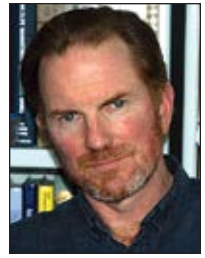


# WHO REALLY DOES FUND CONSERVATION?

## SCIENCE BLASTS



JOHN F. ORGAN  
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Director of the Cooperative Fish  
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**Those of us in the hunting community take great pride in the fact the dollars we spend on hunting licenses, firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment are the financial backbone of state-based wildlife conservation. The Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Program (see *Fair Chase Summer 2016 "From the President"*) was established in 1937 to direct the existing excise tax on firearms and ammunition to state fish and wildlife agencies for wildlife restoration purposes. Amendments to the act in the 1970s established excise taxes on handguns and archery equipment and established funding for hunter education programs. In recent years, as hunter numbers have declined and firearm sales have skyrocketed, there has been a great deal of speculation as to whether the bulk of the funding is coming from hunters or recreational sport shooters. Some have questioned whether hunters can continue to stake their claim as the major funders of wildlife conservation.**

Enter Mark Damian Duda and his team at Responsive Management (*responsive-management.com*). Mark is a specialist in human dimensions of fish and wildlife who did his graduate work under the late, legendary Dr. Steve Kellert at the Yale School of Forestry. For the last 30 years or so, Mark has worked with virtually every conservation agency in the United States and major stakeholders in the

outdoor industry, including the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), to help managers and policymakers understand the public they serve, and industry leaders to respond to trends in society.

Mark has collected and compiled voluminous socio-economic data on hunters, sport shooters, and hunting. In a recent article published in *The Wildlife Professional* (volume 11, issue number 2), Mark, along with coauthors Tom Beppler and myself, address the issue of hunters versus sport shooters. Comparing survey data from 2012, 2014, and 2016 (2016 data just arrived, and were not incorporated in the article referenced) compiled by Responsive Management for NSSF, there has been an increase in those who target shoot but don't hunt, an increase in those who target shoot and hunt, and a decrease in those who hunt but don't target shoot. The single largest cohort among the three groups is those who target shoot but don't hunt (51.4 percent), and the trend from 2012 (38.7 percent), 2014 (44.2 percent), and 2016 (51.4 percent) shows this group is on the increase. Similar trends in archery are revealed through Responsive Management surveys conducted in 2012, 2014, and 2015: an increase in those who target archery and do not bowhunt, and a decline in those who bowhunt only. During 2015, 65 percent of archery participants in the United States were target archers only (i.e., did not bowhunt) while only 12 percent were

bowhunters only (23 percent bowhunted and were target archers as well).

What does this mean for hunting and conservation? It means that wildlife managers and policymakers need to pay attention if the Wildlife Restoration Fund is to continue to get paid by those who purchase the products that are taxed. In 1937 it was a bold, but clear decision for the firearms manufacturers to allow the excise tax to extend beyond its scheduled sunset in 1938. After all, those who bought guns and ammo were mostly hunters, and if there was no wildlife to hunt, it would be bad for business. Eighty years later the playing field has changed. Sport shooters today are similar to hunters demographically in that they are mostly male and rural, but the recent growth has primarily come from young women in urban areas—not your average bubba!

The checks written by the manufacturers who pay the excise tax are the largest ones they write. As savvy business people, they want to ensure their investments provide a return and are relevant to their customer base; that's what prompted them in 1937. State fish and wildlife agencies function as trustees of the wildlife public trust, and the public (all state residents) are their shareholders. The industry customers (shooters and hunters) are a minority segment of the agency shareholders, but they pay the bills. What can be done to ensure their continued support? Enter Mark Duda and

