

# WILL WE SEE A “SCIENCE-BASED” BUDGET?

Last issue I lamented the lack of understanding about basic science and the role that science plays in government decisions. I thought I would move on to another topic for this issue, but prior to putting fingers to keys, I read a *Washington Post* article that reported a curious story about the use of certain terms. It was reported that the employees at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) were informed by CDC leadership that they should not submit a budget proposal that included the following terms: “vulnerable,” “entitlement,” “diversity,” “transgender,” “fetus,” “evidence-based,” or “science-based.” I cannot comprehend the rationale for that supervisory instruction. I suppose the elimination of the first five terms can be explained, if not defended, by ideological polemics; however, the most troubling terms that were apparently deemed off-limits were “evidence-based” and “science-based.”

The CDC is an essential federal agency with respect to human health issues. Because “science” and “evidence” are integral to their mission, it is hard to imagine why the use of those terms has apparently been stricken from their lexicon. There were similar allegations that the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Interior have demurred on the use of the term “climate change” in numerous documents and websites. It is too early to judge how the administration will handle climate change going

forward. What is most troubling to me is the apparent downplaying of science’s role in federal agencies. Three major science programs come to mind immediately, all of interest to wildlife conservationists and those who enjoy the results of wildlife resource management.

The Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, U.S. Geological Survey, and the Forest Service each have a number of budget line items that support research and management on our public lands. These funds are essential for ongoing surveys, monitoring, and research focused on fish and wildlife that inhabit these lands. Because many public lands support critical summer and winter ranges for big game populations, the Boone and Crockett Club has a direct stake in the future funding associated with each of the federal agencies identified above. These science-based programs also support and supplement the work of state fish and wildlife agencies.

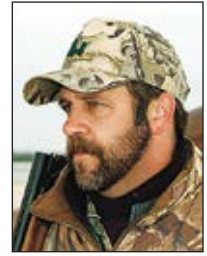
In the past, I have written about the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCC) that exist across the country. LCCs consist of federal and state resource agencies and conservation organizations. LCCs were developed to prioritize research programs for those species that cross state lines and to address regional conservation challenges such as climate change and human development’s encroachment on wildlife habitat. Somewhat controversial when proposed, LCCs have proven their worth

to federal and state agencies in many areas of the country. All indications are that LCCs will not be funded in the upcoming president’s budget request (PBR). This would lead to termination of a promising and innovative partnership and approach to fish and wildlife conservation among state and federal resource agencies.

Although the LCC model is relatively new, the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units (Unit) have been a stalwart of fish and wildlife research since 1935. A cooperative endeavor among state fish and wildlife agencies, the federal government, universities and the Wildlife Management Institute, the Unit program is focused on applied science to assist resource management agencies, training the next generation of fish and wildlife professionals, and providing technical assistance to apply the latest science tools and technologies. The Boone and Crockett Club and its members were instrumental in the initiation of the Unit program (see *Fair Chase Winter 2014*). Currently, 40 units exist in 38 states. A number of states have expressed an interest in starting new units within their own universities (a powerful testament to the accomplishments of the Unit program). Thousands of fish and wildlife professionals owe their early careers to the Unit program, including myself.

Because the Unit program is a science-based program that does not directly align with the research and development priorities expressed in an August 17, 2017

## CAPITOL COMMENTS



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Office of Management and Budget memo to all executive departments and agencies, we must be focused on how Congress reacts to the PBR. I am optimistic that the value of this esteemed program will be recognized and it will be adequately funded; however, we all should be scrutinizing the PBR numbers when they come out this spring.

At the time of this writing, we cannot know the funding levels that have been proposed in the president’s budget request but we should be vigilant and prepared to defend the very programs that are integral to fish and wildlife management on our nation’s public and private lands. Ultimately, Congress has the final say on funding levels and appropriations. In the meantime, we must let them know that evidence-based and science-based decisions are necessary for proper fish and wildlife management. As a Club, there is plenty of evidence that we have made historic investments in science programs at the federal, state, and university levels. Will we preserve that proud heritage or let it fail? ■