CONSERVATION FUNDING

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Morrison Stevens, Sr.
PRESIDENT

I want to thank Hannibal Bolton, of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, one of the Club's new professional members, and James Cummins, our Club's vice president of conservation, for their article about the status of conservation funding in the U.S. Their leadership and perspective on the current model of securing funding for the conservation of our wildlife and natural resources is always appreciated.

If our nation is to continue to maintain healthy wildlife habitats and populations, we must make sure that conservation programs are not only well-funded, but cost-effective; in other words, we must continue to do all we can to produce the most bang for our buck! Our nation is on an unsustainable fiscal path, and it is important for us as a Club to work with the current and changing administration and Congress to develop a comprehensive approach to address our nation's fiscal problems. Many elected officials only focus on discretionary spending, but if we are to attempt to get our fiscal house in order, we must make changes in entitlement and tax programs, as well as changes in federal contracting procedures and cost-effectiveness of certain programs. Discretionary spending, which goes through the appropriations process, represents about 30 percent of the annual federal budget. Mandatory spending (i.e., social security, welfare payments, farm program payments, etc.) represents the balance.

By solely focusing on discretionary spending programs, which include spending on conservation, we as a nation are disproportionately targeting programs, which results in poor fiscal policies overall and frustration among the public. For example, in 1982, approximately 4 percent of the federal budget was dedicated to natural resources, environmental, and conservation programs. This 4 percent was allocated to all of the federal agencies that had a conservation mission (e.g., Bureau of Land Management, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Forest Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Park Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, etc.). Currently, our nation spends less than 1 percent on natural resources, environmental, and conservation programs. While budget cuts are inevitable, we must reflect on all federal government spending—including discretionary, entitlement and tax programs—if we are to continue to prosper financially. Additionally, we must consider adjustments in federal contracting procedures and increase the cost-effectiveness of certain programs.

The U.S. government distributes or allocates funds for conservation through a variety of mechanisms: conservation trust funds, such as the Pittman-Robertson Act; discretionary spending programs such as those in the annual appropriations process; mandatory spending programs, such as some of the conservation programs in the Farm Bill; fines and settlements, such as those from the Exxon Valdez and the Deepwater Horizon; and, tax programs such as those for conservation easements.

In the following article, Hannibal and James have provided a thorough description of the Pittman-Robertson Act and how it functions. Boone and Crockett Club members were instrumental in establishing the Wildlife Restoration Act, commonly referred to as the Pittman-Robertson Act, almost 80 years ago. The Club was also involved in many of the amendments to the act. These amendments include:

- making the funds permanent and indefinite (1951);
- increasing the excise tax from 10 percent to 11 percent on ammunition and firearms (1954);
- adding the excise taxes from pistols and allowing the use of these funds for hunter education (1970);
- creating an 11 percent excise tax on archery equipment and allowing the use of these funds for hunter education (1972);
- changing the tax formula on arrows and arrow components (1997);
- setting aside $8 million for hunter education and shooting range development (2000); and
- exempting certain small manufacturers from paying excise taxes on firearms (2005).

Of special significance—which Hannibal and James discuss in the conclusion of their article—is the partnership behind the U.S. system of wildlife conservation funding. The core of this model is intact; that is, hunters, anglers, and the industries that outfit them comprise the funding engine for fish and wildlife conservation in America. As hunter-conservationists, we are pleased to do whatever we can to fund wildlife research and management efforts. However, we need to do a better job of communicating our story to other members of the public who may not be as interested as we are in contributing financially to conservation. Communicating our relevancy and value to the more general public is essential, especially in these times of cutthroat competition for available conservation funds.

Regarding discretionary spending for conservation, the Omnibus bill that passed in December 2015 makes significant investments in conservation and begins to reverse a decades-long decline in funding for fish and wildlife, as well as hunting and fishing. Whether you hunt public or private lands, fish freshwater or saltwater, or just enjoy one of our nation's wonderful national parks, this is good news. This is also good news for our nation's economy, as so much of it is directly

related to our quality of life and the outdoors.

Our public lands, like our national forests, have been underfunded for decades. In fact, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has lost 12 percent of its workforce in the last four years alone. The forest service has had to cut 39 percent of its personnel working on land management, timber production and recreation since 1998. With funding increases across the board—12 percent for the forest service and 5 percent for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—our land managers finally have the resources they need to improve habitat for a diversity of animals.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which is home to the National Marine Fisheries Service, will receive $325 million in 2016 through the Omnibus bill. That's a 6 percent boost to improve fisheries data collection and management, a significant benefit to the nation's marine fisheries and our seafood industry.

The spending bill also includes a three-year reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund—a hugely successful tool for improving access to national, state, and local lands—and boosts its funding next year by $100 million. These are dollars that forest rangers and state fish and wildlife agencies can use to purchase in-holdings and easements to create better access for our sportsmen. This fund also helps improve parks in our own neighborhoods.

