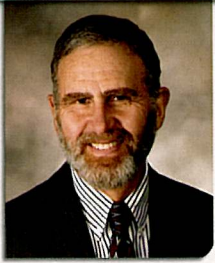


Paying for Conservation

By Leonard H. Wurman B&C Regular Member



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They also pay a hidden tax on firearms, ammunition, bows, arrows, and fishing equipment. That wasn't always the case.

Taxation in the United States has a long and convoluted history. Following the Revolution, the federal and state governments secured funds through tariffs, customs duties, and excise taxes. For many years, our country relied primarily on excise taxes of alcohol and tobacco for much of its income. During the Civil War, the federal government secured additional revenues by utilizing excise taxes on a number of different goods, including ammunition.

From this income, state and federal governments paid for various services, such as police and fire departments, much as they do today. The earliest wardens and foresters were also paid from these general funds. However, with time, other sources of income were required.

Hunting and Fishing Licenses

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, states began to require non-residents to purchase hunting and fishing licenses.

By 1910, every state had a conservation department with an administrative officer. Some officers were political hacks,

but many conservation boards consisted of dedicated and wealthy men who served without compensation. In New York, as an example, Governor Theodore Roosevelt appointed Boone and Crockett president W. Austin Wadsworth as chairman of

of the Wildlife Management Institute), proposed waterfowl sanctuaries surrounded by public hunting grounds. Funding would be through sales of a federal waterfowl stamp. Other prominent Boone and Crockett members who urged adoption of this concept were Aldo Leopold, E.W. Nelson (chief of what was the-then Bureau of Biological Survey, or today's Fish and Wildlife Service), and Henry S. Graves (U.S. Forest Service chief).

The Game Refuge — Public Shooting Grounds Bill was introduced in congress in 1921. It passed the senate by a two-to-one margin but was defeated in the house by southern and western states' rights advocates. When it was reintroduced again in 1924, having the support of nearly every conservation group, it passed the house but the senate adjourned before taking it up.

The bill was introduced for a third time the following year, with what seemed to be insurmountable backing. Its backers, however, didn't plan for the opposition of William T. Hornaday, a Boone and Crockett Club member who had become a turncoat to the hunting-conservation movement.

Hornaday

Hornaday, born in 1854, grew up in the days of market hunting and was himself a professional hunter during the precipitous decline of the passenger pigeon and the buffalo. He trained as a taxidermist and wrote popular books on his hunting exploits and round-the-world collecting expeditions. A nappy dresser, a forceful speaker, and a persuasive writer, Hornaday soon developed a following and became the first superintendent of

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the Forest, Fish, and Game Commission. Wadsworth turned out to be an outstanding leader.

Nevertheless, all state wildlife agencies were woefully under-funded and functioned at the financial largesse of recalcitrant state legislatures. After an 18-year battle, Pennsylvania in 1913 became the first state to require resident hunting and fishing licenses. When the Pennsylvania Game Commission took in \$300,000 its first year, a sum far greater than the legislature had ever allotted to it, other states quickly followed suit.

Refuge Bill

In 1919, Boone and Crockett member John B. Burnham, president of the American Game Protective Association (forerunner



Key players in the “Paying for Conservation” movement, from top to bottom:

B&C Club member Aldo Leopold, B&C Club member and Second Chief of the Forest Service Henry S. Graves, Governor and U.S. Senator of South Dakota Peter Norbeck (on left), Senator Key Pittman of Nevada, and Congressman A. Willis Robertson of Virginia.



CONSERVATION timeline

Paying for Conservation

Washington's National Zoo, but resigned after a dispute with his superiors.

In 1896, Hornaday became the director of the New York Zoological Park (Bronx Zoo), a position he held for 30 years. He was bull-headed and uncompromising, and alienated coworkers by claiming sole credit for group achievements. After he received several honorary doctorate degrees, he expected to be addressed as Doctor Hornaday.

In 1913, when market hunting was illegal but still widespread, Hornaday wrote *Our Vanishing Wildlife*. His book promoted the simplistic idea that all declines in wildlife were secondary to hunting. He had gone from an avid hunter to an avid anti-hunter. Boone and Crockett became a house-divided; it was Hornaday against everybody else.

