

Hunting in America *continued*

Steps Toward a Brighter Future

We introduced the North American Wildlife Policy Conference in the Spring 2008 issue of *Fair Chase*. Since that time, more than 150 wildlife professionals met in Denver for a two-day technical conference. Participants discussed the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation; federal, state, and tribal coordination; conservation funding; and private and public land habitat conservation, which have been featured in prior issues of *Fair Chase*. The executive summary for the fifth and final topic regarding perpetuating hunter traditions is below. During the conference, subgroups identified goals, challenges, and opportunities for each of the five topic areas. The policy recommendations associated with each of the five topic areas will provide a focus for discussions at the upcoming North American Wildlife Policy Conference to be held in Washington, D.C. ■

Preserving the Tradition of Hunting: Education, Recruitment, and Retention

Participation in hunting has been declining in the United States for more than two decades. This is part of a larger trend away from nature-based recreation of almost all types. Several factors are contributing to this change: an aging U.S. population, changing family structure, a shift from rural to urban culture, and a highly mobile society. Sportsmen and sportswomen have traditionally formed the backbone of organizations that provided funding and political support for the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. Loss of participation will have significant effects on the future of conservation. Education programs are vital to the preservation of hunting traditions; however, programs that provide effective educational opportunity are expensive, labor- and equipment-intensive, and competitive with one another for limited funding. The foundation for support among U.S. citizenry, university fish and wildlife curricula, and the wildlife profession itself have eroded. This threatens the foundation of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. A renewed commitment to education and educators will be essential to the future of wildlife management.

Goals

- Increase participation in hunting and recreational shooting in the United States.
- Establish sustainable, effective programs and the institutional framework that educate, recruit, and retain participants.
- Ensure that the rich traditions of hunting and the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation are viewed by the public, resource agencies, and educators at all levels as a vital part of our American heritage.

Opportunities

- Provide sufficient and assured funding and establish the institutional framework and priorities for education, recruitment, and retention.
- Deliver educational programs to ensure an understanding and appreciation of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation and its relevance.
- Seek visible executive endorsement for Americans' involvement in natural resource-based recreational activities.
- Incorporate the role and relevancy of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation into environmental literacy.
- Facilitate structured hunting and shooting events on federal lands and integrate the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation into educational exhibits and programs.
- Commit to annual evaluation and reporting of progress toward increasing recruitment and retention.

Education programs are integral to the preservation of hunting traditions. A variety of programs mainly aimed at youth and women have demonstrated that North Americans are still interested in learning traditional hunting and fishing skills.