

PUBLIC LAND STEWARDSHIP

FROM THE
PRESIDENT



Morrison Stevens, Sr.
PRESIDENT

I want to thank John Organ and Russ Mason for their review of public lands from a historical perspective and the evolution of the management of public lands, as well as for their thought-provoking conclusions.

Most of us have been major witnesses to the recent efforts in Washington, D.C. to transfer federal trust lands to states, or otherwise buy or sell these lands. Federal lands are the foundation of the most successful conservation system in the world, which was established by Theodore Roosevelt and the founders of your organization, the Boone and Crockett Club.

However, public lands are being inadequately managed due to reduced funding, routine litigation, and complicated regulations. These issues are not simple, but they could and should be fixed through a stronger commitment to good public policy, including the legacy of American conservation. But, to manage the intricate system of public lands, adequate funding is needed, which contributes more to the problem than whose name is on the deed.

Winston Churchill once said, "The farther back you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see." For the past 30 years, funding for conservation has been declining. In 1982, approximately four percent of the federal budget was dedicated to natural resources, the environment, and environmental enhancement programs. Function 300 includes all of the federal agencies that have a conservation mission (e.g.,

Bureau of Land Management, United States Forest Service, National Park Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). Currently, our nation spends less than one percent on natural resources, environmental, and conservation programs.

Besides the obvious benefit to conservation, spending money on natural resources also makes economic sense. According to a 2011 study by the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation and further analysis by the National Shooting Sports Foundation, sportsmen and sportswomen spend approximately \$90 billion annually on hunting and fishing in the United States. This kind of spending places the hunting and fishing industry in an equivalent spending category as the number 24 company on the Fortune 500 list, above companies like Kroger and Proctor and Gamble. This spending is more than the combined global sales of Apple's iPhone and iPad products, for which on average, we spend approximately \$2,407 per year.

In 2011, there were 37.4 million people that hunted or fished in the United States, which is more than the population of the State of California. If every one of us had voted in the 2012 presidential election, we would have comprised approximately 30 percent of the total votes cast. Now that is a political force to be reckoned with! Hunting alone creates hundreds of thousands of jobs and generates \$11.8 billion in taxes.

These numbers show the significance of hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing to our great nation's economy.

In the previous 10 years, the expenditures by hunters have grown by 55 percent. For a nation that places such importance on conservation and recreation, investing only one percent on something so important is irresponsible.

Litigation is also becoming more of a problem than a solution. Originally, citizen lawsuits were intended to keep the bureaucracy honest. Today, honest attempts by agencies to do their jobs are the main targets of litigation. This is transforming our system of federal lands from one that is managed to one where preservation is the only "management" option. In the past 30 years I have witnessed litigation over the management of public lands move from the Northeast and the Pacific Northwest to the Southwest, Midwest, and the Southeast. Part of the reason for this is that the federal government reimburses the lawyers before the government, under the Equal Access to Justice Act.

Lowell Baier, past President of Boone and Crockett Club has spent a great deal of

personal time and resources researching the origins and intention of the Equal Access to Justice Act, and he has written extensive articles on this subject in the past (*Fair Chase*, Summer 2011, and B&C e-newsletter, May 2011 and April 2012). His research has led to an amendment of the Act that is now included in the Sportsmen's Act of 2015, which is currently moving through Congress. Lowell and the Club are supporting this amendment with the intent to get the Equal Access to Justice Act realigned with its original intentions.

Lastly, regulations intended to protect public lands are complicated. These regulations are not limited to just those involving natural resources. These complicated and burdensome regulations are preventing the very management that many of our public lands were established under and a major source of frustration for professional agency personnel as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

It appears that we have come full circle from the late 1800s and 1900s when most of our public land administration was formal and managed aggressively to protect and enhance the habitat on a sustainable-use basis.

PUBLIC LANDS— THE HISTORY

RUSS MASON

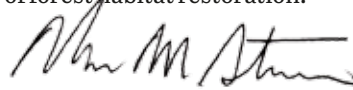
Chief of the Wildlife Division of the
Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Unfortunately, it is almost easier for hunter-conservationists to develop meaningful programs and partnerships with states and agencies to enhance and maximize private lands for the benefit of fish, wildlife, and threatened species.

A significant amount of habitat management dollars and personal effort has been initiated by some species-specific NGO's. Members have also given generously to purchase conservation easements for public access and to improve habitat. All of the NGO's share our frustration with efforts to motivate the agencies to fulfill their commitments to the American public. An excellent article was published in the recent Ruffed Grouse Society magazine (June 2015 issue) as part of the President's Message on this very subject. This year the Ruffed Grouse Society filed a petition for rulemaking with the United States Forest Service (USFS) in Washington D.C. to deal with their under-performance in meeting the main goals in the law for regions eight and nine. Rule-making is not a lawsuit, but legal action is often required if rulemaking is not properly addressed. The USFS has twelve months to respond to the petition. It appears that we

have come full circle from the late 1800s and 1900s when most of our public land administration was formal and managed aggressively to protect and enhance the habitat on a sustainable-use basis. We are now so conflicted that we utilize litigation and rulemaking and political posturing, which can end up hurting us all. To alleviate frustration by all parties affected means something new is needed soon!

