

# CAPITOL COMMENTS



Steven Williams, Ph.D.  
PROFESSIONAL MEMBER  
Boone and Crockett Club  
PRESIDENT  
Wildlife Management  
Institute

## Time for Responsible Compromise

The mood in Washington at the end of July was contentious at best. The partisan and within-party rancor was extreme, and there is little evidence it will improve any time in the near future. Members of Congress left for their five-week

summer recess without completing their work on Interior or Agriculture appropriation bills, the Farm Bill, or a plan to avoid a government shutdown after October 1. When Congress returns in September, they must wrestle with these—and other—responsibilities, as well as the impending issue of the federal debt limit that is predicted to be reached sometime this fall. Once again, crisis management will dictate how we move forward as a nation.

Last issue I wrote about my perception of a Congress that was snarled and did little to move legislation or important national issues forward. Unfortunately my perception was confirmed. Appropriation bills (arguably the most important Congressional action) languish in committees with little sign of compromise or resolution. Immigration reform and the Farm Bill remain unresolved. However, the conservation community should acknowledge some notable legislative actions.

The Senate subcommittee passed appropriations for the Department of Interior that would provide \$1 billion more than the \$9.7 billion the House version recommended, but still \$66 million less than requested. The House version eliminated funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund; if this stands, it will be the first time in its 50-year history. In recognition of the continued threat of catastrophic wildfires, both the House and Senate significantly increased funding for prevention and fighting wildfires within the Department of Interior and the U.S. Forest Service. This positive development was accomplished by offsetting reductions in other agency programs.

The House version eliminated funding for the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program (\$58.1 million enacted in FY13), North American Wetlands Conservation Fund (\$33.6 million enacted in FY13), and Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (\$3.6 million enacted in FY13). It also reduced funding for the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund. If enacted, these reductions would hamper efforts to conserve the imperiled prairie pothole region of this continent and state and federal efforts to keep species in need of conservation off the Threatened and

---

**The task facing Congress when it returns to Washington is daunting. Our lackluster economy, federal debt, mandatory spending obligations, and discretionary spending reductions demand that our nation confront fiscal realities and prioritize government responsibilities in a measured and objective manner.**

---

Endangered Species lists. The House bill would reduce funding for the Fish and Wildlife Service by 27 percent. As a former director of that agency and aware of previous budget cuts, I can assure you that the nation's largest fish and wildlife conservation agency, in spite of its best efforts, will be unable to meet its mission of "working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people."

Discussions will continue and hopefully some compromise will occur to avoid these draconian cuts. However, as Yogi Berra once commented, "It seems like déjà vu all over again." Federal resource agencies were faced with similar reductions during the FY11 appropriations' process (see the Summer

2011 issue of *Fair Chase*). At that time they fared better than originally expected, but conservation funding still took a major hit. This time around however, there were some positive bills submitted for legislative action.

The current Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council (WHHCC) was established by executive order. Numerous Boone and Crockett Club members are members of the council. H.R. 2799, the Sportsmen's Heritage and Recreational Enhancement Act, would establish the WHHCC by law (a key recommendation in the *Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation, Ten-Year Plan for Implementation*). If H.R. 2799 passes, sportsmen and women will have a direct line of communication to the departments of Interior and Agriculture. H.R. 2208, the North American Wetlands Conservation Extension Act of 2013, would reauthorize this critical wetland conservation funding source until 2017. H.R. 1825, the Recreational Fishing and Hunting Heritage and Opportunities Act, would help keep National Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands open to public hunting and recreational shooting.

The task facing Congress when it returns to Washington is daunting. Our lackluster economy, federal debt, mandatory spending obligations, and discretionary spending reductions demand that our nation confront fiscal realities and prioritize government responsibilities in a measured and objective manner. Ideologues on both sides of the aisle must take a backseat or learn to embrace cooperation and compromise. Statesmen and stateswomen must act on behalf of the nation and all their constituents rather than the primary voters of their often gerrymandered districts. I am optimistic that before we reach a tipping point, Congress will act decisively and in the best interest of the nation as a whole. The issue of natural resource conservation is neither a Republican nor a Democrat issue; it is a national issue that will direct the future of our economy and our quality of life. ■