When the refuge-stamp bill was reintroduced in 1926, Hornaday went on the offensive, especially against what he perceived as high bag limits. Writing in the lay press, especially ladies' and family maga-

zines, he created a groundswell against the bill, and with the support again of states' rights advocates, succeeded in defeating it.

Migratory Bird Conservation Act

Waterfowl populations increased during most of the 1920s and the need to decrease bag limits was less apparent. In addition, Hornaday was aging, and when the refuge-creation bill was introduced for a fourth time, he was not able to defeat it in its entirety.

The Norbeck-Andresen Migratory Bird Conservation Act passed in 1929. But to secure its passage, two important provisions were left out: the federal stamp and the creation of public hunting grounds adjacent to the refuges.

Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp

Optimism turned to pessimism in 1928 with the onset of a severe, multi-year drought that turned America's heartland into a dust bowl. Spring potholes dried up, and prairie-nesting duck populations plummeted. When sportsmen in 1930 demanded a more

comprehensive and adequately funded refuge system, the United States Senate created a Special Committee on Wildlife Resources.

The committee considered three financing methods for wetland acquisition. One was to utilize the already-in-existence 10 percent excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition. More Game Birds in America (soon to be Ducks Unlimited) favored a 1-cent tax on each shotgun shell, a proposal unacceptable to upland hunters. The American Game Protective Association again urged acceptance of a federal waterfowl stamp, essentially a federal hunting license.

The Walcott-Kleberg Bill, a.k.a. the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act, passed in 1934. (Frederic C. Walcott is a Boone and Crockett Club honorary life member.) The proceeds of the \$1 stamp were earmarked for the purchase, development, and management of waterfowl refuges. The first stamp artist was Boone and Crockett member "Ding" Darling, then the head of the Bureau of Biological Survey.

Darling asked congress for \$1 mil-

lion in seed money. At the urging of South Dakota's Senator Peter Norbeck, a Boone and Crockett member terminally ill with cancer, congress found unused social relief funds and gave Darling \$6 million. The stamp-refuge program was born. Since 1934, duck stamp sales have generated more than \$670 million that have been used to purchase and manage more than 5.2 million acres of waterfowl habitat.

Pittman-Robertson

During the federal refuge discussions, it became apparent that states also could establish refuges and contribute to conservation and hunting projects. In 1937, Senator Key Pittman of Nevada chaired the senate's Special Committee on Wildlife Resources. Congressman A. Willis Robertson of Virginia headed a similar house committee. Each introduced an identical bill into their respective chamber. The gravity of the migratory bird population drop was so great that the most productive wildlife bill ever enacted rapidly wound its way through the halls of congress.

On September 2, the Federal Aid

in Wildlife Restoration Act became law. Pittman-Robertson money was obtained by a 10 percent excise tax on handguns and an 11 percent tax on other firearms, shells, cartridges, bows, and arrows. All 48 states quickly passed enabling legislation.

Pittman-Robertson differed in several ways from the duck stamp bill, although both collected their moneys at the federal level. P-R money went back to the states under a complicated formula that took into consideration three factors:

- a) a state's population versus the national population,
- b) the number of hunting licenses sold by a state versus national hunting licenses sold, and
- c) the state's land mass as a percent of the national land mass.

No state could receive less than 1 percent or more than 3 percent of the total P-R money allotted in any year. In addition, P-R money could pay no more than 75 percent of a state's wildlife restoration project. In 1970, Pittman-Robertson was amended to include funding for hunter safety pro-

grams and for the development, operation, and maintenance of public target ranges. In its first year, Pittman-Robertson brought in \$3 million. Since its inception, more than \$1 billion have been collected.

Dingell-Johnson

Passed in 1950 and amended several times, Dingell-Johnson, or Federal Aid in Sport Fishing Restoration, was modeled after the Pittman-Robertson Act to create a parallel program to manage, conserve, and restore fish resources. Rods, reels, creels, lures, flies, and artificial baits were taxed at the manufacturing level. The 1984 Wallop-Breaux Amendment added import duties on equipment, pleasure boats, and yachts, as well as a tax on motorboat fuel.

The Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson Acts prevent a state from using its license fees for any purpose other than by its own game and fish department. Given the attempts these days for state governments to raid natural resource departments and use that money for other purposes, this has turned out to be one of its most important provisions. ■