



NATIONAL WILD TURKEY FEDERATION

HUNTERS: Champions of Conservation



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Hunters are the champions of conservation. We were the first—and remain the best—conservationists, dedicating our time, talents, and hard-earned money to conservation.

The National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) believes so steadfastly in the power of hunters to conserve our nation's land and wildlife resources, we made Hunters: Champions of Conservation our 2012 national convention theme.

More than 40,000 hunters and outdoor enthusiasts traveled from across the United States to Nashville in February. We hosted events to recognize our champions of freedom, celebrate our champions of outreach, cheer our calling champions, and enjoy entertainment by the champions of Music City.

But we never lost focus on Hunters: Champions of Conservation.

Hunting is a passion. Many of us were born with the desire to hunt. Though others didn't discover this passion until later in life, they are no less passionate about hunting.

As champions of conservation, hunters must take a personal interest in helping the next generation realize the joy of hearing and seeing the forest come alive and smelling spring air, undisturbed by city pollution. We all enjoy these things, and we must not take them for granted.

Honoring the Early Champions

The NWTF is dedicated to the conservation of the wild turkey and the preservation of our hunting heritage. Our mission is what is right with the world.

President Theodore Roosevelt so understood the value of public land for conserving critical wildlife habitat that he set aside about 84,000 acres of public land for every day he was president—that's 230 million acres total.

Like Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, George Bird Grinnell, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and other visionaries worked for the future. They lived in a time when wildlife was scarce due to centuries of unrestricted commercial and subsistence hunting and other negative practices.

The early conservationists, all avid outdoorsmen, recognized the traditions and values of hunting, fishing, and trapping but they never saw the promised land of the abundant wildlife we have today.

Similarly, my grandfather hunted quail, but he never laid eyes on turkeys or deer. Many years after my grandfather died, I was blessed to be with my son Lee as he hunted the same land my grandfather hunted near Selma, Alabama. Lee, who is a B&C Official Measurer, harvested a wild turkey on the same land using my father's shotgun. I felt such pride for the work completed by the early champions of conservation and for those who have continued their work, which touched three generations.

In 1973, there were only 1.3 million wild turkeys throughout North America. Since then, the number of wild turkeys has increased to more than 7 million birds, thanks to state, federal, and provincial wildlife agencies, and the NWTF, its members and partners. Much of the restoration was achieved through trapping and transferring wild turkeys to suitable habitat—an idea conceived by the late Tom Rodgers, founder of the NWTF.

C.B. McLeod from Florida, L.A. Dixon from North Carolina, and many others who are gone now but loved the wild turkey, were instrumental in guiding the NWTF in those formative years.

Through partnerships with state, federal, and provincial agencies and other partners, the NWTF and its volunteers helped restore wild turkey populations throughout North America, investing more than \$372 million to conserve more than 17 million acres of habitat that benefited all types of wildlife.

Paying the Way

It is imperative to help others recognize how important conservation is to our economy. Early conservationists recognized that public ownership of wildlife provides the cornerstone for the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

It also provides a basis for the public funding mechanisms including the Pittman-Robertson Act that furnished critical funds for wildlife conservation. In 2012 we will celebrate the 75th anniversary of this vital act, which has allowed us to raise \$4 billion, purchase 4 million acres of wildlife habitat, and annually manage more than 50 million acres.

The hunter-conservationists in this country lobbied Congress for a self-imposed excise tax to raise money to fund habitat projects, provide law enforcement, and trapping programs to restore populations. The Pittman-Robertson Act established a tax on the sale of firearms and ammunition, with the proceeds used by federal and state authorities to restore wildlife.

Let me emphasize—we asked for the tax. These taxes, matched 3 to 1 by hunting license dollars, funded the comeback of wildlife in this country. No other continent in the history of the world has accomplished this—and hunters paid the way.

We must not lose momentum. Our goal is to make hunting relevant in our society for the next 100 years.

Reaching Out

To help ensure hunting endures beyond the next 100 years, outreach programs like the NWTF's JAKES, Women in the Outdoors, and Wheelin' Sportsmen host events nationwide that introduce nearly 100,000 youth, women, and people with disabilities to the outdoors annually.

The NWTF also unveiled the JAKES Take Aim program in 2011 to get triple the number of youth involved in the shooting sports through the NWTF. We expect to reach at least 150,000 youth in the next four years through this program.

Thanks to a generous gift from Larry and Brenda Potterfield, founders and owners of MidwayUSA, JAKES Take Aim was developed to increase youth participation in target shooting, clay targets, and shotgunning in a safe, fun environment. All this is to involve youth in the shooting sports, and ultimately in hunting, so they can carry on the legacy of hunting and conservation. This remains a key component of the NWTF's mission.

The Families Afield initiative also gives more people opportunities to carry on America's time-honored hunting traditions. Since 2004, Families Afield has helped bring positive legislative change to 32 states, resulting in more than 598,000 new hunters. With support from the NWTF, U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance, National Shooting Sports Foundation, and many state and local sportsmen's

organizations, Families Afield will continue to encourage youth to hunt.

The NWTF also has successfully helped increase hunting opportunities in several states and defeat restrictive measures in others. The NWTF doesn't have lobbyists working for it on a daily basis in Washington D.C., and it is determined to represent its constituency outside Capitol Hill. The NWTF has established a reputation for telling the truth and works to base its decisions on science-based management and facts.

NWTF founders started the Wild Turkey Technical Committee, consisting of wild turkey biologists from state wildlife agencies, to make recommendations on research, management, restoration, and educational programs. Nearly 75 members from 50 states and 2 Canadian provinces meet annually at our national convention, which serves as the forum to keep the NWTF focused on key issues to support state and federal agency programs.

Looking Upland

After completing restoration of wild turkeys to most of the suitable habitat in the United States, NWTF has added an upland initiative. The NWTF is a leader in upland wildlife habitat conservation in North America. Wild turkeys and hundreds of other species of upland wildlife, including quail, deer, grouse, pheasant, and songbirds, benefit from this improved habitat.

For example, as part of the broader wildlife focus, the NWTF is improving 1,680 acres of habitat for Gunnison sage grouse and could potentially grow the population near Crawford, Colorado, by 37 percent. This restoration project marks the first time the NWTF has invested in a project focused on this species, which is just one step away from being listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

Facing the Challenges

After many years, one challenge remains the same: We must look to the future and keep our resources healthy for the next generation. There is no question that if we don't appreciate what the earliest champions of conservation did for wildlife, habitat and our resources, there will be no wildlife to view and hunt, no habitat to conserve, no resources to upkeep, no cause to champion.

Our call to action is to hand this rich heritage to the next generation. If we take it for granted, we will lose it. Hunters brought back wildlife, and hunters will assure its future. We must protect the legacy of those who came before us. ■