

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hot Issues Concerning Hunting and Wildlife Conservation



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I WISH TO GIVE BOONE AND Crockett Associates an update on several "hot" issues concerning hunting and wildlife conservation, including the Club's continued role in the Chronic Wasting Disease battle and relevant pending federal legislation.

DR. GARY WOLFE TO LEAD BOONE AND CROCKETT EFFORTS ON CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE

Boone and Crockett Professional Member, Dr. Gary Wolfe, has been appointed Chair of the Boone and Crockett committee on Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). Gary is the past President and CEO of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and former general manager of the Vermejo Park Ranch. Gary will lead Boone and Crockett's efforts along with Dr. Jack Ward Thomas and Dr. Valerius Geist.

The symposium on CWD, which was originally scheduled for this past fall, was canceled because of September 11th. Since that time, the Ad Hoc Interagency CWD Committee, consisting of wildlife agency biologists and veterinarians from Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska, Kansas, South Dakota, and North Dakota have taken the lead in rescheduling and planning the symposium. The committee will be providing input and recommendations to the Midwestern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA), Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) regarding the control and management of CWD in wild free-ranging wildlife populations. Gary has been invited to serve on this committee as the non-governmental representative to promote the interests of conservation organizations, including the Boone and Crockett Club (B&C), the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF), the Mule

Deer Foundation (MDF), and other conservation organizations who have joined us in this effort.

Gary has also been invited to participate with the CWD Research Committee. This informal committee meets once a year, and includes scientists from universities, as well as state and federal agencies that are involved with CWD research.

A two-day CWD Symposium is being planned by the Interagency CWD Committee for August 6-7 in Denver, Colorado. Gary has been invited to serve on the symposium planning committee. B&C, RMEF, and MDF have indicated they will participate as cosponsors. Other conservation organizations are expected to also participate as cosponsors.

The latest outbreak of CWD outside of its apparent epicenter in Colorado and Wyoming is likely to be a hot topic. On February 28, 2002, state officials found three wild deer killed by hunters last fall in Wisconsin that tested positive for CWD. Beginning in 1999, Wisconsin officials had become concerned about the disease reaching their state and had encouraged hunters to submit deer and elk for sampling. Last fall, hunters submitted about 600 animals for testing. The three positive tests came from Dane County in south-central Wisconsin. These are apparently the first known cases of CWD east of the Mississippi River. Whether it moved east along with wild deer herds or the wild deer have been infected from captive deer herds in Wisconsin is not known (there are about 250 game ranches in Wisconsin). The only thing we do know now is that the disease has moved east, where deer and people are more populous. CWD will become a more prominent issue nationally.

The current, primary role of conservation groups involved in the CWD issue is perceived to be information dissemination and

the provision of input to state wildlife agencies, regulatory commissions and legislative bodies regarding CWD and its potential impact on free-ranging wildlife. The Boone and Crockett Club has committed to funding the development and maintenance of a comprehensive CWD web site and will include RMEF and the MDF as recognized partners in this project. Gary will serve as the content researcher/provider for the web site. Working together, B&C, RMEF, and MDF are committed to disseminating timely and accurate information regarding CWD to their respective members and the general public. Although each conservation organization will use its own communication tools in these efforts, it is anticipated there will be considerable cooperation and collaboration in the total effort.

This is a great opportunity for a three-way partnership between the B&C, RMEF, and MDF.

MORE MONEY FOR THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

On January, 22, Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton announced a \$57 million increase in the budget for the National Wildlife Refuge System. While touring the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Norton said, "It certainly looks like the refuge system needs a sustained effort to improve the resources. It's important to take care of the land entrusted to us." She said the 18 percent hike would cover maintenance and renovation of boardwalks, trails, and levies on 538 refuges.

The current budget is 6.4 percent larger than last year's budget. Pat Foulk, spokeswoman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimated the backlog of maintenance projects at over \$600 million.

Boone and Crockett Club past president Dan Pedrotti was

recently appointed to the National Wildlife Refuge Centennial Commission. The Boone and Crockett Club's role in establishing the National Refuge System is a key element in the Club's Conservation legacy. Dan is the right person at the right time to continue the Club's leadership in this most important area.

2002 FARM BILL REAUTHORIZATION TO IMPACT WILDLIFE

When Congress reauthorizes the Farm Bill later this year, it will include provisions that may have a considerable effect on wildlife and wildlife habitat. The reauthorization process began last year when the House and Senate Agricultural Committees reviewed existing federal farm conservation programs and considered ways to improve them. Both chambers increased funding for the programs and even established new ones so that farmers and ranchers have more opportunities to protect resources on private lands through voluntary, incentive-driven mechanisms that respond to local priorities. The level of the rewards available to farmers and ranchers would be commensurate with the extent and complexity of conservation systems they install or maintain.

The 2002 Farm Bill should be of interest to all hunters. The overall conservation agenda on farming and grazing lands is becoming increasingly important as rural lands are converted to urban sprawl. The remaining rural lands provide critical habitat for game birds and big game species, such as deer, elk, and antelope—particularly with respect to their winter ranges. The Boone and Crockett Club, along with its conservation partners, are closely monitoring the progress of this bill, as many of the provisions will have an impact on the quality of the private rural lands available for wildlife habitat.

The Farm Bill currently provides funding for approximately

ten programs that affect wildlife and wildlife habitat, including the Conservation Reserve Program (pays landowners to take out of production highly erodible and environmentally sensitive cropland for 10 to 15 years, thus providing wildlife habitat), the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (helps landowners improve wildlife habitat on their property by sharing costs of improvements), the Wetlands Reserve Program (encourages restoration of wetlands in rural areas through easements and cost-sharing), the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (provides producers with technical and educational assistance for conservation and wildlife issues affecting their land), the Farmland Protection Program (uses easements to ensure rural lands are not converted to urban areas), and various forestry programs (provides non-industrial private forest landowners with financial and technical assistance for conservation planning). Under the Farm Bill of 2002, Congress has established a new program, the Grassland Reserve Program, that would let producers create land easements and reserves to protect native grasslands.

The House and Senate have markedly different versions for the Farm Bill of 2002, such as how to phase in spending increases for conservation programs and how each program should be implemented. Congress intends to reconcile these differences by mid-April so that a final Farm Bill can be passed by both houses before current funding ends in September.

The Boone and Crockett Club is one of many wildlife conservation organizations that are urging Congress to develop a final bill that will benefit wildlife. In particular, the wildlife conservation community wants Congress to recognize wildlife as a primary resource—on an equal level with soil and water— that should be con-

served under the Farm Bill's voluntary, incentive programs. Additionally, Boone and Crockett and its partners are encouraging Congress to: 1) increase the number of farmland acres that can be enrolled in the Conservation Reserve, Wetland Reserve and Grassland Reserve Programs; and 2) provide additional financial support for the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program.

CONGRESS CONSIDERS SUPPORT FOR GAME DONATION PROGRAMS

Legislation has been introduced in both the Senate and the House to increase the effectiveness of existing wild game donation programs that help the hungry. The bill authorizes states to use funds from the federal Emergency Food Assistance Program to pay for the processing costs of donated wild game. The bill also increases the funding available to the states to use for donated game processing by \$20 million. This bill, known as "Hunters Help the Hungry," is a positive piece of legislation that the Boone and Crockett Club will consider supporting.

It is important for us to keep abreast of the federal and state legislation that can have such a profound impact on what we all cherish—wild places and wild animals. The Boone and Crockett Club will continue to collaborate with conservation partners to monitor and influence legislation in order to preserve, protect, and enhance wildlife and wildlife habitat. ▲▲▲

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