

# CAPITOL COMMENTS

## Transition In Government – Will Our Interests Be Well Served?



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THE AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC System is functioning – we have a new President in the White House installing his cabinet and setting priorities for management of the nation's assets. Among those assets of course are wildlife, their habitats, and our abilities as hunter/conservationists to enjoy wild places and the pursuits we love.

With the new National Wildlife Conservation Partnership, we enter this period of change needing to organize ourselves better than ever before, present a more unified voice, and have a broad common agenda that is good for the land, the wildlife, and the people who use them. How tuned in is our President, his Administration, and the diverse Congress to whom we wish to speak? A reality check based on the fast moving flow of

newsletters, transition alerts, and various public media gives a revealing answer.

The January 23 issue of "The Hill," a daily newspaper of the "goings-on" in the federal government, listed the following topics: tax cuts, education reform, campaign spending reform, greater local government authority, confirmation woes of certain appointees, medicare, paying down the federal debt, and energy supply and demand with a focus on California. Also sprinkled throughout are various perspectives on bipartisanship, the lessons of excessive hubris after the 1994 congressional elections, and

the wisdom of trying to govern from "the center" as opposed to more radical approaches.

What this tells the hunter-conservationist is that for the most part, elected officials in the power

structure of our government are not thinking about the issues most important to us. This is not a surprise as we organize ourselves to have a more effective voice in the future. The big ticket issues that will drive the public dialogue about government will largely be tax cuts, education reform, and so on. Similarly, professional wildlife managers got a wake-up call in a study of public attitudes recently when the results showed that most citizens simply don't even think about the things that we, the professional wildlifers, think about all day long. That is no indictment of our citizens, nor is it of the things we hold dear. It is simply the practical reality of what drives our political and public systems. So we have a challenge to get our messages to rise above the crowded slate of issues.

Given these challenges, the National Wildlife Conservation Partners (see *Fair Chase* Winter 2000 issue) has further prioritized a set of recommendations to take to the new Administration addressing a wide array of land, wildlife, and people issues that need attention under this Administration. They are:

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish federal budget priorities that will restore wildlife funding to the 1980 level.
- Maintain and restore forest and rangeland habitats in the West through proactive public land management.
- Maintain and restore forest habitats in the East through proactive national forest management.
- Emphasize cooperative national forest decision making.
- Re-establish effective federal natural resource leadership.
- Support wildlife conservation provisions in the 2002 Farm Bill.
- Reaffirm state authority and responsibility for wildlife management-legal issues.
- Reinforce state authority and responsibility for wildlife management-funding issues.

- Increase funding to provide for hunter retention, recruitment, and education.
- Remove disincentives for private land wildlife conservation.
- Initiate an assessment of federal land laws to identify legal and regulatory problems.

These are broad issue statements that encompass a complex array of needs. This requires an adjustment of federal agency procedures, different approaches to managing public lands, stronger incentives for conservation on private land, more conservation provisions in farm legislation, and more funding for wildlife to better balance federal and state influence over wildlife. Perhaps most important would be swinging the pendulum of cultural change and attitudes about wildlife and public lands to include people in the equation. Most of this cannot be accomplished in one or even two presidential terms. The Boone and Crockett Club and those who choose to work through the National Wildlife Conservation Partnership have to take on these issues in a variety of ways, and for the long term. They are that important!

Even with a receptive White House and Administration, some things are good for wildlife and some are not. There is no way to dodge that reality, and it must be part of the good faith the hunter/conservationist puts into the long term effort. When our interests are not served, even our friends need to hear that clearly!

The closest thing to a direct hit on our interests in wildlife habitat, wild places, and wildlife itself is the dialogue about the energy supply and what to do to solve it. An early platform in this Administration is developing ways to move faster to produce energy to meet needs, such as those in California. Hunter/conservationists continue to face a dilemma with how, not whether, such development is proceeding. In a previous column I outlined development pressures facing mule deer, antelope, and sage

grouse in the Green River Basin of Wyoming. The point was *not* in opposition to the development, but rather that the law and common sense require equal attention to the above ground renewable natural resources—like the big game we like to hunt—as well as the efficient recovery of minerals. Our work at the Institute indicates that for the most part, equal consideration has not been occurring.

Industry spokespersons have recently called for relaxation of restrictions on access to oil and gas on national lands, particularly in the Rocky Mountains, to help ease the tight supply of natural gas. Another thing they have called for is restructuring of permitting rules. These two concerns warrant closer examination. In Wyoming, for example, of 28.6 million acres of BLM lands, 700,000 acres are closed to entry. Of the total acres in BLM lands in Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming only 3.4% are closed, leading to the conclusion that 96.6% of BLM lands in those key states are open for oil and gas leasing. Given these facts, one may ask “Just what is it that presents a problem with access?”

As for operating restrictions, a wide array of groups weighed in on behalf of wildlife in development on the Pinedale Anticline, one of the hottest natural gas developments in North America, and maybe the world. The BLM responded with an Adaptive Management Process, working through committees that combined operators, local landowners, and wildlife interests to monitor, among other things, wildlife needs during development. This is good business for oil and gas companies and wildlife. One company has seen fit to sue the BLM over infringement on business because of the Adaptive Management Process, limitations on well spacing, and timing of operations. At stake is a major wintering area for a trophy mule deer herd, vital antelope migration areas, and some of the best remaining sage grouse nesting habitat in

North America. If this Adaptive Management Process can't produce a measured approach to reasonable development while protecting these valued wildlife resources, then the claims of being able to develop at a faster pace elsewhere in an environmentally sound way can certainly be called into question, and indeed should be!

