

# NATIONAL SHOOTING SPORTS FOUNDATION:



## 50 Years of Promoting, Protecting and Preserving Hunting and the Shooting Sports

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# ONE VOICE FOR AMERICA'S SHOOTERS

by **ROGER BARLOW**

Teddy Roosevelt forcefully formulated American foreign policy in his colorful "Speak softly but carry a big stick" statement. As a dedicated outdoorsman and hunter, he was equally forthright in leading the political battles to save some of our rapidly dwindling public lands for our rapidly growing public. Now, half a century later, the fight to preserve our wilderness lands still goes on and, additionally, we are ever harder pressed to maintain our traditional rights as American citizens to hunt. Restrictive legislation and the mushroom growth of our cities make it increasingly difficult to enjoy any of the shooting sports. As a group we shooters and hunters not only speak softly but *apologetically* and we seem to carry no stick at all! Small wonder we have come upon such evil days.

Yet the pressures of modern urban living have clearly shown the need for periodic excursions into our wilderness areas to renew our spirits. Hunting further serves to reestablish in modern man an important sense of primitive self-sufficiency lost to us in these days of supermarket living. The game we now bring home may not be necessary to put food on our twentieth century tables—but hunting (and allied shooting sports) certainly provides much-needed nourishment for the soul of modern man.

Those of us concerned with the precarious future of this traditional American sport can take heart from the news of the formation of the National Shooting Sports Foundation at a meeting in New York City on May 25th of this year. The mere establishment of this organization does not

*Harmon Williams, Browning Arms Co., makes the motion to set up the "National Shooting Sports Foundation" at the New York meeting.*



In November 1961, *Guns & Ammo* magazine carried an account of the formation of the National Shooting Sports Foundation, which occurred at the Second National Conference on the Shooting Sports on May 25 of that year.

In the late 19th century, Dr. George Bird Grinnell, founding member of the Boone and Crockett Club and editor and publisher of *Forest and Stream*, used his magazine to champion a new conservation ethic to restore America's wildlife populations. More than a half century later, another noted magazine editor, Warren Page, shooting editor at *Field & Stream*, the successor to *Forest and Stream*, noticed new challenges to hunting, target shooting, and the firearms industry. He urged industry leaders to respond, and they did by forming the National Shooting Sports Foundation, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year.

For sportsmen and women, the conservation model championed by Grinnell and others needs no introduction, but NSSF, the trade association for the firearms and ammunition industry, may not be as familiar to them. The occasion of NSSF's golden anniversary provides an opportunity to acquaint new audiences with the important work NSSF has done over a half century on behalf of its more than 6,000 member companies and all hunters, target shooters, and firearms owners.

NSSF announced its anniversary, fittingly, at the recent Shooting, Hunting and Outdoor Trade (SHOT) Show, the trade show that stands as one of its great success stories. How the SHOT Show was created and many other notable achievements by NSSF have been chronicled in a history publication and video created to celebrate the Foundation's golden anniversary. Both can be enjoyed at [www.NSSF.org](http://www.NSSF.org).

As recounted in *The National Shooting*

*Sports Foundation: A History 1961 to 2011* authored by former NSSF President and CEO Doug Painter, NSSF's story began when *Field & Stream*, encouraged by Page, organized the first National Conference on the Shooting Sports in New York City in June of 1960. A second conference followed on May 25, 1961, at which industry leaders voted 130 to 0 to form NSSF. A roll call from that conference would include the United States secretary of the interior, military generals, executives from industry, state governors and leaders from conservation organizations—and some groups that today would seem very unlikely supporters. Such was the widespread appeal of hunting and target shooting in that era.

Page, who was the first living American to be named to the Hunting Hall of Fame, and early Executive Directors Charlie Dickey and Arnold H. "Rock" Rohlfing helped establish NSSF. Other early leaders included Winchester's Bill Talley, chairman of the NSSF board of governors from 1972 to 1981, who summed up NSSF's inclusiveness as a trade association by remarking, "The entire shooting associated industry, from gun maker to boot maker, should speak with one voice." Such unity is a hallmark of present-day NSSF.

### Some of NSSF's highlights through the decades:

**1960s** – NSSF tells the story of the hunter's role in conservation and brings out the facts about the safe and responsible use of firearms through Hollywood spokespersons such as Bing Crosby, Roy Rogers and Slim Pickens. Safety promotions include

encouraging hunters to adopt the use of "hunter orange" clothing.

**1970s** – NSSF achieves prominence nationally with National Hunting and Fishing Day, one of the most effective grassroots efforts undertaken to promote traditional outdoor sports and conservation. President Nixon signs the first NHF Day Proclamation, a tradition followed by other presidents, including President Barack Obama.