The Boone and Crockett Club has recently convened a Thought Leadership Council to do some long-range strategic thinking about critical problems in the hunting and conservation world. The long-term funding of conservation is one area I have tasked the council to work on together.

We must think about the future of hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing, and reflect on a future system of conservation in the U.S.—one that can be maintained by a consistent, reliable funding source. This system will have to be supported by a growing and diverse population, incorporate both public and private lands/waters, and funding (e.g., excise taxes, appropriations, mandatory spending, tax credits and deductions, other forms of tax policy, energy-derived revenue, eco-assets such as species credits, water quality credits, and wetland/stream credits, etc.). This system will also have to account for efficiency and cost-effectiveness, which are often overlooked.

On March 2, 2016, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation issued a press release on the results of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining American Fish and Wildlife Resources, which was initially assembled in 2014. It was co-chaired by David Freudenthal, former governor of Wyoming, and John Morris, noted conservationist, founder of Bass Pro Shops and a regular member of the Boone and Crockett Club. The panel includes representatives from the outdoor recreation retail and manufacturing sector, the energy and automotive industries, private land owners, educational institutions, sportsman's conservation organizations, and state fish and wildlife agencies. The panel has excellent representation and perspective on what funding level is necessary for the states to manage our wildlife and natural resources going forward. The panel's recommendation would redirect and dedicate $1.3 billion (out of $10 billion) each year from energy development (both renewable and traditional) and mineral development on federal lands and waters. The panel's recommendation would help pave the way for our state fish and wildlife agencies to have access to the resources they need to manage wildlife and our natural resources properly.

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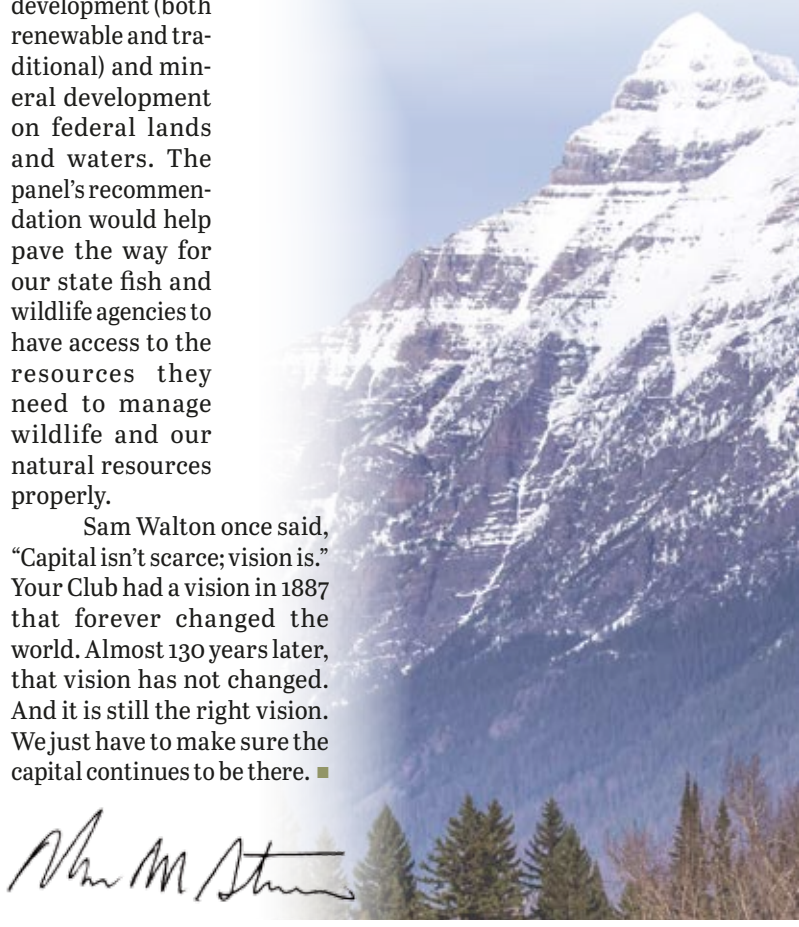
Sam Walton once said, "Capital isn't scarce; vision is." Your Club had a vision in 1887 that forever changed the world. Almost 130 years later, that vision has not changed. And it is still the right vision. We just have to make sure the capital continues to be there. ■



EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN SYSTEM OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION FUNDING

