

Hunting in America A Step Toward a Brighter Future

On August 13, 2007, President Bush signed Executive Order 13443 to enhance hunting opportunity on federal public lands. The stated purpose of the Order is “to direct Federal agencies that have programs and activities that have a measurable effect on public land management, outdoor recreation, and wildlife management, including the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture, to facilitate the expansion and enhancement of hunting opportunities and the management of game species and their habitats.”

Although Executive Order 13443 is not a silver bullet that will suddenly lead to better hunting on the 450+ million acres managed by the federal agencies in question, it does clearly direct these agencies to place additional management emphasis on hunting and game wildlife. The order also directs federal land management agencies to work closely with state fish and wildlife agencies and the federally sanctioned Sporting Conservation Council (Council) to aid in achieving its stated purpose.

The Council includes 12 leaders from the wildlife conservation community and is charged with providing advice to the Secretaries of the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture on issues related to wildlife conservation and sport hunting. The Boone and Crockett Club can be justifiably proud that of these twelve, nine are members of the Boone and Crockett Club.

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It was in 1973 that the North American Wildlife Policy was released at

the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference (initiated and organized by B&C Club Member Durward Allen) in Washington, D.C. The 1973 Policy set the stage for efforts to sustain our hunting heritage, focus on non-game and game wildlife, establish international agreements to support wildlife conservation, provide incentives for private landowners for wildlife habitat management, enhance range

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management and wetland protection, and expand public outreach and conservation education. The 1973 Policy was an update of the 1930 American Game Policy, which was presented by Boone and Crockett Club member Aldo Leopold that year at the American Game Conference.

The first collaborative effort to develop a vision for wildlife in America, one that is considered by many as the origin of natural resource conservation in our nation, was the Conference of Governors held in 1908 at the request of President Theodore Roosevelt. The Conference included representatives from federal and state governments who confronted critical issues including the use of our nation’s minerals, soils, water, and forests.

The recent executive order sets two lofty goals:

- 1) A White House Conference on North American Wildlife Policy is to be convened no later than September 2008. The objective of this White House Conference is to identify solutions to those issues that currently impede hunting opportunity and participation on federal lands.
- 2) A 10-Year Recreational Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Plan will be developed to outline concrete steps that will promote the stated purpose of the order for the next decade.

A work group has been established to identify existing barriers to enhancing hunting and wildlife conservation on federal lands and outline potential solutions. The efforts of this work group will form the foundation for the upcoming White House Conference.

“Members of the work group are extremely focused,” Model said, “[and] there is broad consensus that the White House Conference and subsequent 10-Year Plan must be substantive and bipartisan if we are to be successful in preserving the opportunity for future generations to learn the passion today felt by so many for our hunting traditions.”

On the following pages you will read three of the white papers developed by the work group: Funding; Habitat Conservation on Public and Private Lands; and Federal, State, and Tribal Coordination. Additional white papers on other topics identified by the work group will be presented in the next issue of *Fair Chase*. ■

Habitat Conservation on Public and Private Lands

PROBLEM

1. Wildlife habitat management activities on federal lands are affected by sometimes conflicting statutory and regulatory priorities (Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act, National Forest Management Act). These conflicts, in addition to federal agency management direction, can undermine efforts of state fish and wildlife agencies to attain habitat and population goals for game and nongame wildlife. In the western United States, opportunities on Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands to sustain big game and upland bird habitats, populations, and hunting opportunity have been diminished due to conflicting statutory and regulatory priorities. In the eastern United States, these same conflicting priorities have led to reduced levels of vegetation management on Forest Service lands, which have resulted in reduced quantity and quality of early successional habitats and disturbance-dependent forest types such as oak and aspen-birch. Across the nation, the lack of clear statutory and regulatory guidance regarding wetlands protections is compromising efforts to conserve these important habitats.
2. In some regions of the country, the vast majority of wildlife habitats are held in private ownership. Increasing ownership fragmentation can complicate efforts to conserve important habitats. In addition, private landowners commonly implement management activities without the aid of professional assistance.

