

CAPITOL COMMENTS



Steven Williams, Ph.D.
PROFESSIONAL MEMBER
Boone and Crockett Club
PRESIDENT
Wildlife Management
Institute

The Cost of Success

The White House Conference on North American Wildlife Policy has come and gone, the participants headed home, the chairs and tables folded up, and banners and posters removed from the site. As *Fair*

Chase has reported, months of preparation preceded the conference last October in Reno, Nevada. Prior to the conference,

technical and policy experts developed white papers on the most important issues confronting wildlife conservation and hunting. The conference provided a forum for the conservation community to express various opinions and concerns regarding the future of wildlife conservation. The White House administration reviewed these issues, challenges, and opportunities and is developing a formal 10-year action plan to direct federal agencies to sustain wildlife conservation and hunting.

The challenges facing wildlife

conservation and hunting are numerous, complex, and critical. How the administration and Congress accept the action plan and other recommendations contained in the white papers will be crucial for continued conservation success. The White House Conference provided a working session and commemoration of progress made in the last eight years. However, as a new administration and Congress arrives in Washington, we must put aside any celebration and put our collective shoulders to the wheel to assure that last year's work was not in vain. Given the nation's current situation, the Sporting Conservation Council (SCC), American Wildlife Conservation Partners, other groups and individuals will have a great struggle to keep wildlife conservation and hunting in Washington's spotlight. How will we engage the next president and his staff to address the challenges that we have identified? This is a daunting question given the nation's (and the world's) economic condition, natural resource demands, international relations, national security, and the myriad of other issues that confront our nation's leaders.

In fact, the root cause of many of the issues identified by hunters and conservationists are inextricably tied to the larger issues confronting the nation. The funding crisis that federal and state wildlife agencies face is real and potentially crippling. These agencies cannot meet the broad mandates



Bob Model

Dick Cheney

Director for Agriculture, Lands and Wildlife, Greg Schildwachter (standing) addresses the attendees at the closing summary session of the White House Conference on North American Wildlife Policy. Also pictured is Mark Rey, Undersecretary for Natural Resources and the Environment and a B&C Professional member. Schildwachter is also B&C Professional member and one of the Club's early B&C Fellows. Attendees also heard speeches from notables such as former B&C president Bob Model (far left) and Vice President Dick Cheney (near left) who addressed the crowd. "The men and women in this room understand what conservation is all about," said the Vice President. "It means reverence toward creation, a commitment to faithful stewardship. It means guarding our spectacular wildlife populations -- not just for our own time, but for all time."

and challenges associated with managing all fish and wildlife species and their habitats without additional resources to supplement and complement the funds provided by hunters and anglers. The increased demand for energy development and its affiliated impact on wildlife habitat exacerbates the need for funding in those states located in the energy-rich areas of the country. Adaptation to climate change impacts will not be accomplished without a substantial infusion of new funds to conduct the monitoring and adaptive management necessary to assure that future generations experience the wildlife species, habitats, and opportunities that we enjoy today.

Additional funding will also be required to address other issues identified in the white papers and at the conference. Improving access to private and public lands will require voluntary incentive-based programs, access easements to open landlocked public lands, strategic land acquisitions, and increased operational and maintenance costs. Active management to improve habitat conditions and maintain healthy forest and range lands will require a more significant financial commitment than is presently available. Opening public lands to provide more hunting opportunities

