other sections hold the National Bass Fishing Hall of Fame. Another displays racing vehicles from NASCAR.

There are sections devoted to Safari Club International, Dallas Safari Club, Wild Sheep Foundation, the Nature Conservancy, Boone & Crockett, et al. Boone & Crockett's National Collection of Heads and Horns is now housed in the museum.

There is a large section honoring Native Americans, "The First People of Conservation." It is connected to the

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Buffalo Hall lined on both sides with a herd-sized collection of whole mounted bison as well as the full story of their decline and restoration.

Enough cannot be said about the countless personal artifacts of famous hunters and anglers, such as the full-size boats of Ernest Hemingway (Pilar), Zane Grey (Avalon), and Don Tyson in the Fishing Heritage Hall. To quote Zane Grey, "If I fished only to capture fish, my fishing trips would have ended long ago."

The quality of the museum experience is also beyond compare and genuinely immersive as represented. The room climate matches the particular "4D" dioramic depictions. The sky lighting cycles through the full 24 hours of night and day while the different habitats have appropriate smells and matching night and day sounds. You literally feel the chill of the Arctic, the cold winds of the Himalayas, the dry sun of the African Savannah and more. It is designed to awaken and stimulate one's senses just like the natural world known so well to sportsmen and women.

At the historic ribbon cutting ceremony the speakers included Johnny Morris, President George W. Bush, President Jimmy Carter, actor Kevin Costner, Secretary of Interior Ryan Zinke, Richard Childress, Missouri Governor Eric Greitens, Shane Mahoney of Conservation Force and Conservation Visions, and others. Kevin Costner surprised the audience when he announced with a smile that "I was once a poacher." He then explained when he was 10 years old he was no respecter of property lines, and hunted where he wanted. Secretary Zinke scuba dove in the shark pool and answered school children's questions underwater early in the day. (See picture taken by yours truly.) Later during the ribbon cutting, the Secretary used the occasion to sign an order commencing October as a new National Hunting and Fishing Month.

The indescribable grand opening

ceremony on September 20 was followed the next morning with a Conservation Summit of the business and conservation partners of Bass Pro Stores and hundreds of sportsmen conservation leaders who were VIP Invitees like Conservation Force. First



*Johnny Morris, CEO of Bass Pro Shops (center), with Chrissie and John J. Jackson of Conservation Force.*

Johnny disclosed that after a year of preparation he was to purchase Cabela's the next Monday with the full intent to keep those stores open. The net effect is broader market coverage. The theme of the Summit was to step up conservation, not just to continue it. The speakers opined that conservation is no longer just a moral obligation of the sporting community. It is a necessary "investment" if there is to be wildlife in the future. (Interestingly, no one thought this was counterintuitive because it is not.) Johnny suggested that businesses voluntarily direct a small share of their revenue to fund a greater investment and that everyone partner together to advance that greater good.

The complex also has a connected Johnny Morris Conservation Education Center that in part houses the WOLF school of select fifth grade children that must qualify for admission. That is the same class that asked Secretary Zinke questions while he was diving. WOLF stands for the Wonders of the Ozarks

Learning Facility. As a national model for outdoor education, WOLF operates in partnership with the local school system.

The complex is only a one-hour drive from Johnny's 4,600-acre lakeside Big Cedar Lodge retreat on which is

another Bass Pro Store and Museum in Missouri's Ozark Mountains. That is just south of Branson and, like the National Museum and Aquarium in Springfield, takes days to see. The two campuses together can easily consume a week.

One could write a book about all that the two facilities offer but for Conservation Force the positive message about sportsmen and women is most important. The Springfield complex took nine years to complete and is designed to be "an inspirational tribute to the adventurers, explorers, outdoorsmen and conservationists who helped discover, develop and preserve the nation we love. ... The critical bond that links many of America's great public and private conservationists is an abiding love for hunting and fishing. It's through these endeavors that many of the leading conservationists of yesterday and today learned to appreciate the essential role that responsible sportsmen and women play in preserving our rivers and forests. Hunters and anglers have spearheaded the stewardship of this nation's natural resources.... The millions of anglers and hunters who venture into the woods, streams and oceans of America are the true heroes in the cause of conservation. They are the ones that are inspiring the next generation to love the outdoors. It is as a tribute to them and as an inspiration to future generations that Johnny Morris has created the Wonders of Wildlife Museum and Aquarium.... The museum and aquarium pay homage to the sportsmen and women of today and tomorrow with the knowledge that the surest way to preserve our rich outdoor heritage is to expose more people to its awe-inspiring beauty."