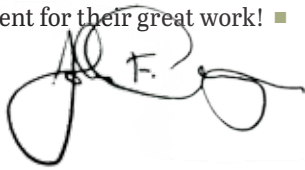
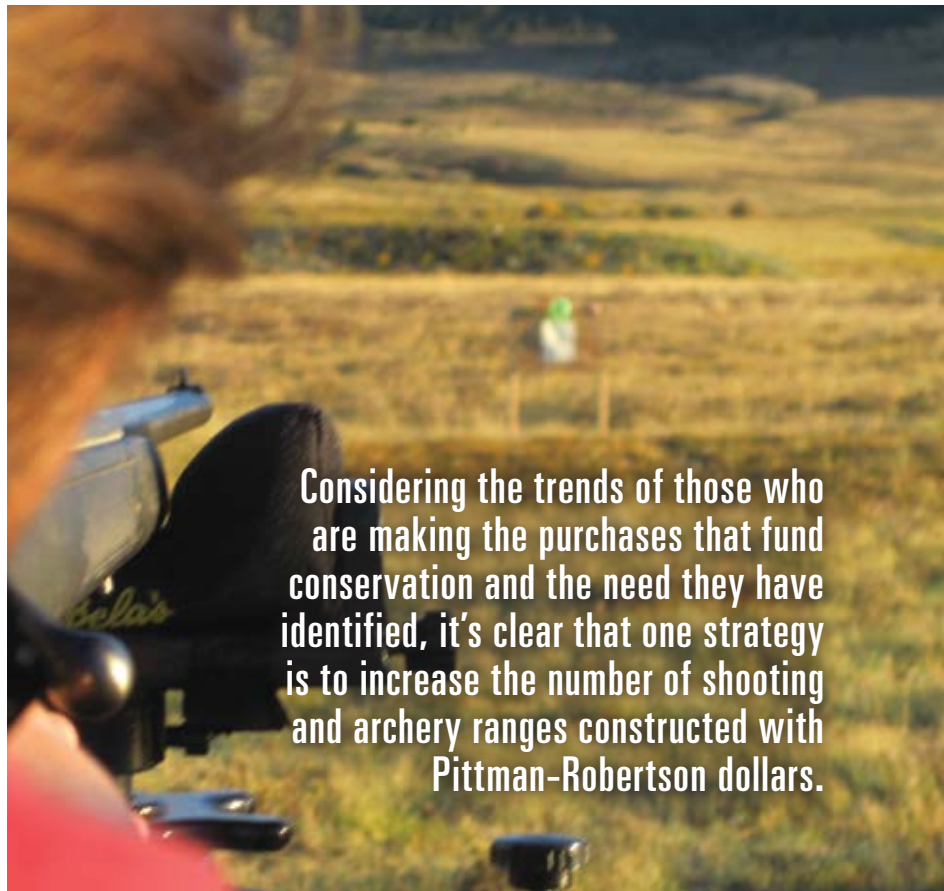
Responsive Management again. Their social science work has indicated that the primary concern of sport shooters is having access nearby to shooting ranges.

Considering the trends of those who are making the purchases that fund conservation and the need they have identified, it's clear that one strategy is to increase the number of shooting and archery ranges constructed with Pittman-Robertson dollars. State fish and wildlife agency staff have greatly increased their expertise in shooting range construction, as has the staff of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program who oversee and approve use of the funds. Much of this is due to workshops conducted by the National Rifle Association and NSSF. The training provided has helped state and federal biologists and hunter education specialists navigate the regulations and understand the best practices associated with range construction. Having more ranges will be a great benefit to hunters as well, as we need to keep our skills honed.

One other take-home message from Responsive Management's work: given the increasing number of people who like to shoot but do not hunt, we need to create the

opportunities to inform them about conservation and the role they play in ensuring our wildlife legacy will endure for generations to come. They may not think they directly benefit from wildlife conservation, but I would challenge them to imagine how they would feel living in a land where there were no grizzlies, no elk, no pileated woodpeckers or chickadees. Wildlife touches everyone emotionally, whether they admit it or not. A visit to any big city in the world will demonstrate that the big advertising agencies learned this a long time ago—the jumbotrons and other big advertising displays seem to mostly feature the animals we have conserved in their ads! We can capitalize in other ways as well—those who have purchased firearms and archery equipment for sport and target shooting only could be a source of new hunters. If, as data indicate, the new participants in sport shooting are largely urban and female, we have the opportunity to cultivate appreciation for conservation in a market we have had limited access to before.

Kudos to Mark Duda and his team at Responsive Management for their great work! ■

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