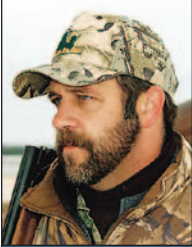


CAPITOL COMMENTS

A Long, Hot Summer



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Summer in Washington, D.C., is typically hot and humid. The city's concrete, glass, and steel trap and reflect the summer heat, broiling those who work and visit there. Heat waves shimmer

off the concrete roads and sidewalks. Clothes stick to your skin as you search for relief in the shade—shade provided primarily by concrete buildings. Nighttime does not bring much relief because the heat absorbed during the day is radiated outward each evening. It is within this sticky and oppressive atmosphere that Congress must address some of our nation's most pressing issues.

While we, as outdoorsmen, enjoy the summer vacation season in the wide open spaces found in the mountains, lakes, forests, and beaches of our nation, Washingtonians are experiencing silly season, which is in full splendor on the sweltering banks of the Potomac. Although I am not a political expert, these things I know: the presidential and congressional campaigns and elections will dominate the summer and fall media coverage; Congress will punt some difficult decisions until after the elections in November; members of Congress will be torn between campaigning in their districts and doing the important work for which they were elected and paid; and federal agencies

will not enact any significant policy changes. All of this is adequate reason to throw up our hands, grab our fishing poles, and head to cool streams and lakes. However, the issues that confront our nation are perhaps more critical today than in any time in the past few decades. The future of conservation is one such issue and it is imperative that we pay attention and engage.

Congress has a number of issues to confront between now and the end of the

discretionary programs will take the brunt of the spending cuts. Conservation funding has never fared well when competing against discretionary programs such as national defense, transportation, homeland security, agriculture, and education. Conservation funding aside, we face another related but more important difficulty—political relevancy.

Even though natural resources face the stresses of climate change, expanded energy development, wetland loss, prairie conversion, tiling and drainage, and invasive species—with the exception of a denial of the impacts, I have not heard one word about how our nation should address these issues in any presidential or congressional debate, speech, or conversation. In the past, presidential candidates relished the perception or reality that they were hunters and anglers. In this and the last presidential campaign there has been no bona fide demonstration of hunting, fishing, or a conservation ethic. Are our pursuits now irrelevant to political leaders? I clearly understand and believe that the pressing issues of job creation and improving our economy are our top priorities. I do not

understand why the fundamental sources of food, fiber, water, space, minerals, and energy—the natural resources that ultimately drive jobs and our economy—have been discarded, as if irrelevant, in the debate about our country's future.

The unprecedented, contentious, and divisive nature of our political parties, where each party appears to be bowing to their extreme wings, does not bode well for the compromise and bipartisanship that must occur to resolve some of our nation's greatest challenges. Conservation is a long-term endeavor that requires unified vision and support. Unless we make political candidates aware of this fact, supportive of our goals, and responsive to our desires, we will lose much of the conservation success for which we are rightfully proud. We all need to contact our members of Congress to let them know we care, otherwise, it looks like a long, hot summer to me. ■

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year. First and foremost, they must address the more than \$15 trillion federal debt and a federal debt ceiling toward which we creep nearer. Congress promised to enact \$1.2 trillion in spending cuts prior to January. They should decide whether to: extend the Bush tax cuts that expire in December, provide funding for doctors who treat Medicare patients, enact tax reform, establish a national energy policy, reform immigration laws, react to the Supreme Court decision on the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, and establish a budget. How much of this critical laundry list actually gets accomplished is anyone's guess, but a guess of "not much" is a safe bet with good odds.

So how does this affect wildlife conservation? It affects it in a very big way. Obviously the major impact is on federal funding for conservation. The portion of the federal budget that addresses land and water conservation is only about 1 percent. Unless Congress has the temerity to reduce funding for mandatory programs such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid (which comprises 55 percent of the budget),