GOALS

1. Improve coordination between federal and state agencies so that state wildlife habitat and population objectives can be used to aid in the development and implementation of land management activities on federal lands.
2. Enhance federal inter- and intra-agency communication during project planning and implementation on federal lands to resolve conflicting statutory and regulatory requirements to expedite habitat management initiatives.
3. Sustain wildlife habitats on private lands by establishing tax policies and other incentives designed to minimize ownership fragmentation.
4. Enhance existing programs that offer technical and financial assistance to sustain wildlife habitats on private lands.

IMPEDIMENTS

1. State and federal agencies commonly have different wildlife habitat and population objectives, even on landscapes with intermixed holdings. These objectives may be poorly understood both within and among agencies, thereby complicating effective coordination.
2. Limited staff time and expertise can limit opportunities to coordinate land management activities.
3. Formal processes to facilitate effective communication and coordination are inconsistently utilized.
4. Tax policies associated with the inheritance of private lands can promote increased ownership fragmentation and the resulting loss of wildlife habitats.
5. Agricultural subsidies can promote the conversion of lands dedicated as wildlife habitats to lands dedicated to commodity production.

CONSEQUENCES

1. The ability of state fish and wildlife agencies to manage wildlife habitats and populations at levels designed to maintain game wildlife populations at levels consistent with public expectations and to conserve imperiled species is eroding.
2. The contribution to wildlife conservation by private lands, which in some regions afford the primary opportunities to sustain wildlife habitats and populations, is eroding.

Funding for Conservation of Fish and Wildlife and Their Habitats

PROBLEM

Fish and wildlife conservation in America has been funded primarily by user fees (hunting and fishing licenses; migratory bird stamps; and excise taxes on arms, ammunition, archery, and fishing equipment, and motorboat fuel taxes). However, wildlife conservation needs have greatly diversified over the past century (wildlife conservation on private lands, disease management, human/wildlife conflict resolution, threatened and endangered species, conservation education, wildlife viewing, etc).

While the Farm Bill, State Wildlife Grants, and some other federal and state programs have provided significant additional funding for conservation of wildlife habitat (especially on agricultural lands), there remains a persistent gap between the needs and the funding base. The costs of wildlife conservation have increased and diversified, new or modified sources of funding have been slow to emerge, and traditional sources of funding are not keeping pace.

GOALS

1. Re-evaluate the traditional sources of funding and consider changes that allow fish and wildlife conservation to grow with the public's demands on these resources.
2. Identify and develop sources of dedicated funding that will ensure adequate financial resources for diverse fish, wildlife, and habitat conservation needs *and* broaden the constituency for fish and wildlife conservation in the 21st Century.

IMPEDIMENTS

1. Although there is strong, widespread support for fish and wildlife conservation and public access to these resources, most people do not understand how conservation and access programs in America are currently funded.
2. The number and percentage of people who finance conservation through purchase of licenses and stamps are declining while the number of people who enjoy wildlife and expect State and Federal agencies to ensure that they have the ability to enjoy wildlife is climbing. Most Americans who value wildlife and wildlife-related recreation, but do not hunt or fish, are not directly financing conservation, and they don't know it.
3. Federal appropriations to executive branch agencies for fish and wildlife conservation have declined significantly over the past two decades.
4. While overall revenues to the Sport Fish Restoration Program have significantly increased due to addition of motorboat fuel taxes, federal excise tax collections from fishing, hunting, and shooting equipment have been relatively flat for many years. Administrative challenges in tax collection and fund allocation, along with an erosion of the traditional partnership between sportsmen, the sporting goods industry, and state and federal government reduce support for these core programs.
5. While there are annual but sporadic Federal appropriations for State Wildlife Grants, and there have been discussions on future conservation funding from energy and climate change legislation, there are no sustainable sources of funding for many of the fish and wildlife conservation programs that will be important in the future.

CONSEQUENCES

1. The amount and quality of fish and wildlife habitat on public and private lands and public access to these resources may seriously decline.
2. Fish and wildlife populations and important ecological systems may decline.
3. Human health and well-being may also be directly impacted by the loss and degradation of natural lands and waters and the spread of diseases and pests.
4. Mandated expenditures and regulatory constraints due to maintenance, recovery, and litigation associated with Threatened and Endangered Species may increase.
6. Participation in fish and wildlife-related recreation may decrease, with serious economic impacts nationwide and substantial social impacts due to the loss of our hunting and fishing and outdoor heritage and a growing disconnect between people and the natural world.



