

# AWCP Update

**In August 2000, America's leading wildlife-conservation organizations gathered as guests of the Boone and Crockett Club in Missoula, Montana. These dedicated hunter-conservationists met to explore how to best work collectively to further the cause of wildlife conservation in the United States.**

The American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP) evolved from this initial gathering. AWCP is not an organization *per se*; rather, it is a consortium of 40 organizations, representing over 6 million individual members. AWCP is designed to facilitate communication within the wildlife conservation community and between our community and elected and appointed officials and policy makers at the federal level.

The AWCP groups have faithfully gathered every successive August following that initial meeting, from the Rocky Mountains to the foothills of the Adirondacks, and from the boundary waters of northern Minnesota to the humid coast of south Texas. Having the privilege of attending almost all of these meetings, what has been perhaps the most significant achievement is the camaraderie and levels of trust that has developed between the leaders of these still very independent conservation organizations.

In an arena where groups compete for membership, sponsorship dollars, and recognition, the AWCP partnership is cutting across the lines and delivering results that benefit the greater conservation good, while still enhancing the records of success for the individual organizations. Prior to the formation of the AWCP, there was a great deal of apathy for a conservation effort that didn't directly benefit an individual group's mission, but now we are using our collective strength to move a slate of conservation priorities.

The most recent AWCP meeting took place this past August at the King Ranch in south Texas. True to the AWCP mission to address a variety of complex national conservation topics, issues that were discussed included:

- Ongoing efforts with Congress to ensure that the strongest possible conservation title is included in the reauthorization of the Farm Bill;
- Energy development and wildlife issues as they pertain to both Administration and possible Congressional action;

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- Access issues and concerns as they related to public lands for hunting and recreational shooting;
- Clean Water Act interpretations and possible Congressional action in the wake of several Supreme Court decisions, and other more specific issues and recommended actions.

A key tactic that has evolved over the years of the AWCP partnership is the use of "sign-on" letters to address specific issues of concern. Any individual AWCP group can generate a sign-on letter on an issue or topic of concern, and through the AWCP

network, other organizations are invited to join onto these as co-signatories. Working with Congress on a daily basis, a well-placed letter with 30 or more hunting conservation organizations, representing millions of sportsmen and sportswomen, can have a significant impact on the legislative debate. The AWCP has leveraged this power of a broad sportsmen's coalition to win key victories in Congress, including the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, Firearms Lawsuit Liability Protection Act, the Electronic Duck Stamp Act, the Reauthorization of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, and many others.

Two excellent documents that form the pillars of our conservation efforts, *Wildlife for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Volumes I & II*, were also crafted by the AWCP partner groups and presented to President Bush and senior Administration officials, as well as conservation leaders in Congress. These documents highlighted some of the major areas of concern regarding the conservation of our wildlife and natural resources, as well as made recommendations as to how these challenges might be addressed.

In closing, it is also worth noting that the chairmanship of the AWCP rotates to a different representative of a different AWCP organization every year and to date, every single AWCP chairman has been a Boone and Crockett Club member. I think it is fair to say that Boone and Crockett Club deserves credit for being a driving force for conservation by successfully leading the effort to unify sportsmen's groups under the umbrella of the American Wildlife Conservation Partners. ■

