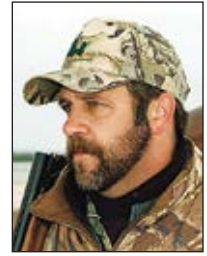


CHANGING TIRES ON A MOVING VEHICLE

CAPITOL
COMMENTS



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For most of my life, I have driven old pickups. Living in the country, flat tires are routine. Each time it happens, I buy and mount new tires that get me on my way. After I change the tire, my pickup continues to take me where I want to go. The truck, it turns out, is more important than the tires. After the change, it keeps on going sometimes better, sometimes worse. At the risk of savaging a simile, our country is like the truck and the tires are like the administration on which the truck runs.

We are now in the early months of a new president and a full transition of power to the Republican Party. As conservationists, we can all hold our collective breaths or breathe deeply, confident that our issues will be addressed. In reality, neither action is warranted at this time. The coming months will indicate what the implications are for the natural resources that sustain and inspire us. As always, the Boone and Crockett Club will need to position itself to remain a force for wildlife conservation. That positioning should not assume anything, and it should be ready to adapt to positive and negative signs from the new administration and Congress.

At the time of this writing, the secretaries of Interior and Agriculture have been nominated and confirmed by the Senate. On the first morning of his new position, Secretary of Interior Ryan Zinke met with representatives of national hunting and angling organizations. He decisively told us that he would listen to our concerns and restore our

rightful place in the conservation dialogue. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue had a very late start in his new role at the department. Neither individual had much of an opportunity to influence the budget blueprint released by the Office of Management and Budget. However, the document does provide insight into the new administration's approach to conservation policy that both secretaries will inherit and carry out.

In order to address priorities, the presidential "skinny" budget request (PBR) reallocates \$54 billion from non-defense, discretionary funding to programs aimed at advancing the "safety and security of the American people." One would be hard pressed to find fault with that aim; however, as with all hard choices, it matters whose ox gets gored in the process. Congress will certainly have its say on the budget and appropriations for departments across the federal government but the PBR does provide a blueprint for the administration's policy priorities.

On a general level, the PBR espouses the desire for agencies to be more effective, productive, efficient, and transparent in their use of taxpayers' dollars. Numerous executive orders have been signed in an effort to curtail regulations and federal hiring, reorganize the executive branch of government, and further ethics reform. Recently the president has appointed his son-in-law to a post with the intent of bringing business management principles to government management. Each of these

measures is intended to better operate the federal government and contain spending. However, for those of us who have worked in state or federal governments, these are familiar refrains heard with each new administration. As in the past, time will tell how much of this ambitious agenda will be accomplished.

The PBR does not provide great detail about individual conservation programs, though it does provide insight into the future of conservation policy. As proposed, the PBR would reduce the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) budget by 21 percent. Reductions would occur, in part, due to closing USDA service centers across the country and a reduction in funding for land acquisition associated with the National Forest System. Impacts to Farm Bill programs are unknown at this time and Farm Bill deliberations are in full swing within Congress. As conservationists, we will want to carefully watch the government's services to private landowners with respect to technical assistance and private land conservation efforts.

The Department of Interior (DOI) budget is slated for a reduction of 12 percent. Proposed cuts to land acquisitions, streamlining administrative offices in both Washington, D.C., and in the regions, reduced construction and major maintenance project funding, and lower Payment-in-Lieu of Taxes combine to achieve part of the proposed reduction. Detailed impacts to DOI agency programs are unknown and demand our attention. Some members of Congress

continue their push for the transfer of federal lands to states and/or private interests. Others have expressed the desire for amending the Endangered Species Act. The Environmental Protection Agency budget has been proposed for a 31 percent reduction and would turn much of the current environmental monitoring and enforcement responsibility over to states and tribes.

How Congress treats this blueprint in its budget negotiations is yet unknown. It does establish policy markers that Congress must consider. Every new administration offers its perspective on how government should operate and spend. Like fitting a truck with tires, each time I have experienced this situation, I have been offered re-treads or new tires. Sometimes the tires get kicked and mounted, and sometimes the tires get kicked down the road or into the gutter. By all indications so far, the Boone and Crockett Club should have better access to the selection and implementation of conservation programs on which our country will run. It is up to us to monitor the tread and tire pressure. ■