

FROM THE PRESIDENT

31st President of the Boone and Crockett Club, William A. Demmer



William A. Demmer
PRESIDENT
Boone and Crockett Club

What an honor it is for me to lead the Boone and Crockett Club, an organization founded by Theodore Roosevelt in 1887. The Club is celebrating its 125th anniversary this year. Theodore Roosevelt

created this organization out of his concern for dwindling wildlife populations and irresponsible land use in North America. He assembled like-minded, passionate souls to help conserve our nation's wild resources for the future. Because of the dedication of these respected leaders and fellow hunters, this Club was at the forefront of actions that resulted in the foundation for the greatest conservation revolution in the history of mankind and in the survival of our hunting heritage. Our Boone and Crockett endowed chair at Michigan State University, Dr. William Porter, says it best: "The Boone and Crockett Club ushered in one of mankind's great ideas... 'Conservation,' the sustainable and shared use of our precious wildlife and natural resources."

It is always important to reflect on where the state of U.S. wildlife stood in 1886, the year before the Boone and Crockett Club was founded. I am always stunned when I review the condition of big game populations in the 19th century. When viewed with our ethical and environmental lenses of today, it is hard to believe that the original wildlife bounty of the U.S. had been decimated to such a degree. Bison were down to 5,000 head from an estimated 40 million. White-tailed deer were down to 500,000 from an estimated 24 million (Quality Deer Management Association estimates the pre-settlement population was 40 million.). Wild

turkeys were down to 400,000 from an estimated 15 million; pronghorn populations were down to 25,000 from an estimated 10 million, and elk were down to 150,000 from an estimated 10 million. Added to those tragedies, other game and non-game animals had become extinct!

The Boone and Crockett Club has much to celebrate this year. Club members were champions of the first national parks,

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national refuges, and the national forest system. John F. Lacey, a U.S. senator and Boone and Crockett Club member, ushered through Congress the first national legislation for the protection of wildlife. The Lacey Act made it a federal offense to transport illegally taken game across state borders. In 1902, President Roosevelt signed game law legislation for Alaska that became the model for the rest of the states. Club Members ushered through legislation that established the National Bison Range. Created in 1908, this refuge for bison is one of the oldest national wildlife refuges in the U.S. By 1917, both Glacier and Mount McKinley National Parks were established with Boone and Crockett Club members doing most of the heavy

lifting. In 1929, Boone and Crockett Club members introduced legislation creating the Federal Waterfowl Refuge System. In 1932 the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act was passed, providing revenue from sportsman for the recovery and protection of waterfowl and their habitat. That act was ushered through Congress by Boone and Crockett Club members.

In 1937, with conceptual groundwork laid by Boone and Crockett Club members, the Pittman-Robertson Act passed Congress, earmarking sportsmen's dollars for conservation and game management. In 1947, the Club aggressively began promoting Roosevelt's ideals of fair chase in relationship to heads and horns submissions for records book consideration. President George H.W. Bush in 1989 asked the Club for a 10-point program for his administration's wildlife conservation agenda. That request laid the groundwork for the American Wildlife Conservation Partners, an organization formed in 2000 under the leadership of then-Boone and Crockett Club President Dan Pedrotti. In 1993, the Club endowed its first professorship chair at the University of Montana, appointing Dr. Hal Salwasser chair to guide graduate student research. The Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Alliance was formed in 2002 with the Mule Deer Foundation and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to address CWD issues. In 2004 the Club launched a "Hunt Fair Chase" program to build awareness of ethical choices and to strengthen the public's perceptions of hunting.

The Club now has five endowed chairs and/or programs at major universities that include the University of Montana, Oregon State University, Texas A&M, the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point, and Michigan State University. The Club is engaged with other universities in North America to



establish more programs to advance the cause of wildlife conservation and to help develop the appropriate policies and leaders that will facilitate that cause.

My vision for the Club during my tenure is to continue to focus on our strengths and build even greater effectiveness in our delivery systems. Our hunting constituency, the policy makers who so powerfully impact our wildlife and habitat decisions and today's general public who, through their power of the vote control our destiny, need to hear one of the greatest stories barely told! That story is how the hunter-conservationist in the late 19th century created a movement so powerful that the conscience of a nation was awakened and energized to save wildlife. That movement was conservation, the sustainable, wise and shared use of our nation's wildlife and natural resources. That movement has resulted in wild game populations rebounding to powerful and sustainable levels. North American bison now number over 400,000; white-tailed deer in the U.S. now number over 15 million; wild turkeys more than 7 million; and both pronghorn and elk populations top more than 1 million each. Through Pittman-Robertson funding, more than \$481 million annually is distributed to the states and territories to support fish and wild game habitat, science and management. Together, hunters and anglers are the most important source of conservation funding, and if Boone and Crockett Club doesn't get that message out to the general public, who will?

This dynamic conservation movement—so powerfully impacted by the Boone and Crockett Club—has been best defined in the works of three current Boone and Crockett Professional Members, Professor Valerius Geist, Shane Mahoney and John Organ. They developed an effective description of the tenets of that movement called the *North American Model of Wildlife Conservation*, which describes the seven primary

principles that underpin successful wildlife and habitat management. Spreading the gospel of that model is at the heart of our Club's new five-year strategic plan.

With U.S. gun ownership being challenged anew, it is critical that the general public has a clear view of what hunters—i.e., hunters who are responsible, passionately engaged in habitat protection and who behave ethically within their sport—have done and continue to do for the greater good of the country. There is a special opportunity today to get our message out, as many people are trying to determine just where they stand on sensitive issues.

These are exciting times again for the Boone and Crockett Club. Our effort to affect national wildlife policy will be at the forefront of our activities. Our Club, being the North American repository for big game records, will be expanding B&C's records database, making it easier for more scientific access. Our communications efforts will be even more impactful as we finish our branding work, which will provide both a focus for our message and a filter to ensure consistency. The Boone and Crockett Club, which was the first hunting-conservation organization to promote ethics through our beacon of fair chase will expand that effort as to provide both the hunter and non-hunter moral underpinnings of their actions and to provide quality options for behavioral choices, choices associated with both land use and hunting. Our Club's university programs working synergistically have the potential to become a true bully pulpit for conservation. It is critical that we, the Boone and Crockett Club, rekindle a national awareness of conservation. To that end, to quote Shane Mahoney, as he so succinctly says, "Conservation matters." ■

William A. Demmer

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