

# CAPITOL COMMENTS



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## Hunting: Perfect Opportunity

When you read this, the campaign season and elections will be well under way. Those of us living in swing states will almost be able to breathe a sigh of relief. The time between fake reality shows that consisted of endless, insipid

campaign commercials touting the strengths and weaknesses of this candidate or that candidate will be replaced with endless, insipid product commercials touting the strengths and weaknesses of this product or that product. I thought this election was about “change!” Regardless of the campaign outcomes, one thing is certain, we will be swearing in a new president and new members of Congress in January. What will that mean for wildlife conservation and hunting? The forecast is stormy and unpredictable, given current and emerging administrative and legislative issues that confront Washington and the nation.

First, a new administration means new leadership for those federal agencies entrusted with managing our public resources. Transition teams will be formed, resumes vetted, and selections made for the appropriate individuals to assume top posts in the land-management agencies that control almost 700 million acres of public, federal land (an area larger than the land surface acres of Alaska, Texas, California, and Colorado combined). These appointed officials will provide assistance in managing more than 1.5 billion acres of non-federal lands (read private lands). This is a very tall order for secretaries, deputy secretaries, under secretaries, assistant secretaries, directors, chiefs, commissioners, solicitors, etc., all of whom are appointed by the incoming President and serve with advice and consent of the U.S. Senate. As we have seen in previous administration changes, this all takes time, a lot of time.

Meanwhile, administration-selected transition teams will select dozens of

individuals (chiefs of staff, numerous deputies and assistant deputies, special assistants, liaisons, etc.) who almost immediately after the election, and without any public vetting or knowledge, will arrive at the offices of these land management agencies and interact with career professionals to learn about ongoing resource issues, personnel, budgets, and other administrative issues. This process is necessary and is intended to result in a smooth transition between administrations.

At the direction of the White House, both the appointed and transition team-selected individuals will set an early conservation agenda for the ensuing years. Policies and regulations will be reviewed for consistency or conflict

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with a new and emerging presidential agenda. It will be critical that these new folks, especially the first wave of transition team-selected staff, understand and appreciate wildlife and habitat conservation, science-based wildlife management, our hunting heritage, and the role that hunters and hunting play in conservation. Even though they are generally upstanding, well-intentioned, and invariably smart and dedicated individuals, they do not necessarily value or understand the complexity of the issues that we hold near and dear. Their mission is to transition to, and carry out the incoming president's agenda. Boone and Crockett Club members would do well to engage in the transition process or at least make the acquaintance of these critical staff early in the process to assure that they have an understanding of conservation and the Club's history.

The new Congress will undergo a similar transition with new members, new staff, and changes in leadership. The conservation issues they grapple with today will remain front and center on the radar screen—issues such as energy policy, climate change, the next Farm Bill, and resource agency budgets. These are daunting challenges especially in light of the changes that will occur in that body as well as in the administration.

The possibilities of one party controlling both the executive and legislative branches of government or split control of the branches will add to the complexity of governance. Current budget deficits, healthcare concerns, social security funding, housing market and mortgage travails, counterterrorism confrontations, energy supply and demand, a new highway bill, climate change adaptation funding, coupled with the change in executive and legislative branches of government may create the “Perfect Storm.” The indecision and divisiveness that will ensue is inevitable.

A port in this storm is the North American Wildlife Policy Conference and the white papers which were described in this and the last two issues of *Fair Chase*. The papers (developed by the Sporting Conservation Council, members of the American Wildlife Conservation Partners, and many others) describe major issues confronting wildlife conservation and our hunting heritage.

They provide a bright and clear beacon for a new administration and Congress by explaining conservation issues, identifying challenges that confront resource managers, and recommending opportunities to address these challenges. They identify success in an atmosphere of indecision.

We have an opportunity to make sure that those who arrive in Washington in January, be they new or seasoned, understand that with our help, they can make progress in meeting our country's resource demands while conserving our nation's natural resources. In 1910, Theodore Roosevelt stated, “The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired, in value.” Although there has been much talk about “change” in these elections, nothing has “changed” about that fact. ■