

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Robert Model
PRESIDENT
Boone and Crockett Club

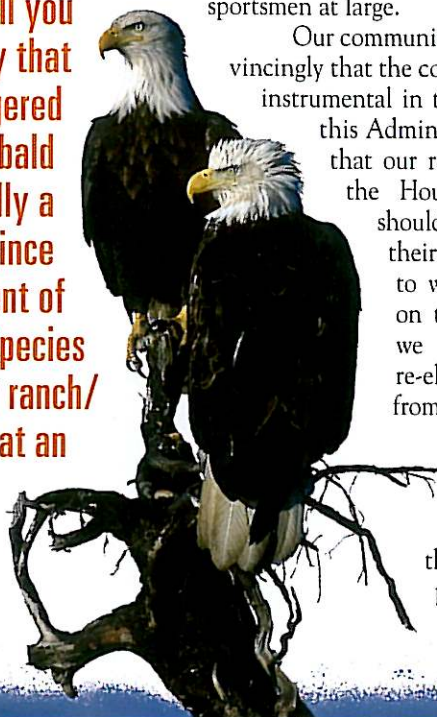
2007 Farm Bill

In my past articles for *Fair Chase*, I have attempted to discuss what I believe to be the most important issues our community faces as we move into the 21st century. Time

is continuing to march ahead, and we find ourselves already halfway through the first decade of the new century. In my last article, I talked about the Endangered Species Act and its importance to our community. In this edition of *Fair Chase* I want to talk about the 2007 Farm Bill. This is already front and center in the minds and meetings of those institutions and special interests that will be affected by this bill.

I would like our community to think about what this bill can do to promote good land stewardship and good wildlife management, and how we can make sure those issues are addressed effectively. I believe our community will be best served if we ask ourselves the following questions:

Since I fall into the category of small-ranch owner, I can tell you most definitively that we are an endangered species. While the bald eagle is basically a recovered species since the establishment of the Endangered Species Act, the family ranch/farm is declining at an exponential rate as a result of losing millions of acres to development.



What do we currently have that will not change?

We have the public lands that our Boone and Crockett Club founders and early members set aside for the American people. Those lands include our National Forests, National Parks, the Fish & Wildlife Refuges, and the unclaimed public domain now managed by the Bureau of Land Management. We have reached a saturation point with some species and a significant plateau where several wildlife populations generally do not need to be increased, but do need to be sustained and managed at present levels.

Where are the risks?

The answer to that question is how we will be able to use the upcoming Farm Bill to best meet the needs for private habitat protection. Without the private habitat, we cannot sustain the wildlife populations that exist today.

I believe these to be the core issues that our community is faced with as this bill moves toward passage. I recognize that, in some instances, this may be an oversimplification of a complex issue. However, the "detail" is not something we can affect at this stage of discussion. We can focus on the importance of recognizing what the opportunities are by being present and active in this debate. It is important to recognize that this is about money and influence. The people best suited to ensure private habitat protection are the hunters, anglers, and sportsmen at large.

Our community can argue convincingly that the collective "we" was instrumental in the re-election of this Administration. I think that our representatives in the House and Senate should start making their positions clear as to where they stand on the Farm Bill. If we can affect the re-election of those from either party who support what is good for our community, we will then be in a strong position to dictate where the money is directed

in the 2007 Farm Bill.

In my opinion, it is vital that we recognize that the small family farm and ranch is the best way to ensure proper land stewardship. Since I fall into the category of small-ranch owner, I can tell you most definitively that we are an endangered species. While the bald eagle is basically a recovered species since the establishment of the Endangered Species Act, the family ranch/farm is declining at an exponential rate as a result of losing millions of acres to development. This translates to a significant loss of private habitat, which translates to fewer hunting and fishing opportunities. Our community needs to engage in the discussion of this issue. Everyone worries that the wolf is the end of the world. The wolf is a problem; but it pales in comparison to the loss of habitat.

What do we do? We must insist that we do not continue to subsidize corporate agriculture in the way in which it has been subsidized in the past. Let me make it clear that I am not advocating that small farmers/ranchers be subsidized. I am advocating that we must find a way to monetarily reward small farmers and ranchers for what they provide, free of charge, for the wildlife that does not belong to them, but that belongs to the state, and therefore to the American people. This plight is unsustainable and a national tragedy. Unless this is addressed now, we will soon wake up to find our hunting and fishing heritage is extinct. It is incorrect to assume that small farmers/ranchers are rich and "have it made." Small farmers/ranchers are in desperate straits. If we want the same hunting and fishing opportunities for our children and grandchildren, we better stand up and let Congress know the value of the entrepreneurial farmer/rancher. We are no longer the silent majority; we are the vocal majority, and we expect to be heard.

I urge all of you to think about this, and think about what you/we can do to affect meaningful change via the 2007 Farm Bill. If we choose not to engage in the early stages of the discussion, we will lose everything that our community has worked for over the past 125 years. It is past time to even the playing field. Corporate farms are not particularly good land stewards, and it is usually not in their economic best interest to take the long view as to what will sustain the habitat at a time of growing populations and shrinking land. ■