

FUNDING WILDLIFE CONSERVATION



James L. Cummins
PRESIDENT

Ensuring sustainable funding for wildlife conservation has long been a priority of the Boone and Crockett Club. Wildlife restoration has never been cheap, and the Club was able to foot the bill for decades. Yet they could only raise so much. Members of Boone and Crockett were key players in laying the groundwork for both the conservation of game species and generating the funds to pay for it—a system that we still use today.

THE CLUB'S LONG HISTORY WITH CONSERVATION FUNDING

In 1934, the Club worked with Congress to pass the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp Act (Duck Stamp Act). Since its inception, the Duck Stamp has raised more than \$1 billion, with the money being used to protect six million acres of wetlands. Establishing the Duck Stamp was a solid start to funding conservation, but it wasn't enough. This same year, Club member "Ding" Darling hosted a dinner in

New York City with heads of industry. Thanks to Remington Arms Company, DuPont Company, and Hercules Powder Company, the Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit Program was created. I was fortunate to have worked for this program in Virginia.

Also this same year, the Club worked with Congress to create the Select Committee on the Conservation of Wildlife. Nevada Senator Key Pittman (a Mississippian by birth) served as the Senate chair, and A. Willis Robertson of Virginia served as the House chair. Pittman and Robertson introduced identical bills in the Senate and the House, which directed the excise taxes on sporting arms and ammunition to states to acquire habitat and to restore and research wildlife populations. As a result, the Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act became law in 1937; it is regarded as one of the most important funding mechanisms for wildlife conservation.

In 2014, Club member and Cabela's/Bass Pro Shops owner Johnny Morris and

former Wyoming Governor Dave Freudenthal co-chaired the Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources. The panel included industry representatives, conservation groups, and state wildlife agencies. Their primary goal was to develop a way to fund the conservation of at-risk, non-game species and their habitat. Based on the panel's recommendations, Club member Don Young of Alaska first introduced the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) in 2016. This bill would have provided greater regulatory certainty for industry, landowners, and other private partners by conserving species and avoiding the need to list them under the Endangered Species Act. The Club is currently working with House and Senate leadership to help advance the concepts of RAWA.

As the national debt of the nation increases, there is intense pressure to reduce spending, resulting in maintaining funding for wildlife conservation being more of a challenge than normal. To do so, there will be cuts in

appropriations, such as defense and domestic spending, mandatory or entitlement programs, and tax reforms. Unfortunately, much of the focus on reducing spending is often on domestic programs, such as that for wildlife conservation, and not on the larger mandatory spending programs, which represent 63 percent of the federal budget.

CHALLENGES FOR CONSERVATION FUNDING

While the funding for wildlife conservation has been declining, the challenges to it are many and have been increasing. For example, there will be more people, perhaps as many as 40 million in Canada, 438 million in the United States, and 153 million in Mexico by 2050. This growing population will place significant additional pressure on the wildlife resources of the North American continent. These people will be more urbanized and



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older. There will be more ethnic and cultural diversity in North America, including people from places with no experience with the major features of North American conservation. There are other challenges as well, including the loss of support for hunting by the public, invasive species and diseases, a changing climate, and a lack of understanding of land management.

While many Americans, including many members of the Club, are concerned about our nation's fiscal health, we face unsustainable future fiscal deficits, which must be addressed. Hunting and conservation programs should not be exempt from scrutiny. However, budgets should not be balanced disproportionately on the backs of hunting and wildlife conservation. Further savings in spending should be achieved while understanding the economic benefits of hunting (e.g., a sustainable source of protein), conservation, and utilizing nature as a solution to many of society's problems, such as utilizing forests and grasslands to address climate change or conserving watersheds to protect drinking water and reduce water treatment costs—things that

non-hunters can also relate to. There is also room for improving efficiency in delivering conservation and broadening the base of financial support to address these challenges. There are new partnerships and opportunities to increase sources of funding. Innovation is needed in finance and the tax code to protect and enhance conservation funding. We need to develop long-term strategies to increase and broaden conservation funding.

With the increase in human population and activities needed to support such (e.g., food, construction, energy, etc.), we must provide a massive intensification in wildlife conservation funding. We need to develop additional creative funding sources. Relying almost solely on government funding will not be sufficient to meet the conservation needs that are presented by the challenges before us. Government funding is static to declining while the need is increasing. There have been no major innovations in wildlife conservation funding during the past 35 years.

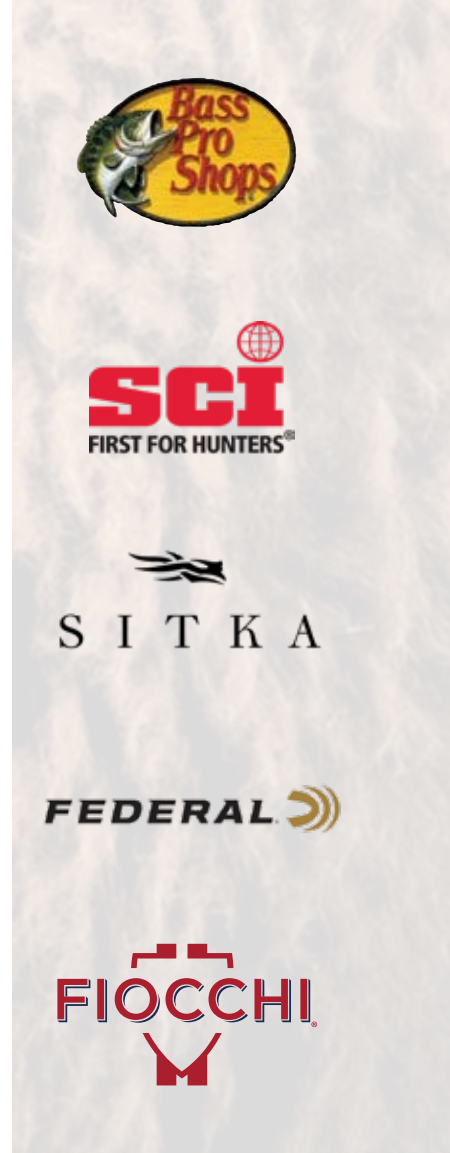
The portion of the federal budget that includes all environmental and natural resource funding is termed Function 300; it covers water

