

# CAPITOL COMMENTS

## Cloudy with a Chance of Clearing



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This was the 12th year that organizations affiliated with the American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP) gathered together to discuss the conservation issues confronting our nation.

Many of us left the sweltering banks of the Potomac River to collect near the cool banks of the Clark Fork River in Missoula, Montana, just as the founders of AWCP did 12 years ago. As then, the Boone and Crockett Club was well represented during the meeting.

Prior to attending the AWCP meeting, I spent a few days in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, participating in the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Board of Directors meeting where we, in part, discussed Washington political issues. While there, the smoke from Idaho wildfires obscured the grandeur of the Grand Teton, 13,770 feet of sheer rock, rendering it all but invisible from a distance of four miles or so. First-time visitors to the Jackson Hole valley must have wondered what all the fuss over the beauty of the Teton Range was about. On a positive note, I suspect postcard sales skyrocketed! Thankfully, while in Missoula, skies were sunny and crystal clear. The air quality and visibility of both locales serve as appropriate metaphors for conservation discussions in this nation.

The atmosphere in Washington is now clouded by politics, elections, and ideology. The candidates of both political parties have sent their respective smoke signals to their political bases. On many issues including conservation, it is difficult to see for what or where the candidates stand. The intentional or unintentional smokescreens of “facts” presented by the candidates for public offices render understanding as unattainable. It is as though the back doors of smoke-filled rooms have been opened, and their contents have been released. I have to scratch my head as to why we, as American citizens and taxpayers, don’t demand clarity of thought, speech, and purpose from all our political candidates for whom we have hired or intend to hire to do our nation’s business.

As I headed north out of Jackson to Missoula, the skies and my vision became clearer, both literally and figuratively. The organizations that comprise the AWCP try to avoid the muddying associated with Washington politics. After all, many of these organizations have members and boards of directors that require transparency, accountability, and performance on a quarterly and annual basis. Each organization has developed clear positions on conservation issues that reflect their memberships’ interests. All work tirelessly at national, regional, and

for wildlife conservation, particularly to the administration and Congress.

This year’s AWCP agenda items provided an inventory of the most significant conservation issues and challenges facing the nation. We spent considerable time and effort deciding on the eight or so conservation priorities to be included in *Wildlife for the 21st Century, Volume 4*, a veritable policy road map for upcoming administration officials, members of Congress, and their staffs. The priorities will be honed over the next few months and will define the collective input of organizations that represent the interests of more than 20 million Americans and their families. These priorities provide a vision for enhanced conservation.

This vision of private citizens and organizations interested in wildlife conservation could not be clearer. The nine percent increase in hunters during the last five years, as reported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, demonstrates a growing personal and financial commitment to conservation. Our powerful voices must be the clarion that dissipates the smokescreens and misperceptions that currently cloud conservation issues in our nation’s capitol. Without this clarity of vision for conservation and concomitant investment in conservation, our future is hazy; with it, we will be able to chart a course to the mountains’ summits. ■

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local levels to deliver distinctive and recognizable conservation projects on the ground. Legions of volunteers from all walks of life assist in these projects. If any of these organizations operated in the opaque manner of Washington politics, I doubt they would survive very long.

It struck me that the work of organizations like NFWF and AWCP might be the best, current hope for conservation in this country. With federal and state agency budgets strained or broken, private financial contributions and private conservation efforts have accomplished tremendous conservation successes. Last year NFWF leveraged \$46 million of federal funds to achieve a \$130 million financial impact for conservation projects. This almost 1-to-3 return ratio included innovative and effective approaches that serve as public-private partnership models for federal and state conservation agencies. The conservation investments and rates of return achieved by NFWF are similar to many of the organizations affiliated with AWCP. Although AWCP does not provide direct financial contributions to conservation, the collective voice of AWCP organizations provide strong policy direction and advocacy

