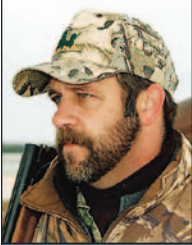


CAPITOL COMMENTS

Our Enhanced Influence



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In the summer 2011 issue of *Fair Chase*, I bemoaned the fact that the House of Representatives had offered a fiscal year (FY) 2011 budget that posed draconian cuts in conservation funding. Wiser heads eventually prevailed and federal conservation programs

did receive reduced appropriations that limited agency programs; however, the budget did not eliminate programs as submitted by the House. As promised, the fight associated with the FY2011 budget was only a sparring match compared to the fistcuffs associated with the FY2012 budget. However, during this round of budget negotiations, a powerful, new entity has entered the ring.

America's Voice for Conservation, Recreation and Preservation is a bipartisan coalition of 1,000 organizations that represent tens of millions of Americans who enjoy conservation, outdoor recreation, and cultural and historical preservation. These organizations represent national, regional, state, and local interests and industries and associations that support and exist because of the natural and historic resources of our nation. Formed in reaction to the 2011 budget and in anticipation of the 2012 budget, this coalition has compiled information on the economic and employment impact associated with conservation, outdoor recreation, and historic preservation. Those of us who care about conservation, hunting, fishing, hiking, bird watching, wildlife refuges, national forests, national parks and battlefields contribute more than \$1.06 trillion to the economy. We support 9.4 million jobs. These activities contribute \$107 billion in federal and state income taxes each year. Armed with this information and strong bipartisan leadership, this unprecedented coalition has already had a positive influence on budget discussions but the job is far from done.

For the 2012 budget, the House once again proposed substantial budget cuts to conservation funding. The cuts were not as draconian as in 2011; however, they would

seriously harm the sustainability of conservation programs. The House slashed funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, the National Wildlife Refuge System, state and tribal wildlife grants, the Forest Legacy Program, and the Farm Bill conservation title, to name a few. The Senate has yet to take formal action on the conservation budget, but it did circulate a draft which, although below the enacted FY10 and FY11 budgets and the FY12 administration request, demonstrated a more careful consideration which balances conservation spending levels with the need to control all federal spending.

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As of this writing, the budget negotiations are in flux and the congressional "super committee" has shown little progress in resolving necessary spending cuts that must total \$1.2 trillion over the next decade. Without action from the super committee and congressional approval of its plan, all bets are off with respect to conservation funding. Without an agreement, Congress must enact an across-the-board budget cut for all categories of discretionary spending. The current Senate draft would result in a more acceptable budget for conservation than the mandatory nine percent across-the-board reduction. That would amount to an approximately \$600 billion cut for domestic programs.

While the efforts of the America's Voice for Conservation, Recreation and Preservation coalition continues to influence congressional action on the budget, the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council (WHHCC) continues to affect

national policy issues. The WHHCC is a federal advisory committee comprised of 18 conservation leaders who provide advice to the secretaries of Interior and Agriculture. A number of WHHCC members are also regular or professional members of the Boone and Crockett Club. In mid-November, the WHHCC will meet to discuss and provide advice to the secretaries with respect to hunter recruitment and retention, Farm Bill funding, Bureau of Land Management recreational shooting policy, intergovernmental coordination, the Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports, and other topics. I will report on those discussions in future *Fair Chase* issues.

The political power of sportsmen has been enhanced by our affiliation with other outdoor recreationists and historical preservationists. The direct involvement of chief executive officers from organizations that have rarely worked together to support conservation and historic preservation funding may seem like proverbial strange bedfellows; however, it is apparent that there is strength in numbers and diversity. The work of the WHHCC under the Obama administration and the Sportsmen Conservation Council under the Bush administration is a clear indication that both political parties intended to include hunter-conservationists in their decision-making processes.

One hundred years ago, the Boone and Crockett Club could not have imagined that a 1,000-member coalition of diverse organizations would rally together to protect federal conservation funding. The Club could not have imagined that formal advisory committees comprised of sportsmen would be established to provide guidance to the secretaries of Interior and Agriculture. Club members have helped make this happen. However, the real proof of our influence will be on display when Congress submits its budget to the president and when federal land management agencies act on our policy advice. Meanwhile, Club members have the responsibility to let their congressional delegation know what conservation funding and policy means to you and that you will be watching how they vote on these issues. ■