

# CAPITOL COMMENTS

## Landmark Wildlife and Conservation Legislation Progresses



**Rollin D. Sparrowe**

President  
Wildlife Management Institute

Professional Member  
Boone and Crockett Club

**It is in the tradition of the founders of our Club that we do everything we can to secure appropriate funding for fish and wildlife for future generations. We have taken the first giant step - now let's take the final one!**

**Truly bipartisan action** near the end of the first session of the 106th Congress has taken a giant step toward historical legislation to guide our nation's conservation, recreation and wildlife programs for decades to come. The Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) was passed out of The House Resources Committee to go to the full House for consideration next year. Not since enactment of the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson legislation more than 60 years ago has there been so much promise for improved funding for fish and wildlife restoration and conservation, as a foundation for the outdoor recreation we all enjoy.

There are significant issues yet to be overcome, such as continuing opposition from private property rights proponents, opposition from those who don't approve of government ownership of land, continuing concern from some environmental groups, and very strong feelings by the members of the Congressional Appropriations Committee, who generally don't support dedicated funding. But make no mistake, this committee action is a product of enthusiasm and hard work by a wide array of interest groups, and leadership by both conservative and liberal members of Congress. It is an issue whose time has come, as has been documented in *Fair Chase* in the past.

This committee action serves notice that the issues will not go away, and offers tremendous potential for further action when Congress reassembles next year. It is

important to note that the public, when asked, keeps repeating that open space, wildlife, even wilderness are high priority! The citizens of the United States consistently want more of the wild land legacy begun by the actions of Theodore Roosevelt 100 years ago.

### ISSUES AND COMPROMISES

From the beginning there have been few real issues about Title III of CARA, which provide funding for state fish and wildlife agencies. There is a well documented need for comprehensive fish and wildlife programs that go beyond those now supported by sportsmen's and sportswomen's dollars. While some remain concerned about future direction and emphasis in our state agencies, the surest way to maintain traditional wildlife management in the midst of change is to build on our wildlife agencies and keep them in the leadership role. Funding must be provided for programs to solve wildlife management problems before species decline, or face more federal restrictions on public use of land and wildlife.

The real controversies have centered around accusations by private property rights advocates that permanent annual funding of The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) at \$900 million per year will threaten private landowners. LWCF funding also became a target for Western conservatives who fear the measure will lead to more federal land purchases in their states, where the federal government already owns a large amount of the land. Some Western conservatives have aligned themselves behind a goal of no more federal land. Some environmental groups continue to believe that money to coastal states through Title I of the bill will be an incentive for further drilling, and feel this outweighs the benefits of the legislation.

These most polarized of views, presented stridently and

with claims of great potential for damage, have not been convincing to many in the leadership in the Congress. The new legislation passed by the House Resources Committee contains specific language to clarify the issues often raised as reasons to oppose the legislation. It offers additional protection to private landowners. Other legislation pending in Congress provides funding for schools to buffer the concern about losing the local tax base. The compromise version of CARA clarifies the control Congress has over any addition of lands.

Perhaps the most powerful counter to these concerns is the continuing widespread support for the legislation coming from almost all sectors of America. More than 40 of the 50 state governors, the National Governors Association, the Southern Governors Association, and the Western Governors Association have all supported the bill. A letter of support from more than 40 governors was read on the floor of the Congress and has received much attention.

On a more local level, the legislation is endorsed by The National Association of Counties, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and hundreds of elected local officials from every region of the nation. Large support groups continue to work on behalf of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and Fish and Wildlife Conservation Fund. The more than 3,000 member Teaming With Wildlife Coalition remains a strong force on behalf of wildlife programs.

Clearly, the legacy of Theodore Roosevelt embraces a strong public land base. For most Americans, our wildest, most satisfying hunting experiences will continue to be on those public lands. We as hunters have a fundamental stake in the careful, fair use of funds to provide additional public lands to maintain our outdoor traditions. LWCF is impor-

tant to us – it is our issue along with Title III.

Committee Chairman Don Young of Alaska and Ranking Minority member George Miller of California provided strong leadership through more than two months of intense negotiations. They were joined by Congressmen Billy Tauzin (Louisiana), Bruce Vento (Minnesota), Richard Pombo (California), Tom Udall (New Mexico), Chris John (Louisiana), John Dingell (Michigan) and their staffs in exceptional involvement in these negotiations. Their leadership paved the way for agreement by a majority of the committee members, while respecting the differences that other members had over parts of the bill. This bodes well for the potential of this bill to wind its way through the House next year. Clearly, this kind of bipartisan work on behalf of conservation and wildlife is what the people expect from their elected officials. The challenge now will be to elicit the same bipartisan leadership in the full House and Senate.

The Administration has been present in negotiations supporting the President's Land Legacy, a similar package of legislation that would fund LWCF and other programs. The President's Land Legacy proposal was deficient in not directly addressing fish and wildlife management needs at the state level. It focused too heavily on securing land, without providing for necessary management in the future. The make-up of the bill from the House Resources Committee gathers together the needs of proponents of the President's initiatives as well as the broader CARA legislation and Mr. Miller's own Resources 2000 bill. Full support from the Administration on this legislation will help the Congress objectively approach the work it needs to do.

