



# CONGRESSIONAL SPORTSMEN'S FOUNDATION

In late November of last year, I found myself standing behind the lectern in the ballroom at Nemaquin Woodlands Resort in Western Pennsylvania, speaking to a room of nearly 50 state legislators who came from as far away as Alaska to discuss and learn about issues facing our nation's sportsmen. We were in the middle of a busy, yet successful event, and I took a brief moment to reflect on how our organization, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF), was now successfully working with sportsman-legislators, at both the state and federal levels, and from every corner of the country to protect, promote, and advance our community's collective sporting heritage. This is no small feat.

Many of the state legislators in attendance were part-time lawmakers who balance full-time jobs and family obligations in addition to their legislative duties and leadership roles within their respective state sportsmen's caucuses. They are also people who would rather be sitting in a duck blind or tree stand than discussing policy issues in a hotel ballroom hundreds, if not thousands, of miles from home. I couldn't help but think to myself: What could possibly motivate these busy people to spend their little free time and their hard-earned money to attend an event like this, particularly during the busy holiday season?

This rhetorical question that I asked myself after a long and hectic day of presentations and meetings was one that, in my heart, I already knew the answer to. The people sitting in that room were there for the same reasons I was. They were there because of an unbelievably strong and truly selfless commitment to ensuring Americans are able to hunt, shoot, fish, and trap – both now and for generations to come. They were there because they believe in the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation and the American System of Conservation Funding and, ultimately, they were there because they understand the critical role that hunting and recreational fishing and shooting play as fundamental components of the American System of Conservation Funding.

This reflective moment caused me a great deal of pride as I thought about how far CSF has come since its establishment in 1989, but also concern when I thought of how far we have to go in the future.

#### **How We Got Here**

Although we may not like to admit it, most natural resource management decisions are inherently political. Decision makers – legislators, government agencies and non-governmental organizations – are often charged with deciding who gets what, why, and how. In a complex world full of competing interests, this process can be overwhelming. The majority of hunters, recreational anglers and shooters aren't naturally inclined to spend their time tracking legislation, following the regulatory process or engaging their elected representatives, despite

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**Team B&C with Congressman Don Young of Alaska at last year's Congressional Shoot-Out. From left to right, Robert Model (B&C Past President), Ben B. Wallace (B&C President), Congressman Don Young (B&C Professional Member), Paul Miller (Congressional Sportsmen Foundation's Treasurer), and Gregory Schildwachter (B&C Professional Member).**



**Members of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus leadership at their annual dinner. CSF President, Jeff Crane is at the podium.**

the fact that legislators have the ability to limit or enhance our ability to enjoy the activities we are passionate about. CSF exists to bridge this gap between America's sportsmen and those who make the decisions that impact our collective sporting heritage.

In 1989, a coalition of sportsman-legislators came together to form the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus (CSC). The CSC is one of the most effective caucuses in the United States Congress with more than 300 members in the House and the Senate, and has both Democratic and Republican leadership in each chamber. Shortly after the development of the CSC, the CSF was founded to support the growth and development of the caucus by promoting sportsmen's issues with elected officials. Because of this interaction between the caucus and CSF, the CSC is a powerful voice and the first line of defense on Capitol Hill for America's sportsmen.

CSF works with these dedicated leaders to communicate the needs of the sportsmen's community, provide education on issues impacting our heritage, and identify opportunities to develop, pass and ensure the implementation of policies protecting the sportsmen's legacy.

### **Where We Are Now**

From the beginning, we at CSF always knew that while it is important to work with federal policymakers on issues impacting sportsmen, the majority of wildlife management decisions are made at the state level. With this in mind, CSF used the CSC as a model and in 2004 launched the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses (NASC) with a mission of organizing sportsman-legislators into state sportsmen's caucuses.

Currently, more than 2,000 state lawmakers are members of 39 legislative sportsmen's caucuses under the NASC umbrella. Each year, leaders from member caucuses come together at a NASC annual sportsman-legislator summit such as the 2011 meeting in Pennsylvania to discuss recent developments in their respective states and to exchange information and ideas about how to successfully advance sportsmen's issues in state capitals.

In 2009, CSF's state organization and outreach efforts were further enhanced through the formation of the Governor's Sportsmen's Caucus (GSC). In just three years, the GSC has grown to include 24 member governors, and it features a bi-partisan leadership team that works to facilitate communication and enhance the exchange of information among the state executive offices that are dedicated to supporting a pro-sportsmen agenda through legislative, administrative and regulatory action.

In addition, federal agencies can significantly impact our ability to hunt, fish and shoot on public land. Fortunately, CSF is well-positioned to work with these agencies in pursuit of conservation policies that protect sportsmen's access to our nation's greatest recreational assets. CSF fills a unique niche in our community as the only organization with leadership appointed to two federal advisory councils representing hunting, shooting and fishing interests—the Wildlife Hunting Heritage Conservation Council and the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council.

### **What's Next**

In a constantly evolving world, it is imperative that we as sportsmen take it upon

ourselves to insist that those who have been entrusted to make decisions about wildlife and natural resource management are informed about the issues that impact our outdoor heritage. In order to protect our community's future, we must take steps to ensure decision makers understand the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, the American system of conservation funding, and the importance of enhancing access and passing down our sportsmen's heritage through recruiting additional sportsmen and women into the fold.

Along with recognizing the challenges of recruiting individuals to carry on these traditions by hunting, fishing and trapping, CSF faces other significant challenges. As time passes and the political winds change, decision makers who may have once been important advocates for sportsmen and women regularly move on to other endeavors, retire, or lose elections. When this happens, CSF continues to do everything in the organization's power to help new members of Congress, governors and state legislators understand the benefits associated with representing their constituents as a member of a sportsmen's caucus.

Standing united as sportsmen, our voice is loud and strong. With sportsmen's caucuses existing at the federal level and in states throughout the country, the future of spreading our message is bright if we remain committed to pursuing our common goals. With this in mind, I suggest that you, as constituents, ask your elected representatives if they are a member of the CSC, the GSC, or a NASC-affiliated sportsmen's caucus. If the answer is "no," your response should be, "Why not?" ■