

SEEING THE FORESTS FOR THE TREES

FROM THE
PRESIDENT



B.B. Hollingsworth, Jr.
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The Boone and Crockett Club has long “seen the forests for the trees.” One of the Club’s early efforts was aimed at the development and passage by the U.S. Congress of the Timberland Reserve Act in 1891, which reserved approximately 36 million acres for national forests. The Club later helped create and establish the National Forest System and the federal agency to oversee it. In the past 20 years, the Club has worked to create a system for the conservation and management of private forest land.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nationwide, public forestlands comprise 316 million acres (37 percent) and private forestlands comprise 423 million acres (63 percent). We recognize that forests—public and private—are the lifeblood for many species of wildlife, providing critical food, water, shelter, and space. And we realize that forests, if managed improperly, often have impaired ability to perform their vital wildlife habitat functions. Despite the great work of the Boone and Crockett Club relative to all forests, broader swaths of society do not always recognize how to manage our forests for a multitude of benefits. Those of you—members of this great Club—who possess valuable time and treasure for conservation, are uniquely positioned to increase the visibility of forest management and its connection with wildlife management in society at large.

In addition to management, there are big problems

on national forests regarding fire. More than 60 million acres of national forests are at high risk of wildfire or in need of restoration. More than 40 million acres are in the interior West alone. In the past 10 years, over 65 million acres have burned—with approximately 10 million acres burned in 2015 alone, killing 11 firefighters. Federal foresters estimate that an astounding 190 million acres of land managed by the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior are at unnatural risk to catastrophic wildfire, millions of which are infected by insect and disease.

From a Forest Service perspective, wildfires average 6.9 million acres burned annually since 2000. It was approximately 3 million acres annually before 2000. In 1995, fire made up 16 percent of their annual appropriated budget. In 2015, fire made up 52 percent of their appropriated budget. That is a decrease in 36 percent of their funds that would be used for other activities, including research, wildlife habitat improvements, and maintenance. All of this poses a massive threat to the health, diversity, and sustainability of America’s forests, although the tragic loss of human life and property understandably occupy the forefront of wildfire-related news cycles and overshadow the wildlife impacts.

Fire suppression policies and reduced timber harvest in recent decades have altered natural disturbance cycles, promoting forest diseases, insect infestations, and unnaturally large fuel loads

that contribute to wildfires. Even before the onset of wildfires, overgrown forests can be starving grounds that offer poor habitats for deer, elk, game birds, and other species, which may move to new areas—some with limited hunting access—in search of suitable habitats.

With the proper forest reforms, professionally trained wildlife biologists and foresters can restore these cherished landscapes back to a healthy condition by recommending proactive forest management that blends ecologically informed timber harvest and prescribed fire to safeguard wildlife habitats and populations. However, challenges arise and wildlife populations suffer when obstructionists prevent science-based forest management practices

from being implemented—as has been the case in certain areas of the United States—resulting in catastrophic wildfires and loss of human lives and property.

From a hunting perspective, the canopy closure of these dense, overgrown forests creates reduced hunter success rates, which leads to fewer license sales, which equates to less money for state fish and wildlife agencies. This is especially true with mule deer and elk in the West and whitetail deer in the East; these species depend on early forest succession stages for



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forbs, shrubs, and other food sources. The decline in forest conservation projects has resulted in a precipitous decline in species that are dependent on young forest habitat.

If you are interested in climate change, you can't separate the cause or contributing factors to the solution from active forest management and good forest health. They are linked. Wildfires emit carbon that contributes to poor air quality. Healthy forests, as well as forest products, are a carbon sink, sequestering carbon that would otherwise be emitted into the atmosphere.

Reforms are needed nationwide, not only in the western U.S. where the role of the federal government is largest. Fire is the biggest issue and must be addressed at

its root cause, which is the fire-prone condition of U.S. forests, particularly on public lands. The costs of wildfire and other forest management issues are secondary issues that can be solved by promoting more management because forestry—like wildlife conservation—can often pay its own bills.

While the diversity of opinions and viewpoints regarding forest management is making it difficult to sway some members of Congress to support a proactive approach to forest management, the Boone and Crockett Club is currently playing a critical role in working to achieve an agreement in Congress on a forest management and wildfire fix that is beneficial for humans, forests, and wildlife alike. Forest health and the integrity of

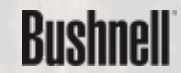
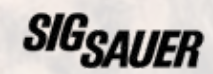
our cherished wildlife populations are interwoven.

The Boone and Crockett Club is extremely pleased that a professional forester, Tony Tooke, is the new chief of the Forest Service. He will oversee the agency to get our forests working again and make them better for a diversity of wildlife. These reforms are the tools he needs. The Club looks forward to working with Chief Tooke in conserving and protecting one of the most important resources in our great nation—our forests—for the benefit of generations to come. Join me as we continue our rich tradition of seeing the forest for the trees. ■



LEARN MORE:

- Page 32 in the Fall 2017 issue of *Fair Chase* addresses Boone and Crockett Club's position on wildlife conservation, the state of our Western federal forests and wildfire funding.
- Boone-Crockett.org lists our archived press releases regarding forest health.
- See how the Club has been influential in the two-part series in Fall 2011 and Winter 2011 issues of *Fair Chase*, written by the late Jack Ward Thomas.



THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB ASKS THAT YOU PLEASE THANK OUR TRAILBLAZERS WITH YOUR PATRONAGE.