Johnny obviously intends that the nonprofit Wonders of Wildlife and Aquarium and its Conservation Center serve as a conservation wellspring to enhance the conservation paradigm in America, to "invest" more than to just "give back" in the future. Johnny is a "giver" because he is a hunter and angler. He cares. We are excited to see this emphasis on conservation and positive imaging of sportsmen and women. Johnny's conservation ethic is welcome and promising. ■



*Secretary Zinke (in the background diving in the shark tank) and the students of the WOLF school program give the museum a thumbs up.*

## Decision Time for Lion Hot Spot in West Africa

Conservation Force opposed the endangered ESA listing of the lion in West Africa on the legal basis that the population was not “significant” enough to warrant listing and had not been for a very long time. Nevertheless, the subspecies was listed as endangered (over the objection of certain range nations), and that listing is expected to have the perverse negative effect we were trying to avoid. There is one thing that may save those lion.

Research demonstrates the *benefits* of hunting in a lion hot spot in West Africa. A research article published by a team including Conservation Force Board Member Philippe Chardonnet explains the benefits: *Embargo on Lion Hunting Trophies from West Africa: An Effective Measure or a Threat to Lion Conservation?* PLOS ONE, May 2016. This paper evaluates the impact of lion hunting in West Africa’s W-Arly-Pendjari (WAP) Complex. It concludes the hunting is not detrimental, and in fact, generates necessary incentives to maintain the WAP complex as the last stronghold for lion in West Africa.

The WAP is a transboundary conservation area of 33,000 km<sup>2</sup> across Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger. It is an oasis of wildlife, with stable or increasing populations of lion, leopard, elephant, and other species. Its ecosystem comprises national parks (58.6%), hunting areas (40.6%), and game reserves (0.8%). Almost 90% of West Africa’s remaining lion inhabit the WAP, and its estimated population exceeds 400 adults and sub-adults.

Regulated hunting has been permitted in Burkina Faso since 1996 and in Benin since 2001. Concessions are leased for 20 and 10 years, respectively. Each government has devolved responsibility for management and protection to the operators—resulting in “strong increases” in wildlife over the past 15 to 20 years. (The government maintains responsibility for quota-

setting.) Operators must distribute three-quarters of harvested meat and 30 to 50% of hunting fees to neighboring communities. Lawful hunting is restricted to tracking by nonresidents on a 21-day hunt, and lawful trophies must be six years of age or older. This system generates crucial conservation revenues, which have increased recently because both the minimum hunt length and permit fee was increased.

The paper evaluated the number of lion harvested per year, per block; the initial harvest intensity; and the estimated population of lion based on a 2014 spoor density survey. It found the lion harvest to be stable over the past 16 years. In 10 of 16 hunting areas, the number of lion harvested increased—but so did the estimated number of lion. There was no significant difference in spoor densities between the national parks and hunting areas in the WAP.

Perhaps most surprisingly, hunting areas with higher harvest rates had the highest lion densities. The researchers postulated that these areas “generally benefit from favorable management, and/or abundant water availability, usually hosting more large herbivores.” This attracted lion: “Therefore, any negative impacts on the lion population arising from hunting appear to be either minimal or to be offset by management that protects and fosters populations of both lions and their prey.”

In conclusion, the paper identified several management lessons. First, the hunting sector’s involvement benefited wildlife in the WAP Complex because it funded proper enforcement and management, as compared to other “protected” areas in West Africa that lack resources and are “protected” on paper only.

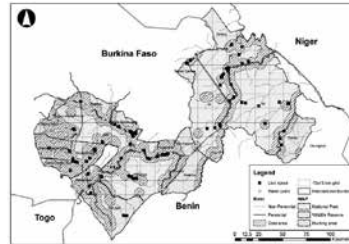
Second, the “first driver of wild population depletion is not poaching ... but the unequal distribution of water ... during the dry season.” In Burkina Faso, private hunting operators have almost quadrupled the range available during the dry season by maintaining approximately 30 water points. That represents a huge gain for water-dependent species like lion.

And third, hunting generates 99% of revenues from the wildlife industry in the WAP. The lion is the most valuable species hunted. Because of this, “restrictions on lion hunting may reduce

tolerance for lion in communities where local people benefit from trophy hunting and reduce funds available for anti-poaching and management activities ... loss of revenue will affect the WAP’s self-supporting financial capacities and reduce the competitiveness of wildlife-based land uses relative to ecologically unfavorable alternatives.”

Put simply, hunting, and particularly lion hunting, has been sustaining the last stronghold in West Africa for lion, prey and other species. There is no viable alternative, and if the hunting disappears, so will the lion.

Although the lion in the study are listed as endangered, Conservation Force is considering an initiative to reestablish the import of those lion hunting trophies under the “enhancement” import permit policy that we pioneered for endangered black rhino, markhor, and wood bison. Before we embark on such a task we need someone of means to step up and pledge a substantial tax-deductible contribution to fund the project. We hesitate to start such an effort without serious dedicated support. Will anyone out there fund this enhancement effort? If so, contact John J. Jackson, III, at [jjj@conservationforce.org](mailto:jjj@conservationforce.org), 504-837-1233. ■



The WAP Complex is the stronghold of West African lions, sprawling three West African countries.

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