

SPORTSMEN OUTRAGED AT CLINTON ADMINISTRATION ATTACK ON PRO-HUNTING BILL

Sportsmen nationwide are outraged at the Clinton Administration's blind side attack on H.R. 1675, The National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act. The bill is designed to enhance management of the National Wildlife Refuge System and ensure that outdoor sports continue on them, where compatible.

On December 15, 1995, U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt, in a letter to the measure's sponsor, Rep. Don Young (R-AK), attacked the bill and stated the administration's opposition. Young is chairman of the House Resources Committee, which in July passed the bill.

"This is nothing more than a hostile, politically motivated attack on sportsmen's interests," said Richard B. Pierce, president of The Wildlife Legislative Fund of America.

A consortium of environmental organizations, led by The Wilderness Society, Sierra Club and National Audubon Society had earlier stated their opposition to the measure. They prompted four former Interior and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials to issue a letter of opposition to members of Congress.

In response, the sportsmen's community fired back. A coalition of 15 national sportsmen's conservation organizations sent a jointly-signed letter supporting of The National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act to members of Congress.

The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, representing the 50 state wildlife departments, has reiterated its support for H.R. 1675. Additionally, former Interior Department assistant secretaries for fish, wildlife and parks, William P. Horn, G. Ray Arnett and Mike Hayden, joined by former U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Robert A. Jantzen likewise wrote to Congress in support of the bill.

"We are not surprised that the environmental organizations oppose the pro-hunting bill," said Pierce. "They never support legislation to enhance sportsmen's opportunities. We are astounded, however, that the administration has come out in opposition. This is especially the case in light of the blatant pandering to sportsmen they've been doing lately." Pierce said the Service has been mouthing sympathetic words about hunters and

fishermen since it had its nose bloodied by WLFA and other sportsmen in the 1994 campaign which forced it to shelve its plans to restrict hunting on the national wildlife refuges.

The National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act seeks to amend the National Wildlife Refuge Administration Act of 1966. The improvement act protects hunting and fishing on the refuges by elevating them to "a purpose" of the refuge system. Currently, these activities are deemed "secondary uses" the same as cattle grazing, oil drilling and jet skiing.

Pierce said that H.R. 1675 is poised for a vote on the House floor and that the votes seem to be in place for passage.

"However, the Clinton Administration's ambush could way lay the efforts of those of us who worked for this bill," he said. "It is a shame that months of negotiation resulted in this blind side. The sportsmen who pay the bill for wildlife conservation in America deserve much better."

— WILDLIFE LEGISLATIVE FUND OF AMERICA

NEW REGULATIONS AIM AT INCREASING NORTHEAST OREGON BULL ELK NUMBERS

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commissioners adopted sweeping changes to northeast Oregon elk hunting regulations for 1996. The new regulations are designed to improve the long-term health of elk herds by increasing the number of branch-antlered breeding bulls.

Many hunters attended the meeting to comment on proposed changes. Proposals to add a muzzleloader hunt in the Chesnimnus hunt unit, removal of a three-point-or-better rule in the Snake River unit, and adoption of spike-only or any-elk bag limits for other northeast Oregon hunt units drew the most comment.

Elk populations are at historic highs in many areas of Oregon, rebounding from a near total loss in the state in the early part of the century. Despite the healthy numbers, biologists are concerned because northeast Oregon bull-to-cow ratios are generally below the 10-bulls-per-100 cows standard set in the 1993 Oregon Elk Management Plan.

Current season structures and regulations haven't increased the bull ratios, leading to the new regulations. Spike-only rules have been in place in the Walla Walla and Wenaha hunt units

for several years, and show dramatic improvement in mature bulls as percentage of the population.

"Two things drove these regulations - a need to increase bull ratios, and a need to provide as much recreation for hunters as possible," said Tom Keegan, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife deer and elk program leader.

A working group of landowners, sporting group representatives and biologists formed to develop the initial draft regulations. The department held public meetings and sent questionnaires to hunters seeking their comments. In general, said Keegan, hunters wanted to retain the "general season" opportunity. The new regulations provide a general season structure, but focus hunter effort on spike elk to help protect branch-antlered bulls, which scientists have found to be important for herd productivity.

— OREGON FISH AND WILDLIFE

MOUNTAIN LION MANAGEMENT

California Governor, Pete Wilson, signed Senate Bill 28 which enables the voters of that state to decide whether or not mountain lion management should again fall under the control of the California Fish and Game Department. The measure, sponsored by Sen. Tim Leslie, R-Carnelian, was largely prompted by the deaths of two women last year during mountain lion attacks in California.

"Californians have witnessed first hand the often deadly impact of managing wildlife by emotion, rather than with science," said John J. Jackson, III, president of Safari Club International. "It's been a hard-earned lesson, but thanks to the efforts of Sen. Leslie and that state's conservation groups, the voters will ultimately decide the direction of California's wildlife management in March."

Senator Leslie was quoted in a May 26 Los Angeles Times editorial as saying the measure would rid the state of "ballot box management" of species. Senate Bill 28 would erase a law passed in 1990, Proposition 117, which "permanently" stripped the California Fish and Game Department of its authority to manage that state's growing mountain lion population. The election will take place in March, 1996.

— SAFARI CLUB INTERNATIONAL

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