

CAPITOL COMMENTS

Assuring a Return on Our Investment



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We all know the story if we think about it, but the successful partnership formed in 1937, representing the biggest single investment by sportsmen and women in the future of wildlife and their ability to enjoy it as they wish, seems to get lost in all the hoopla about endangered species, pollution of our environment and more recently, the animal rights movement.

Sixty years ago, organizations committed to restoring America's depleted wildlife, joined with states and the shooting industry in the most enduring partnership on behalf of conservation that exists today. We know this as the Pittman-Robertson Program (PR) that earmarked revenues from an excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition to support wildlife restoration. Administered through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, PR provides for federal/state cost-sharing projects that have restored many species of wildlife. One of its most effective aspects was

that it provided significant and consistent funding dedicated to wildlife management. The key to its implementation was the development of science-based, non-political wildlife management agencies with the legal authority to manage wildlife in the 50 states. These agencies are under siege from a variety of directions, and need more attention and support.

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lost in all the hoopla about endangered species, pollution of our environment and more recently, the animal rights movement. Boone & Crockett Club members know very well that from PR came restoration of whitetail deer, pronghorn, Rocky Mountain elk, wild turkey, and many other wildlife. This investment in wildlife management agencies fully implemented conservation activities pioneered by the Club decades earlier.

Has PR been a good business investment? Data show us that hunting alone is a \$14 billion a year business. Since 1937, almost \$4 billion has gone into wildlife restoration and management. A model of user-pays conservation, this has been a combination of taxes paid by hunters and target shooters which has bolstered license fee and other revenues to the states, to form the core of wildlife funding in America. The industry stimulated by this activity is economically strong, and serves a lot of people. More than two-thirds of the income of this industry is related to hunting, and therefore, is based on returns from the investment in wildlife management foundations through PR and the state agencies.

There are other important players in federal and provincial agencies. Our broad system of public lands, ranging from state wildlife management areas to national wildlife refuges, national forests and grasslands, public lands in Canada, the vast holdings of the Bureau of Land Management of both forests and grasslands, provide recreation for our citizens. The agencies involved are of equal importance to the 50 state wildlife agencies, and their impacts on habitats, wildlife, and opportunities to enjoy them.

This seems to be an unprecedented time to be negative about government and our agencies. A look at just a few of the problems

facing these agencies offers a sobering prospect for the future because of the stake we have in them. Some of the challenges faced by management agencies include:

- ▲ Commissions, legislatures, and governors that are a powerful influence in swaying agencies from objective management of resources.
- ▲ Changing constituencies, no longer dominated by hunters and fishermen, which have a legal but not financial stake in what their agencies do.
- ▲ A dramatic loss of organized constituent support—the old hunting and fishing clubs are disappearing.
- ▲ Public expectations and demand for broader wildlife, endangered species, and habitat protection activity without new funding.
- ▲ Legal challenges under both state and federal law.
- ▲ Cultural changes within agencies such as fewer employees with hunting and traditional wildlife backgrounds.
- ▲ Staff reductions and cuts linked to real budget shortage, but also anti-government sentiment.

State agency directors identifying the major issues facing agency management now and the future not unexpectedly rank funding, changing constituencies and their demands, and habitat loss very high among the many problems they face.

The handwriting is on the wall as to where recreation interests of Americans are going. The 1994-95 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment led by the Forest Service and other agencies and industry representatives, showed decreases in fishing between the 1982 and 1994 survey of 3.8% for fishing and 12.3% for hunting, yet an increase of 155% for birdwatching. Such a trend harkens back to an earlier column

discussing the need for Teaming With Wildlife. Expanding excise taxes to those who don't hunt or fish, or some other mechanism to more broadly fund our traditional state agencies is essential to keep them relevant, and in charge of the future of wildlife management in the 50 states. That challenge still remains and Boone & Crockett Club has a stake in it.

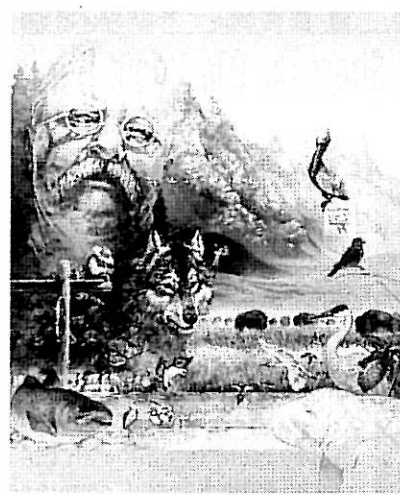
The U.S. Forest Service and its 181 million acres of national forests and grasslands is vital to wildlife and hunting opportunity in America. Decades of controversy over timber management, sharply focused during the past 15 years, has damaged that agency's credibility in the minds of activists, and to some extent, the general public. On many forests, so much time is consumed processing environmental assessments, appeals of actions, and litigation, that the agency is limited in its ability to do what it needs to do in land management. Both the reality of, and misunderstandings about, past timber harvest, have created a lack of trust that puts the agency under attack procedurally and legally at every turn. The Bureau of Land Management is similarly assailed, both for timber and for grazing issues that fall over onto the Forest Service as well. Yet, hearings in Congress seem to focus on spurring these agencies on to greater utilization of resources at the same time the public is digging in its heels.

The Fish and Wildlife Service and its management of national wildlife refuges is under more scrutiny than at any other time. Thankfully, progress has been made with organic legislation that can establish the conservation mission of refuges, yet, clearly recognize the role of public use including hunting and other wildlife-oriented recreation. Attention is being given to the need for operating funds. Overall, however, the Fish and Wildlife Service has been

tarred with the image of being the "regulator" under the Endangered Species Act with all of its emotional, political, and other ramifications.

Our agencies are trying to cope with these problems in many ways. The state agencies are spending considerable time in trying to learn more about their changing constituents, through focus groups, market research, and application of a new area of work referred to as "human dimensions" in wildlife management. A recent piece of work funded by the states, for example, has more than 700 references on "Factors Related to Hunting and Fishing Participation" which are being used to try to roadmap future activity to retain and serve traditional participants. The Hunter Education Program under PR addresses 600-700 thousand people a year, and the Becoming an Outdoors Woman program reaches about 10,000 women annually--both of these in Canada and the United States.

Why is all of this of concern to us? Once again, we have a tremendous investment in the future of wildlife, habitats, and the ability to hunt them which we have made through these agencies. In this unprecedented time of anti-government sentiment, tight budgets, and a backlash against the wildlife manager who now is viewed as bringing bad rather than good news to the private landowner, we need to keep a clear head about what it is we want in the long run. The agencies are the key to meeting our needs. Things are not going well for them in many ways at this time. Sixty years ago, the sporting community rallied providing consistent funding with a mission in mind. If we have a different idea, we'd better come forward with it. If not, we need to work to improve our agencies and not let them be torn down.



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Wild Things

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WILDLIFE
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OCTOBER 12-18, 1997



**This year, National
Wildlife Refuge Week will
be October 12 through 18,
1997. Any time, however,
is a great time to see a
National Wildlife Refuge.**

There are over 500 National Wildlife Refuges in the United States, so chances are at least one is less than an hour's drive from just about anywhere.

If you go during National Wildlife Refuge Week you can enjoy the special events planned, including birdwatching with experts, nature demonstrations, slide shows, and lots of wildlife.

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For more information, a map and a beautiful poster of our National Wildlife Refuges, call 1-800-344-WILD.