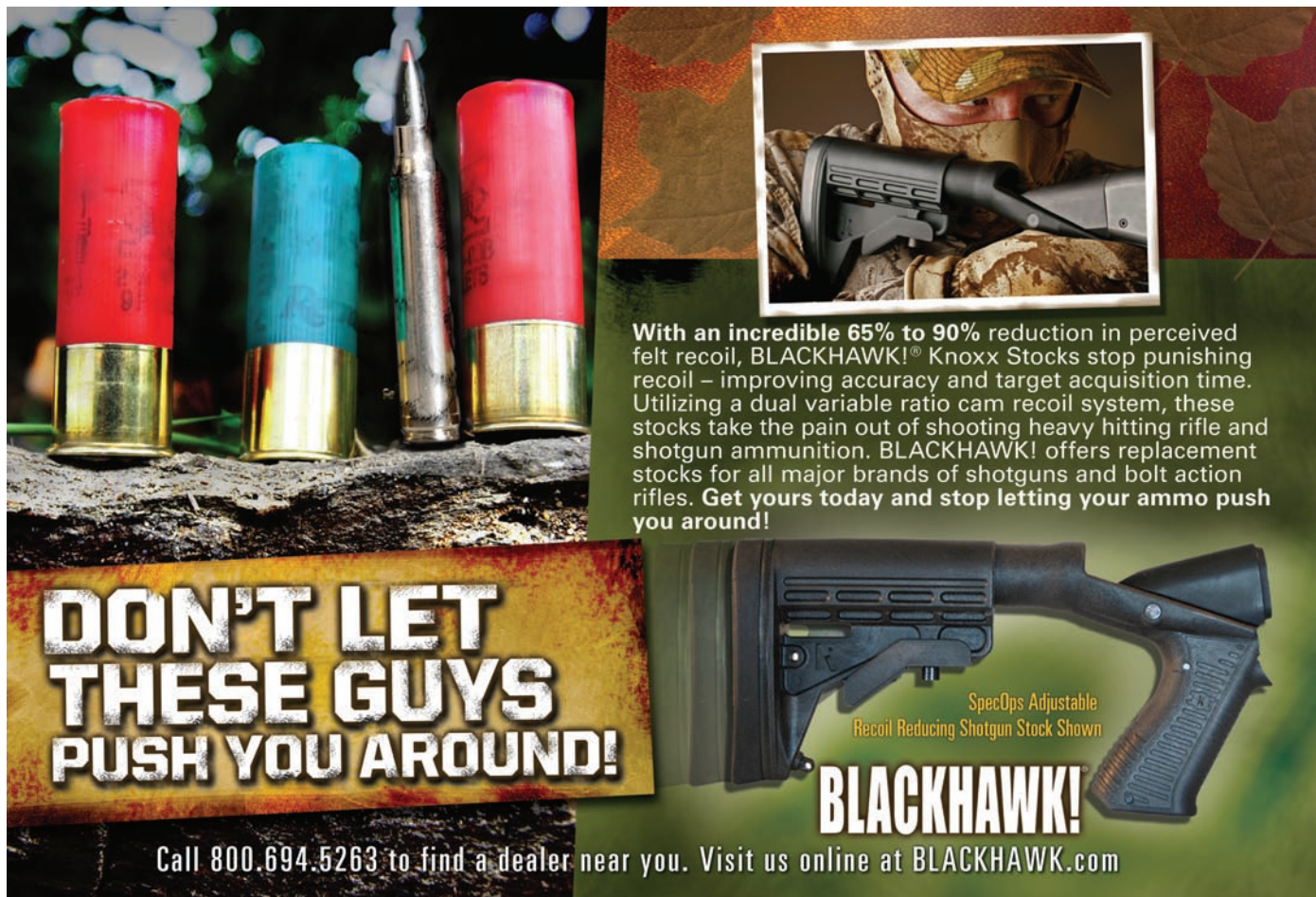
will only be accomplished with additional staff and money to conduct the environmental analyses and planning necessary to comply with federal and/or state legal requirements. Virtually every recommendation provided in the SCC white papers will require the reprogramming of inadequate, existing resources or provision of additional resources to agencies charged in carrying out the recommendations.

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One surefire way to evaluate the commitment of the administration and Congress to sustaining wildlife conservation and hunting is to evaluate their commitment to funding the activities to accomplish the mission. We have seen the nation's financial commitment to support efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, to prop up failing financial institutions, to conduct

expensive political campaigns, to meet the demands of healthcare and entitlement programs, and to address numerous social concerns. Meanwhile, federal and state agencies responsible for managing the nation's wildlife resources, in trust for the American public, have experienced years of declining financial support. Surely we can convince our nation's leaders to invest in wildlife resources based on the economic, ecological, and social values that wildlife provides.

While our community basked in the glow of a presidential executive order establishing a successful national conference on hunting and conservation, the financial resources needed to meet the requirements of that executive order were being used for other national needs. We can dwell on what we did last October or we can commit to holding agencies responsible to finish and implement the action plan described in the executive order. We also must commit to helping those agencies obtain the necessary funding to accomplish the tasks ahead. I submit that the true measure of our community's influence will be evident in the financial budgets of federal and state wildlife agencies in the years to come. ■



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