

NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT ACT BECOMES LAW

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The Boone and Crockett Club is praising Congress and the president for their bipartisan support of the Natural Resources Management Act (S. 47), commonly referred to as the John D. Dingell, Jr., Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act. The Act permanently authorizes the use of a portion of offshore oil and gas revenues for land conservation, outdoor recreation development and historic preservation.

The U.S. Senate approved the Act on a vote of 92-8 and the U.S. House of Representatives approved it on a vote of 363-62. President Donald J. Trump signed the bill into law on March 12 at an Oval Office signing ceremony surrounded by a bipartisan group of lawmakers. The bill that was signed into law was made up of more than 100 individual bills that were introduced by 50 senators and numerous House members.

Upon the signing of the bill, David Bernhardt, Acting Secretary of the Interior, said, “President Trump knows that federal lands are meant to provide both peace and prosperity for the American people, and signing this bill allows us to continue managing public lands in a balanced way. This bill is extremely beneficial to the American people and I look forward to working with Congress and local communities to implement the many local conservation wins within the bill.”

The comprehensive public lands package is the product of many years’ worth of work and negotiations by the authorizing committees and sportsmen’s organizations from around the country. It is

broad in scope, and the passage of this package by Congress and the signing into law by the president is a historical step forward for public lands and conservation.

Hunters, anglers, other outdoor enthusiasts, and outdoor industry leaders welcomed the Natural Resources Management Act, which will protect thousands of acres of public lands and hundreds of miles of rivers. The new law includes provisions addressing wild and scenic rivers, wildlife conservation, funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and recreational activities on federal and non-federal lands, among other matters.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund was permanently authorized for the first time since its original passage in 1964. Grants from the fund have paid for the establishment or expansion of federal parks, national forests, and wildlife refuges. It has also paid for the development of local parks and ballfields, historic battlefield preservation, and the Forest Legacy Program.

U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski, (R-Alaska) who formally introduced S.47 in the 116th Senate with Senator Maria Cantwell (D-Washington), said, “This law will benefit every state and clear the deck of issues that we’ve been working to resolve for years. From providing access for sportsmen to creating new economic opportunities for local communities, this is a good, balanced measure. We built it through a team effort that drew strong support from both parties in both chambers. Today is a triumph

for good process and good policy, and this bill is a win for Alaskans and all Americans.”

Congressman Raul M. Grijalva, D-Arizona, and Rob Bishop, R-Utah, led the way to passage in the House. Grijalva said, “This bill represents Congress at its best and truly gives the American people something to be excited about. It’s a massive win for the present and future of American conservation. Everyone from inner cities to suburbs to rural communities wins when we work together to preserve the outdoors.”

Provisions incorporated in the bill include:

- Guaranteeing funding for public access enhancement projects and permanently reauthorizing the Land and Water Conservation Fund,
- Declaring U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands open for hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting unless specifically closed,
- Directing the USFS, BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service to annually identify lands where sporting related activities are permitted, but where access is currently unavailable or restricted, and,
- Requiring public reporting of federal agency reimbursements of legal fees on lawsuits against the government.

One of the Club’s top priorities is the dedication of \$15 million per year for increasing public access to existing lands for hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation activities. We were very pleased to see that in the Act.

Another one of the top priorities for the Club is an effort to curb the abuse of excessive litigation aimed at stopping or slowing down conservation, such as sustainable, forest management on federal lands. A provision included within S.47 would support this effort simply by requiring agencies to report on legal expenses awarded under the Equal Access to Justice Act. The Forest Service has been voluntarily reporting on these expenses in its annual budget request. The Club’s policy team thanks Lowell Baier, a Honorary Life Member of the Club, for his long-dedicated work to curb this abuse. Picking an issue and following through on it from conceptualization to implementation is what our founder Theodore Roosevelt did. Actions like Lowell’s are what the Club is all about.

In addition to the members and staff in the Congress, a special thanks also goes to Paul Phillips, the co-chair of the Conservation Policy Committee, our team in D.C.—David Anderson, Greg Schildwacher, Mitch Butler and Chris Segal—and everyone on the policy committee that spent many long, hard hours to pass this historic piece of legislation. ■