Approving the H.R. 2647, or the "Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2015" could be one step in the right direction. This bill, which was just passed in the House, is currently in the hands of the U.S. Senate. United States Senators John Barrasso of Wyoming and Ron Wyden of Oregon have introduced other related bills, as have Senator Martin Heinrich of New Mexico and Jeff Flake of Arizona. Along with these more bills are likely, including one bill from the Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chair Lisa Murkowski of Alaska. The Boone and Crockett Club will continue working with these Senators and others toward the same goal we have supported in the House; namely, a faster pace of forest habitat restoration. ■



In the beginning, public lands were established as a practical expression of the Neoromantic desire to preserve wildlife and other natural resources. Later, forestry emerged as a professional discipline, together with the concepts of conservation and wise use. Particularly in the West, states were poorly equipped and in some instances actively opposed to conservation. For that reason, the federal government and the U.S. Forest Service were the first to prove the practical value of public land and sustainable use.

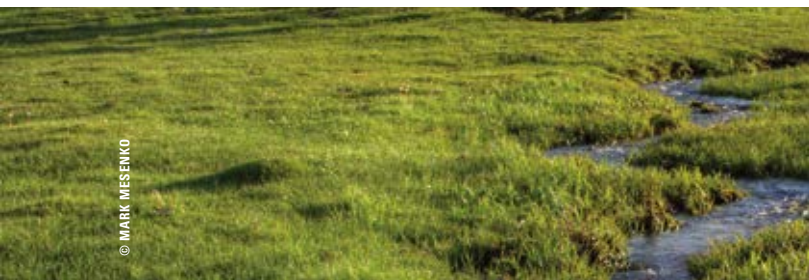
In the 21st century, particularly in the Midwest and eastern United States, circumstances have changed. The ability and capacity of federal agencies to effectively manage lands has diminished due to a lack of funding as well as laws (e.g., National Environmental Policy Act) intended to improve transparency and public participation in decision-making. Largely unfettered by similar legal constraints, states have taken the lead in actively managing landscapes in genuine partnership with stakeholders for the benefit of wildlife. As well, states are leaders when it comes to integrating multiple emerging demands on public lands in ways that are compatible with sustainable use.

Consider Michigan. Natural resources conservation and the importance of public lands to wildlife, hunting, fishing, and other forms of outdoor recreation are central to the state's heritage and catalysts for economic

recovery and reinvention. Michigan's 4.6 million acres of state-managed public lands comprise the backbone of a \$22.2 billion tourism industry. There are 1,300 boating access sites and 84 public harbors that support a \$4 billion boating industry, and provide hunting and fishing opportunities that generate \$4.7 billion annually. As well, these public lands are the drivers of a \$16 billion timber industry and provide 1.1 trillion cubic feet of natural gas storage capacity in the 6.4 million acres of mineral rights underneath. Coordinated sustainable use not only provides abundant recreational opportunity but supports industries that, in turn, accomplish the habitat work upon which wildlife depend (e.g., by ensuring tree species diversity and proper age structures).

Regardless of ownership or the fact that management is funded almost exclusively through license fees and federal matching funds, public lands provide the path and the lens through which most people, whether or not they hunt or fish, define and encounter wildlife and their habitats. More often than not, these lands provide examples of good management and functional ecosystems. This reflects agency mandates to provide for sustainable populations of all wildlife. Public land provides the backbone by which natural systems (i.e., habitats, rare occurrences, and all wildlife) are sustained throughout North America.

Much of the time, public lands provide key opportunities for encounters that blossom into appreciation and support. Yet this is not always the case. Sometimes preconceptions, parochial views, and resentment of government in general become catalysts for conflict. Consider periodic outbreaks



of the Sage Brush Rebellion, simplistic conceptions of ecosystem balance, and Agenda 21 as examples. At a more local level, uninformed aesthetic preferences of what, how, and why management occurs are frequent causes of conflict. The wildlife management importance of clear-cuts can be missed in stridently expressed aesthetic preferences for old-growth forests.

Perhaps the most persistent and pervasive issue facing public lands management is the growing divide among various user groups. Put otherwise, there is no longer a conservation community (if there ever was) that consistently works together for the benefit of public lands. Different user groups fight among themselves and with agency professionals over management strategies that favor some species (e.g., deer) or activities (e.g., hunting) over others (e.g., songbirds or bird-watching). This divide manifests in calls for more or better management, where “more” and “better” are usually code for sectarian expressions of self-interest. As well,

because public lands are available to all and used for a range of wildlife-related and other recreational activities, there is the perception that the quality must be less than that of privately managed lands. John Gierach pointed out that a pond behind a fence is always more attractive.

