

# CAPITOL COMMENTS

## Seeking Responsible Outcomes for Wildlife



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A popular TV ad featured a grandmotherly woman who would confront the screen with a pugnacious question "where's the beef?". The cattlemen and women among us would have a ready

answer to the question, however, in our seemingly endless work to achieve better wildlife habitat on private and public lands, this question must remain one that is frequently asked.

Take the Healthy Forest legislation recently passed. The Boone and Crockett Club and many of its American Wildlife Conservation Partners supported this legislation to help swing the pendulum back from a no management philosophy to more active management of our National Forests. We knew that while there had been excessive emphasis on timber harvest decades ago, the decade leading into the millennium had deemphasized active management too much. But after its passage, with growing attention to needs for management of forests to achieve balance in controlling fire, how far have we come, and most importantly, how do we get where we need to be? The fact is money is not available to do all that is needed and the Forest Service doesn't have the staff to do it.

The energy boom in America draws more and more attention as it expands rapidly on public and private lands. Few dispute the need for energy – we are a nation of people who drive cars, like warm houses, and enjoy great agricultural production – all based on energy use. But decisions to explore and produce in local areas seem to swiftly lead to expansion and increased density of well sites. Effects on wildlife are growing, yet there is no specific provision for wildlife in the hotly debated national energy legislation. There are abundant incentives for industry, but no funding to cope with on-the-ground effects. The huge revenues coming to state and Federal Governments and energy companies are not being shared to soften the impacts, and the Club and its partners have been regularly working with the Administration to change this.

The Departments of Interior and Agriculture, and Council on Environmental Quality listened to hunter/conservationists on energy concerns, and in August at the Fifth Annual Meeting of the American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP) at the Campfire Club in New York, announced important changes in development processes that will help plan for and manage wildlife under development. Assistant Interior Secretary for Land and Minerals Management Rebecca Watson told AWCP members that areas important for wildlife or other resource values can be temporarily deferred from leasing while critical considerations for development or protection options were made in ongoing planning processes, like the pending Resource Management Plans for the Bureau of Land Management. We assume this prudent step would affect BLM leasing of areas under Forest Service planning as well.

A.S. Watson also announced additional steps she and Mark Rey, UnderSecretary for the U.S. Department of Agriculture were jointly announcing to increase coordination between BLM and Forest Service actions in development, some of which affect common resources, such as mule deer using winter range on BLM and summering on the Forests. To do this, they intend to fund a position with the Wyoming Department of Game and Fish to assure that wildlife needs were given proper focus, and to initiate a pilot project to expand the role of a subgroup of a citizen's committee for the Pinedale Anticline (a large energy development in critical mule deer, pronghorn, and sage grouse

habitat) to monitor wildlife and other needs for the BLM and Forest Service areas in the Upper Green River Valley.

In these announcements there is considerable "beef" for wildlife, but it comes with a mandate for work by those interested. AWCP members have been requesting more attention to these issues and this is a strong start. Getting in front of the leasing process has been a long struggle for wildlife and other resource values. Once leases are let on public land, they convey property rights, and foreclose many options for wildlife protection. It is good to see our long-term work pay off, and we appreciate the moves by Administration officials.

On a few fronts we are learning where the real issues are. For the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), with all its gains for wildlife, the beef is in its implementation by U.S. Department of Agriculture agencies and in keeping the dollars focused on soil, water, and wildlife. For wetlands, it is actual implementation of no net loss and net gain principles announced earlier by President Bush. For healthy forests, it is prudent programs with money and staff to manage them. For energy, it is moderation in development and sharing the tremendous wealth with affected wildlife and their habitats. For National Wildlife Refuges, it is funding and staffing to assure that each refuge meets the needs of wildlife and people who use them. The list goes on, but the idea is clear: without continuing commitment by us to work on these issues at the local level, and support more resources to do the work, we don't achieve much.

President Bush delighted the hunter/conservation community in early August with his announcement of firm support for full implementation of CRP. Included in the President's announcement were using full authorization for maximum acres, new sign-ups, re-enrolling contracts that are ending, and specific commitments to bobwhite quail recovery. This action and the changes in energy policy are where the "beef" is for wildlife conservation and shows us the way for other programs of importance — and we appreciate it!

We need to focus on the "beef" in all of these challenges to assure positive outcomes for wildlife. As we endure the crazy season of an election year, where important things (the beef) are left behind in debates over perceptions and image, our sights should be on the meat of the issues. ■



President George W. Bush hunts for quail during a hunting trip in Texas on January 1, 2004.

White House photo by Eric Draper