Federal, State, and Tribal Coordination

PROBLEM

Because of my experience working at state and federal wildlife resource agencies, I have been asked to head up a team that has explored issues associated with state, federal, and tribal wildlife management coordination. We believe that the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation can only be sustained with effective collaboration between federal, state, and tribal wildlife resource agencies. Wildlife conservation efforts aimed at managing populations, habitat, and people must be coordinated to achieve landscape-scale goals. Although it is most apparent in addressing migratory species, interstate fishery resources, and other federal trust species, the importance of coordination is also evident in the management of resident species and/or populations that cross state boundaries or reside on federal public land. Federal, state, and tribal land management plans and actions should be developed in concert because of the proximity of these lands to one another and because actions taken on one governmental entity's land may have an impact on wildlife and habitat occurring on the same range and/or habitat type. Although we recognize that some level of collaboration and coordination exists today, it is apparent that improvement is necessary to meet the fish and wildlife conservation challenges of tomorrow.

GOALS

We have established some practical goals to improve the level of coordination that currently exists. Although federal agencies are mandated to analyze environmental impacts associated with land management decisions, they are not required to analyze the effects of their actions on the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. We believe that is an achievable goal. Routine communication must be established among and throughout federal, state, and tribal wildlife resource agencies. Collaborative processes for federal land-management planning should be enhanced among and throughout federal, state and tribal wildlife resource agencies. Collaborative processes between state agencies and the federal land management agencies that occur within their state borders should be established to set wildlife population objectives and guide federal land management activities. Federal, state, and/or tribal landscape-scale habitat management projects should be encouraged within and across state borders to improve wildlife habitat, especially on those multiple-use federal lands impacted largely by a singular use. Collaborative processes are necessary to enhance hunter access to and hunting opportunity on federal public lands.

IMPEDIMENTS

Although we recognize that some collaboration currently exists, we know that there are impediments that must be addressed to maximize collaboration and

achieve our goals. Some federal, state, and tribal agencies are unaware of existing opportunities to collaborate. Even though various cooperative agreements and memoranda of understanding exist, at the field level, they often collect dust on bookshelves and in filing cabinets. Irregular and somewhat voluntary meetings occur among federal, state, and/or tribal agencies regarding land management planning activities and wildlife population objectives. Often state and tribal agencies lack the capacity and knowledge to fully engage in federal planning activities. Even though state agencies may become involved in federal agency planning processes in a "cooperating agency" status, not all elect this approach. Because the federal planning process is a lengthy and complicated process, often times, states and tribes are unaware of status of these planning efforts.

The impediments continue and occur at the federal, state, and tribal level. No one level of government is fully at fault. Federal land-management agencies may not incorporate state or tribal wildlife and habitat objectives into their land-management plans. Federal agencies often consider the comments of state wildlife agencies as just another public comment as opposed to professional judgment and recommendations from a cooperating/partnering agency with its own set of statutory authorities. States and tribes may lack the dedicated resources to contribute to the federal planning process. Even if they do become engaged, states often present conflicting input to the decision-making process due to conflicts within the state government itself. Wildlife resources agencies may provide different comments than their own governor's office, the state's Department of Agriculture, or

other state agencies with resource-management authority. Federal agencies are forced to try to reconcile these conflicting recommendations.

CONSEQUENCES

The lack of collaborative involvement of federal, state, and tribal wildlife agencies to address the aforementioned impediments and achieve the stated goals will lead to wasted time and money; miscommunication; distrust; counterproductive, redundant and/or conflicting efforts; and therefore, ineffective conservation efforts at each level of government. Finite financial resources, staff, and time will not be used effectively to deliver wildlife conservation to the citizens of the nation. Given the nation's substantive and financial challenges facing wildlife conservation, the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation will be impaired and may become imperiled. However, we have the opportunity to address these challenges in the coming years. We believe that collaborative processes exist and can be enhanced to improve the coordination among federal, state, and tribal resource agencies, thereby helping to sustain the Model of Wildlife Conservation that is the envy of the world. ■

Fair Chase magazine has run a series of articles extolling the virtues and successes of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. However, it is evident that the Model faces serious challenges. The entire conservation community must take calculated steps to assure that the Model survives for future generations. The upcoming White House Conference on Hunting Heritage provides an opportunity and forum to discuss these steps.