One role that the Boone and Crockett Club can assume is the branding of conservation. Just as the word environmentalist lacks a clear definition, so too, conservation remains mostly in the eye of the beholder. The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation’s fiduciary analogy of trustees, managers, and beneficiaries, while glib, is a poor description of day-to-day natural resources management. In the absence of some firm baseline, there is no easily defended starting point from which to judge what constitutes or does not constitute acceptable practice. Some clear compass of what fits within the definition of wise, sustainable use is increasingly important as natural resources become a centerpiece to our quality of life. ■

PUBLIC LANDS— THE SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

JOHN F. ORGAN
B&C PROFESSIONAL MEMBER

Director of the Cooperative Fish
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Many people consider the state and federal investment in public land ownership in the United States to be our greatest conservation legacy. The saying, “They’re not making land anymore.” is often invoked by advocates for further public land acquisition. Recent legislative efforts to dispose federal lands underscore the fact that many people are divided over whether these resources represent a legacy or a liability. This article summarizes some basic facts about the relevance of public lands to hunting, challenges in public lands management, and the Boone and Crockett Club’s history in regard to this resource.

My generation of wildlife biologists was taught from day one that wildlife needed three things: food, cover, and water. Thus, the quantity and quality of habitat became a driving force in wildlife management. Aldo Leopold in his epic, “Game Surveys of the North Central States,” funded by the Sporting Arms and Manufacturers Institute in the late 1920s, came to realize that private agricultural lands were key to game production in the upper Midwest, and thus Leopold advocated for

rewarding or subsidizing farmers as part of the American Game Policy in 1930. Private land wildlife incentives, best exemplified in the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the conservation provisions of the Farm Bill, are testaments to the vision of Leopold and the recognition that we will never be able to outright purchase enough land to meet public demands for sustainable wildlife resources. So what value do public lands provide?

The Boone and Crockett Club played a significant role in the establishment of federal lands for conservation. George Bird Grinnell is responsible for the establishment of Glacier National Park, like Charles Sheldon is responsible for Denali, and also Theodore Roosevelt for millions of acres of National Forests, National Wildlife Refuges, and other federal lands. The Club in many of its early books, including *American Big Game Hunting*, *Hunting and Conservation*, *American Big Game and its Haunts*, and *Hunting at High Altitudes* emphasized the importance of federal protected lands for conservation.

Public lands of all kinds in the United States – not just those for conservation – amount to around 40 percent of the total land area. Those lands open to hunting comprise a lesser amount. The National Survey of Hunting, Fishing, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, conducted every five years by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Census Bureau, has

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the most reliable national data on public versus private land hunting. One-third of United States hunters hunt on public land. When data on hunter residence are included, we can see that half of all urban hunters hunt on public lands.

Many studies on hunter attitudes, behavior, and motivations have identified access to hunting areas as a major concern, and a barrier to recruitment of new hunters. The availability of public lands both accessible to hunters and managed with the intent to provide hunting opportunities becomes increasingly important in light of this. State wildlife lands, particularly those purchased with Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration and/or hunter license dollars, are invaluable for providing hunting opportunity, and efforts to redirect these lands to purposes other than wildlife are prohibited under federal

law, as enforced by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Many federal lands provide significant hunting opportunities. National Forests, National Wildlife Refuges, Bureau of Land Management lands, and others offer varying levels of hunter access and opportunity, while others, such as many National Parks, may be closed to hunting completely. The latter can still be of importance as source population areas—or potentially as liabilities due to a lack of population management. In many cases, competing demands for multiple uses inhibit land and population management that is desirable for providing the maximum hunting opportunities, experiences, and practices designed to ensure the sustainability of habitats that support wildlife for generations to come. These competing demands can range from energy production on

sensitive wildlife lands to advocacy for “hands-off” land management. Can there be resolution that allows for a sharing of the wealth? Often, the interests of wildlife and other land uses are incompatible to the extent that it becomes an either-or proposition. Our courts often opt for the greatest good to the greatest number of people, but that defies principles of the Public Trust Doctrine in wildlife, that holds our government trustees to a higher standard and limits the decision space on trade-offs.

Jack Ward Thomas, no stranger to divisive land management controversies, has suggested we consider a new approach to federal land management that is revolutionary yet imbued with the common sense that Jack is brimming with. He suggested we take all Agriculture and Interior Department public lands and look at each for their best,

most practical management utility, identifying those best for wildlife, timber, recreation and culture, grazing, energy, and so on; and reshuffle the deck, assigning them to the appropriate agencies for administration. Doing so with organic legislation that gives clear mandates would pre-empt the conflict and litigation over competing uses. Key to this would be the recognition that lands for wildlife will not be the left-overs, but rather the priority. This recognition would acknowledge the vision of Roosevelt and Grinnell in creating the Club; that America’s greatness is rooted in the values people derive from having wild lands to test their limits, hone skills, and build character such as that embodied in Fair Chase hunting. Doing so on public lands can cultivate another great American virtue, one that Shane Mahoney defines as citizenship. ■



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