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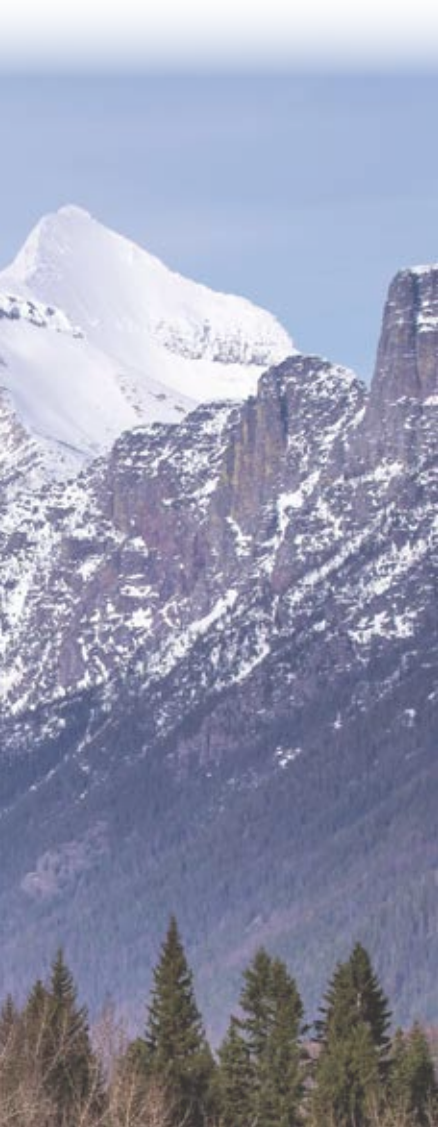

Conservation of fish and wildlife in the United States is unlike conservation anywhere else in the world. Like many nations, we began our conservation story in the throes of wildlife depletion. Rapid settlement of lands in the 19th century, booming population growth by the turn of the 20th century, unregulated harvest of wildlife across the centuries, and the depths of the Depression and the Dust Bowl culminated in accelerating loss of habitat and near-extermination of America's most iconic wildlife.

By 1937, whitetail deer were almost non-existent, having been extirpated from Indiana as early as 1893. Further west, pronghorn and bighorn sheep populations were on the precipice of collapse. Nationwide, beavers had almost disappeared, and wild turkeys were at the edge of extinction.

Fortunately for conservation, 1937 marked not the end of wildlife but the beginning of the greatest story in wildlife restoration. On September 2, 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed into law the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, which is commonly known as the Pittman-Robertson (P-R) Act—an act strongly supported by the Boone and Crockett Club and one that would set the precedent for future wildlife conservation in America.

The act established an excise tax on guns and ammo and directed those moneys to be used by the states for restoration and scientific management of wildlife. P-R was later supplemented by excise taxes on fishing equipment for sport fish restoration by the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act of 1950, which is commonly known as the Dingell-Johnson (D-J) Act, by adding bows and arrows, motorboat fuel, and other sporting products.

What makes the 1937 act and its successors so remarkable is not the sheer amount of excise taxes collected for conservation but the conservation funding model and partnership it spawned.

State fish and game agencies existed in 1937 but were, without exception, strapped for cash. Hunting and fishing fees and fines collected for violations were barely enough to cover the cost of enforcing hunting and fishing laws. In South Carolina, for example, a game warden's salary was 50 percent of whatever he collected from fines. Budgets for scientific management of wildlife, not to mention recovery of depleted iconic species, were effectively zero.

After 1937 everything changed. Funding to implement the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (North American Model) was set in motion by establishing a dynamic partnership between: (1) the hunters and anglers who pay hunting and fishing fees and who purchase sporting equipment subject to excise taxes; (2) the industries that produce those products and pay the excise taxes on them; (3) the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) that administers and distributes funds from the excise tax to all 56 states and territories; and (4) the states and territories that use those fees and excise taxes to conserve wildlife in America.

The dollar figures are impressive. Since 1937, the Wildlife Restoration Fund has distributed over $15 billion to wildlife management, and hunters have paid $6.4 billion in hunting fees toward the same. Since 1950, the Sport Fish Restoration Fund has distributed over $12 billion to fisheries management and boating, and anglers have paid more than $6.5 billion in fees to complement those funds. In all, over $40 billion has been invested in fish and wildlife restoration and management—a conservative figure that does not include other fee and revenue sources available to individual states for fish and wildlife management.

Success of the Pittman-Roberson Act and the partnership it enabled is dramatic. In the first 10 years of P-R, 38 states acquired almost a million acres of land for use as wildlife management areas, most of which were dedicated to habitat reclamation and wildlife relocation. By 1951, Indiana had 5,000 whitetail deer; by 1970, 50,000. Pronghorn populations recovered to 1.1 million and beavers returned in abundance to their historic range. Waterfowl hunting days increased from no season in 1937 to between 50-150 days in the 50 states. Similar trends over this same period occurred for turkey and whitetail deer in the East and elk and mule deer in the West. In the past 25 years, 41 percent of P-R dollars have gone toward habitat development and management, 5 percent for acquisition (purchase or lease), 14 percent for wildlife surveys, 14 percent for research and technical assistance, 14 percent for program planning and coordination, and 12 percent for hunter and archery education.

