

POACH AND PAY PROJECT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



Poaching is theft of a public resource - no different than embezzlement, misuse of public funds, benefits fraud, or theft of government property. Poachers steal wildlife, degrade conservation investments, and reduce opportunities for law-abiding hunters. The Boone and Crockett Club's *Poach & Pay* research demonstrates that current state penalties, enforcement structures, and restitution systems fail to deter offenders and fail to reflect the true conservation cost of poaching. ~1.4B in conservation value (minimum penalties and replacement costs) is lost each year nationwide. States must take action to raise criminal penalties, increase wildlife law enforcement, and improve prosecution.

1. Raise Fines & Fees - and Grant Commissioners Authority

- In a handful of states, the fines and fees associated with poaching are less than the cost of purchasing a hunting license. In these cases, fines, fees, and restitutions should be increased such that hunting is rightly less expensive than poaching.
- Poaching crimes should be classified as a felony when the value of the animal taken exceeds the threshold for felony theft in any given state.

2. Enforce Restitution & Replacement Fees

- Restitution fees - the value of replacing wildlife resources lost to poaching - is often set too low to reflect the biological and management value of lost wildlife. Commissions can help ensure these values are appropriate and can be adapted proactively without requiring legislation to change future restitution rates to keep pace with inflation.
- Restitution fees should be criminal penalties, not civil.
- Legislatures should consider authorizing state wildlife commissions to set restitution schedules to ensure criminal penalties match the true conservation cost of wildlife crime.

3. Expand Enforcement Capacity & Authority

- Wildlife law enforcement agencies nationwide are underfunded and understaffed, reducing effective enforcement and prosecution of wildlife laws.
- Increased staffing and modern investigative tools will increase detection, deterrence, and prosecution.
- State wildlife law enforcement officers need the authority to confiscate equipment. Confiscated gear should be declared contraband upon conviction or guilty plea.

4. Implement Roving Prosecutor Teams

- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has pioneered a model of "roving prosecutors" specializing in wildlife crime. These prosecutors travel between jurisdictions, providing consistency, expertise, and efficiency in wildlife cases.
- Other states should seek to adopt similar roving prosecution teams to ensure poaching cases are taken seriously and prosecuted effectively, while also reducing caseload burdens on local prosecutors. In lieu of additional staff, state wildlife agency staff can be made available to provide educational materials on the true costs of poaching.



**IF YOU POACH
YOU WILL PAY**

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