This all creates a dilemma for the hunter/conservationist. Many Boone and Crockett Club Members are in the oil and gas business, but many also largely operate on private land. Many hunters who use the public lands work in the oil business as well. There seems to be a propensity to take any question raised about oil and gas as an attack and react against it, rather than trying to work things out. What is needed for our interests to be served—game herds to be sustained and hunting opportunities to persist—is a businesslike, thoughtful approach that deals with all of this as a cost of doing business. A key concern is that sportsmen's dollars should not have to recover those game herds a second time! New funding must be found to improve habitats and help game herds through the several decades their ranges will be disturbed. Club Members should be of help as this develops; we have the connections to industry and the professional wildlife skills to do so. It would be appropriate in the true spirit of Theodore Roosevelt.

A very positive opportunity for our interests in this transition is the National Wildlife Refuge Centennial Act of 2000. Passed in conjunction with Federal Aid Reform at the end of the last session of Congress, it offers an opportunity to review the status of the National Wildlife Refuge System in preparation for its 100th anniversary in 2003, and take steps to assure a secure future for refuges. Theodore Roosevelt acted to save Pelican Island as the first refuge in 1903, and the Boone and Crockett Club has a long record of support for individual refuges and the system itself.



THE NWCP WILL PRESENT THE NEW ADMINISTRATION WITH THIS BOOKLET HIGHLIGHTING SEVERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WILDLIFE.

## UPDATE ON CARA

A portion of the attempt to find new funding for state fish and wildlife agencies was successfully added to other legislation at the end of the last Congress. Some of the original language from the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) established a \$50 million program of grants to states through a new account under the Pittman-Robertson program. This account will fund state agencies and give the highest priority to the unmet needs of fish and wildlife agendas. This is funding that is planned for the next six years, but has to be appropriated annually by the Congress. Conservationists know this is not the secure funding needed to adequately manage all wildlife at the state level. Projects under this program can demonstrate how a fully funded CARA will be used for wildlife, and make the case for full funding. The huge coalition of thousands of supporting individuals, organizations, and businesses is poised to work again to secure CARA or something equally secure for wildlife. In January, within days of the Presidential Inauguration, Representatives Don Young and John Dingell wrote to President Bush to offer this vital legislation for bipartisan action as a key component of the President's first year agenda. Mr. Bush acknowledged in his campaign the need to provide for recreation and wildlife. We are told that this first year's Presidential agenda will focus on issues that were promised attention during the campaign, as this one was. There will be an opportunity for the Boone and Crockett Club to help move this issue to the forefront!

The Act calls for a report from the Fish and Wildlife Service stating the condition of the Refuge System and its needs. A Centennial Commission of citizens from business and other walks of life would then advise the Secretary of Interior how to proceed for the next 100 years. Direct involvement by the Club would be an asset both to the effort for refuges, and the continuance of our heritage.

One of the themes of this transition has been talk about reexamining actions of the past Administration, and some have focused strongly on the intent to "roll back" things like the roadless areas designations recently completed. Add to this the new monuments and special land designations under the Bureau of Land Management, and a variety of environmental regulations affecting everything from truck diesel fuel to local government. These

are targets for action by new people with new philosophies, with different ways of approaching governing. Would rollbacks serve the purposes of the hunter/conservationist?

Let's examine two of the issues. The roadless area controversy has been a very nonproductive, extensive diversion from dealing directly with a lot of things that need attention on national forests. But, it is also an important issue to the future of hunting in truly wild landscapes. Without going into the details, the way in which the designation was done, incorporating lands from virtually every part of the country, was a very broad brush approach without attention to the trade-offs in values and needs at the local level. That said, it is likely that the majority of the designations to keep these areas wild and build no more permanent roads serves the hunter/conservationist very well. On a local and regional basis in eastern states, some designations may have been inappropriate because of their inordinate value for public access and recreation, and because public lands are so limited. Clearly fire management and wildlife management provisions need to be tested under the new rules. The situation is very different in high mountain areas of the West versus small forest segments in the Midwest and East. But the basic question hangs in the air, "should all of this be rolled back summarily?"

Another set of concerns is over the array of new "monuments" and other land designations created on Bureau of Land Management lands. It appears that only one relatively small area of a few thousand acres in California, not a prime hunting area, was closed to hunting because of these actions. The other areas are now receiving more attention by the BLM for their special attributes than they ever did before. The BLM is addressing how to manage its new "National Landscape Conservation System" with a multiple use approach that includes

traditional public access. There is opportunity to help develop a new land system that is recognized for its multiple use values, and we should take that opportunity. Again, many rightly object to how these designations were made because they did not include input from a lot of people.

What should be done about all of this? Whether it is roadless areas or other issues, the new Administration should take time to evaluate local needs and details that were largely neglected by the previous Administration *before* making any decisions about changes, let alone consider a rollback. Many of these designations serve the needs of the hunter/conservationist well. They aren't making any more wild country, and we need it kept that way. How important is wild country to most hunters? For elk, mule deer, wild sheep, and many more it is the gold standard. The real issue should be a much more comprehensive look at the whole road system on national forests (see *Fair Chase* Summer 1999 issue). This should include responsible recreational vehicle management, which the roadless designation avoided. We have a stake in the outcome that can't be served by narrowly focused actions; we must join in the hard work of dealing with the whole issue of access to national forests and other public lands.

The answer to the question posed by the title of this article is clear. There are positive opportunities of which we, the hunter/conservationists, should take advantage. Our new National Wildlife Conservation Partnership helps us ready ourselves for action. But there are also likely to be problems for wildlife and habitats that we can't shy away from if we are to uphold the spirit of the Boone and Crockett Club. Our new agenda of broad issues covers a huge array of topics, and we must deal with them directly. At least this time we can feel certain we will be heard. ▲▲▲