

# CAPITOL COMMENTS



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## Hunting: Washington Style

By now many of us have hung up our jackets, cleaned our boots and guns, and stowed the camouflage away for next year. Whether your hunting adventures took you to places like the savannahs of Africa, the tundra of Alaska, or the fields and forests of

your home state, there is a certain satisfaction and sadness that accompanies the end of hunting season. While you fondly reflect on the memories of this past year's hunts and sip your favorite beverage in the warmth of a crackling fireplace, remember that there are others who continue to toil for hunting and conservation in that faraway land of Washington, D.C.—many of whom have forsaken their personal hunting opportunities to advance conservation.

Unlike the environments where most hunting takes place, Washington is not a physically demanding environment. Paved streets, sidewalks, taxis, and subways provide the paths for those who “hunt” in Washington. However, the occasional one-or two-inch snowstorm that hits the city can shut down traffic and provide slushy street crossings that only Olympic long-jump competitors can traverse. All in all, the Washington environment does not compare to the experience of a wild sheep hunt. The difference between Washington and other hunting destinations is that there are tens of thousands of individuals who prowl Capitol Hill and D.C. on a daily basis, hunting for policy changes and money. The competition for trophies is more intense than any opening day that you have ever experienced.

As I have alluded to in a past column, conservation often comes up short in this environment, where almost 35,000 registered lobbyists and untold numbers of

other individuals meet with the administration and Congress to promote their own agendas. Last year, almost \$2.5 billion dollars was spent on registered lobbyists, many of whom were after a piece of the almost \$3 trillion budget pie. I am not taking issue with lobbying; I only mean to put it in perspective with our potential to influence Congress on conservation matters. In spite of these staggering amounts of individuals and expense, conservationists can take pride in the relatively few, but

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dedicated, individuals and organizations that endeavor to promote sound wildlife policy and appropriate funding levels for conservation.

Today, meetings on Capitol Hill and within the confines of Washington, D.C., are populated by individuals from a variety of conservation organizations. Perhaps there is no better example of this than on the Farm Bill issue. Two decades ago a few diehard staffers worked the Farm Bill. Now a coalition of organizations is coordinated and effective in providing information on the Farm Bill's importance to wildlife and hunters. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, National Wildlife Federation, and a host of other organizations carefully plan and implement a strategy to improve the

conservation provisions of the bill. Other organizations, like the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement, struggle to provide adequate funding for public-land management. The Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation works with members of Congress and their staffs to promote sportsmen-friendly legislation at federal and state levels. Conservation organizations, such as the Wildlife Management Institute, National Wild Turkey Federation, Safari Club International, and the Boone and Crockett Club, work in front and behind the scenes to produce sound wildlife conservation policy.

All of these organizations labor throughout the year for improved conservation policy and funding. Those organizations that do not have offices within the Beltway make their opinions known through the American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP), a network of more than 40 organizations. On many issues we speak with one voice, a voice that is powerful and effective considering the millions of sportsmen and women who make up the organizations involved with AWCP.

So while you were hunting or enjoying the memories of past hunts, be aware that a committed cadre of individuals and organizations endeavor to improve federal wildlife and habitat management, conservation policy, conservation funding, and a variety of other issues that directly impact your hunting and quality of life.

You can help by engaging in this effort as individuals and as a club. The future of hunting and conservation is at stake. Effective as they are, these organizations need your support. They are faced with stiff competition from others who do not share our hunting heritage and love of the outdoors. If you choose not to become engaged, at least tip your hat and toast those that hunt within the borders of the Beltway. Their quarry are elusive, and when they collect a trophy, it benefits all hunters. ■