**SHOT Show, 1979** – A turning point in the foundation's history comes with the creation of the SHOT Show in 1979 with 290 exhibiting companies. Today, more than 1,600 exhibitors attend this international trade show, which is the economic engine that powers NSSF's many programs and services. Industry leaders realized that starting their own trade show was risky. As Rohlfing remarked the night before the first show SHOT Show in St. Louis, "Boys, I sure as hell hope someone shows up tomorrow." They did, of course, and still do. SHOT Show has become a phenomenon: it's the biggest trade show of its kind on the planet and the 11th largest trade show of any kind in North America.

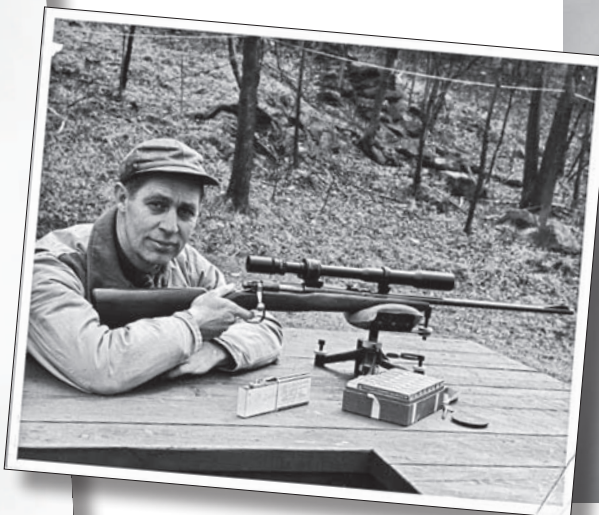
**1980s** – NSSF launches a national advertising campaign to promote good sportsmanship in response to a study that shows the public did not have a problem with hunting so much as with hunters who behaved poorly. Educational initiatives continue to be a mainstay of NSSF, including the landmark Un-endangered Species video for schools. NSSF brings the shooting sports to

## PROCEEDINGS SECOND NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE SHOOTING SPORTS

"...to foster in the American public a better understanding and a more active appreciation of all shooting sports..."

Sert Room, Waldorf Astoria New York, May 25, 1961

**RIGHT: The Proceedings of the Second National Conference of the Shooting Sports is a summary report of the conference that took place in New York City in 1961 at which the NSSF was formed. BELOW: Warren Page, shooting editor at *Field & Stream*, noticed new challenges to hunting, target shooting and the firearms industry.**



television with shows like NSSF's *Chevy Trucks Shooting Sports America*.

For 10 years, this show on ESPN brought the world of shooting into millions of American homes on weekend afternoons.

**1990s** – NSSF establishes the Women's Shooting Sports Foundation to respond to a growing interest in target shooting among women. NSSF organizes its Shooting Sports Summits to bring industry and conservation leaders together to assess challenges and develop strategies, leading to major programs such as STEP OUTSIDE that promote hunting and target shooting participation.

**2000s** – NSSF helps fight off 23 politically motivated municipal lawsuits filed in attempt to hold manufacturers financially responsible for the criminal misuse of their lawfully manufactured and sold products. In 2005, Congress passes the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act prohibiting any new lawsuits based on this failed legal theory. The turn of the century brings two big programs—Project ChildSafe, which has distributed 35 million gun lock safety kits, and Don't Lie for the Other Guy, a purchase-deterrent initiative sponsored jointly by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and NSSF. New programs designed to build participation include the Scholastic Clay Target Program, First Shots, Hunting Heritage Partnership and Families Afield. As the decade comes to a close, NSSF launches an education campaign to dispel misconceptions about AR-style rifles, pointing out that these modern sporting rifles are commonly owned and widely used for target shooting and hunting, and that they are not “assault weapons.”

### Founders Would Be Proud

NSSF's founders intended that America's sporting and gun-owning traditions would continue to flourish due to the efforts of the organization they established. Their hopes continue to be realized.

“We would like to think that the founders of NSSF, most of whom have passed on, would be proud of the work that the organization they formed in New York City in 1961 has accomplished,” concludes the history publication's foreword. “If those founding individuals were here, they would be able to enjoy hunting and target shooting today much as they were able to 50 years ago. That surely would be one measure of success of their vision and effort in creating the National Shooting Sports Foundation.” ■



**TOP:** President George W. Bush, with members of Congress looking on, is signing the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act on October 26, 2005. The law prevents frivolous lawsuits from being filed against firearms manufacturers. **ABOVE:** The ad above is one of several early advertisements during the mid-1970s from a national campaign by NSSF to promote hunter ethics and sportsmanship.