resources, conservation and land management, recreational resources, pollution control and abatement, and other natural resources. As recently as the Reagan Administration, specifically in 1982, the portion of the federal budget that went to these programs was almost 4 percent. Today, the amount of funding in Function 300 is less than 1 percent (\$44.7 billion), with only 0.7 percent being spent on programs important to hunters, anglers, and other outdoor enthusiasts.

INNOVATION IN CONSERVATION FUNDING

With significant constraints on federal and state budgets, increasing the funding base from government will be challenging. There could be some significant innovations to reverse this constraint, but without creative new approaches, prospects for increased government funding are doubtful.

There are potential strategies to seek increases in federal conservation funding. The innovation that allowed the creation of the Conservation Title of the Farm Bill resulted from a savings strategy that reduced federal expenditures. In the early 1980s, the federal government was



THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB ASKS THAT YOU PLEASE THANK OUR TRAILBLAZERS WITH YOUR PATRONAGE.

subsidizing the breaking out of additional highly erodible acres for conversion to and the draining of wetlands for conversion to crops. This subsidy principally was through the payment of price supports for commodities produced on these lands. Not only was there a direct expenditure to increase lands enrolled in commodity crop production, but the government paid a price for surplus commodities and paid to store and ultimately dispose of surplus food commodities. This placed a tremendous burden on the taxpayer while causing environmental harm. Ending this set of subsidies reduced federal spending used to offset conservation programs and removed the government subsidy of environmentally destructive practices. The termination of these subsidies in the 1985 Farm Bill more than offset the new expenditures for conservation. Innovative strategies that reduce federal expenditures could be widely supported in the current political climate.

Currently, a great opportunity exists for conservation investments that are also smart fiscal policy. For example, a recent study titled “Wetland Reserve Easement Program Economic Assessment: Estimated Commodity Program and Crop Insurance Premium Subsidy Cost Avoidance Benefits” showed that cropped former wetlands enrolled in the Wetland Reserve Easement create economic benefits by reducing costs in commodity, federal crop insurance, and Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance programs. In Mississippi, for example, the study found that benefits of farm-program-payment cost avoidance were greater than costs associated with the Wetlands Reserve Easement acquisition and wetland restoration. Specifically, the research showed that the cost avoidance benefits (present value of avoided costs less the

Wetlands Reserve easement and restoration costs) for Mississippi was \$870/acre. Although not evaluated as part of this project, enrollment in the program also creates a wide range of other benefits related to flood mitigation, wildlife habitat, hunting and outdoor recreation opportunities, groundwater recharge, carbon sequestration, and improved water quality, among other benefits. The Louisiana black bear, for example, was delisted pursuant to the Endangered Species Act because of the bottomland hardwood restoration efforts of this program, which has restored over one million acres in the Lower Mississippi River Valley alone. A similar study was conducted for the Conservation Reserve Program. Combined, they represent a cost savings of approximately \$8.4 billion over the next 10 years.

One can see that while conservation programs have a cost, they also result in significant cost savings if designed properly and can have a significant positive economic impact. We must constantly remind elected officials of the significant economic impact that the 54.4 million hunters, anglers, and other wildlife recreationists have on the economy. If they were a corporation, the \$394 billion spent in 2022 would have placed them

at the number seven spot on the Fortune 500 that year—right above Apple.

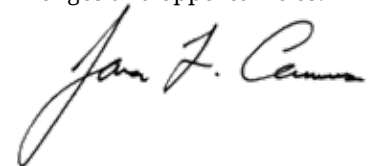
Hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching drive consumerism and tourism by supporting the outdoor recreation economy. They buy meals and snacks, stay in hotels, buy specialized equipment, lease land, and incur travel costs. Anglers and hunters aren’t just an economic powerhouse but also a political force. According to the Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation, one-third of registered voters are sportsmen and women, and 8 in 10 believe that a candidate’s position on sporting issues is important in determining whom they vote for. Approximately 20 percent of the entire population of major swing states—Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Florida—hold either a hunting or fishing license or both.

U.S. residents over 16 took over 1.7 billion trips in 2022 to participate in outdoor activities like fishing, hunting, wildlife watching, recreational boating, and target shooting. In 2022, 148 million U.S. residents watched wildlife, 40 million went fishing, and 14.4 million hunted. This means roughly 57 percent of Americans 16 or older participated in wildlife watching, 15 percent fished, and 6 percent hunted last year. These trips equaled a total of 14

billion days spent in the field, on the water, and around the home viewing wildlife—an all-time high.

MAINTAINING FUNDING

Money for adequate conservation funding is essential to the quality of life of many, if not all, Americans. With the political, economic, social, technological, and environmental changes we are currently experiencing, this impressive system of conservation will not sustain itself without solving the many challenges it faces, especially with funding. While we all remain committed to this critical task of maintaining a system of conservation, it must constantly be nurtured as there is much competition for funding to manage this system, and special interest groups seem to constantly have their own plans that go well beyond why these policies and funding levels were established. However, it is the Boone and Crockett Club’s duty, as the architect of the system, to maintain and improve it. To do so, we must do a better job of being more involved in the political process and unify our collective strengths and apply them to common challenges and opportunities. ■



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