Fisheries in America reaped similar benefits from the Dingell-Johnson Act and the partnership that stands behind it. Over the past 25 years, 14 percent of D-J dollars have gone toward fisheries research and technical assistance, 24 percent for fisheries surveys, 5 percent for aquatic education, 20 percent for boating and fish access and operations, 24 percent toward fish stocking and development, 8

percent for program planning and coordination, and 5 percent toward improvement of fish habitat. More significantly, almost half of the cost of inland fisheries conservation nationwide is covered by D-J dollars. Together, P-R and D-J funds have provided the financial resources that state and territorial fish and game agencies need to fulfill their conservation mandate to restore and scientifically manage a diversity of species. Despite its notable success, the Wildlife and Sports Fish Restoration Program is not stagnant. It is evolving to meet the changing circumstances and needs of wildlife conservation in America.

The most notable change is that of focus. After almost 80 years of reversing the legacy of the past, the Program and its partners are shifting from restoration to management of wildlife and fish to meet multiple-use objectives that include sustainability of all species and the integrity of supporting ecosystems. This shift is not surprising. With few exceptions, big game species are no longer at threatened levels. Indeed, the explosion of whitetail deer populations in the East and elk populations in the West has created a new set of conservation challenges. The priority is no longer to save deer and elk, but rather to balance their populations with the needs of hunters and, in Aldo Leopold's terminology, the land communities where they dwell. Management of species, whether terrestrial or aquatic, means preserving all of the parts of the underlying ecosystem.

None of this is inconsistent with the original intent of the Wildlife Restoration and Sport Fish Restoration acts. Imbedded in both is the acknowledgement of the importance of non-game prey species and habitat to the health and sustainability of hunted and fished species. Nowhere is this more evident than in a 1939 letter Aldo Leopold wrote to Albert Day, chief of federal aid in wildlife restoration, Bureau of Biological Survey (predecessor to the USFWS and WSFR) to ask if P-R funds could be spent on bird and mammal species "without any gunpowder value." Within six days of Leopold sending the letter, Day responded affirmatively: P-R funds could indeed be spent on "wild birds and mammals which do not have any hunting value..."

The Program continues to evolve in the direction of inclusivity for all species and their habitats. In 2000, Congress authorized the State Wildlife Grant Program (SWG), under WSFR administration, and authorized the first appropriation of $77 million in 2002 for the conservation of state-determined species of greatest conservation need (SGCN). Since then, more than $800 million in state wildlife grants have been allocated to the states and territories by WSFR for SGCN conservation.

In part, the SWG program is an acknowledgement of the ongoing shift in how Americans perceive and engage in wildlife recreation. The National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation reported in 2011 that 90.1 million Americans (38 percent of the U.S. population) engaged in some aspect of wildlife recreation. Hunters accounted for 13.7 million and anglers 33.1 million. Significantly, the overwhelming majority of wildlife recreationists neither hunted nor fished: instead, they viewed wildlife for pleasure.

Changing American attitudes toward uses of wildlife explain, in part, the evolution in the implementation of the North American Model toward more comprehensive wildlife and habitat management. Nonetheless, internal changes within the WSFR program are also having significant impacts by strengthening the Model and nudging it in new directions.

For example, WSFR recently inaugurated a project performance reporting system called TRACS to give the U.S. funding partnership a better handle on how well conservation dollars are being spent on projects at the state level and the species and habitat outcomes achieved. This information is essential for the Program and its partnership to thrive. Associated with outcome reporting, WSFR is also inaugurating five-year reports on the overall performance of the program in promoting and achieving programmatic goals. In effect, these five-year interval reports will shed light on the effectiveness of the WSFR state, federal, private, and industry parternship in achieving the wildlife values sought by the American people.

Finally, WSFR, at the urging of Congress, is working with the states and territories to direct increasing amounts of SWG funding to address the needs of imperiled species designated "candidate species" under the Endangered Species Act. The importance of this cannot be overstated. Keeping species common should be a goal of all of us. Once listed, often adversely, hunters and anglers, the sporting industry, the USFWS, and the state and territory agencies are often left with the greatest burden.

All of these changes are important and understandable, but they do not diminish the spirit or the partnership that stands behind the WSFR funding system—or its continuing importance today. Despite dramatic shifts in public uses and perceptions of wildlife, the core of the American system of conservation funding is intact: hunters and anglers, and the industries that outfit them, are and will remain the funding engine for fish and wildlife conservation in America. Wildlife viewers watch but do not pay. Hunters and anglers do—as do the industries that manufacture guns, ammo, rods, reels, and boat fuel. Serendipitously, this means that the contributions of a few will continue to sustain the public benefits of abundant wildlife and healthy landscapes for all Americans for decades to come. ■

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