#### **A BOONE AND CROCKETT ROLE**

Boone and Crockett Club members have awakened to the need for support for new funding for wildlife during the past year. President

#### **The Conservation and Reinvestment Act of 1999 (H.R. 701) would provide dedicated funding for the following:**

<b>PROGRAM</b>	<b>ANNUAL FUNDING</b>
Impact Assistance and Coastal Conservation	\$1 billion
Land and Water Conservation Fund Revitalization	\$900 million
Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Fund	\$350 million
Urban Park and Recreation Recovery	\$125 million
Historic Preservation Fund	\$100 million
Federal and Indian Lands Restoration	\$200 million
Conservation Easements and Species Recovery	\$150 million
Payment In-Lieu of Taxes and Refuge Revenue Sharing	\$200 million



Photograph by Neal Mishler

Not since enactment  
of the Pittman-  
Robertson and  
Dingell-Johnson  
legislation more than  
60 years ago has  
there been so much  
promise for improved  
funding for fish and  
wildlife restoration  
and conservation as  
a foundation for the  
outdoor recreation  
we all enjoy.

Dan Pedrotti's editorials on the topic, and Steve Mealey, Consulting Administrator, have provided leadership to involve members in advocating this important legislation. The presence of members Bob Model, Charlie Long, and Gil Adams, along with several professional members, in visits to Congress in September, was a welcome addition to other organizations who have been working to support new funding for wildlife. Such support will be needed equally next year when further discussion engages in the House, and the dialogue moves to the Senate. The Club has found a way to fill

an important niche in this all important dialogue!

Through the Wildlife Partners Network, the Club and other wildlife organizations have spoken to Congressional leadership as a block of groups representing the interests of sportsmen and sportswomen, saying that wildlife funding is needed and fundamentally sound. We will need to repeat this performance more than once to help this all important legislation over the top.

**FEDERAL AID TO  
WILDLIFE  
RESTORATION -  
CURRENT  
PROBLEMS**

A serious problem continues to threaten the future of CARA and the existing Federal Aid program that funds state wildlife agencies. A GAO investigation of the use of Administrative funds has revealed very poor record keeping,

inappropriate use of funds for travel and moving costs, and lack of sound processes to use excess administrative funds for projects that should directly benefit wildlife conservation and the states.

Keep in mind this issue refers only to a portion of the 8 percent of wildlife funds provided by law for administrative costs to the Fish and Wildlife Service. There are no indications that there are problems with Service administration of the large percent of the funds that go directly to the states for wildlife programs. Basically, the root of the problem is that there have been inadequate guidelines for how the Administrative funds are to be spent.

Confounding this scandal is that personnel and related issues were reportedly mishandled in the Service. Allegations of anti-hunting sentiment and even grants to anti-hunting groups emerged. The record shows that the personnel issues are being handled through legal and procedural channels - as they should. The record also shows that Federal Aid funds were not used to pay for grants to groups who oppose hunting. There has been no evidence, as has been reported, of "stealing from sportsmen."

Certainly, sportsmen and sportswomen expect these administrative blunders to be fixed. Unfortunately, GAO testified at two hearings but so far does not plan to issue a final report. Normally, they would issue a report with specific findings and recommendations, and the agency (FWS) would respond point by point. Until GAO finishes its job there will be finger pointing and allegations, but no closure to the issue.

The Fish and Wildlife Service remains an important partner in administration and essential oversight of Federal Aid Programs. A regular FWS audit process of state programs is underway (and long overdue) and its findings demonstrate the need for this partnership

and oversight. There is a joint State-Federal committee at work now, preparing recommendations for improvements as needed. These businesslike approaches to Federal Aid issues are what is needed - not rumors and accusations.

Why is this important here in the content of CARA? Because this controversy has been widely and inaccurately reported and threatens support for CARA and the basic Federal Aid Program. Club members encountered concerns about it from Congressional visits. CARA as written doesn't include administrative funding for new programs. That can't work. The House Resources Committee appears ready to provide a legislative fix for the demonstrated problem with FWS administration of Federal Aid. This should pave the way for the clearheaded provision for administrative funding for CARA within appropriate guidelines. Let's help put this issue to bed. It can damage our chances to take the biggest step for wildlife in over 60 years.

**THE ROOSEVELT LEGACY**

President Theodore Roosevelt moved in a timely and courageous matter to establish major segments of public lands for America unrivaled in the world. The National Forests and other public lands provide a framework for hunting and outdoor recreation unexcelled in the world. Management of wildlife on those public lands, and on the 70 percent of our country that is privately owned, is the responsibility of the states. More than 60 years ago sportsmen and sportswomen led the way to establish permanent funding for our current state wildlife agencies. Those agencies have the authority and mission to conserve all wildlife - let's give them the tools they need by passing CARA. It is in the tradition of the founders of our Club that we do everything we can to secure appropriate funding for fish and wildlife for future generations. We have taken the first giant step - now let's take the final one! ▲▲▲