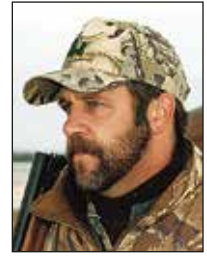


# THE NEED AND PLAN FOR SUSTAINABLE CONSERVATION FUNDING

## CAPITOL COMMENTS



Steven Williams, Ph.D.  
B&C PROFESSIONAL MEMBER  
PRESIDENT  
Wildlife Management Institute

**Increased funding to support effective fish and wildlife conservation is the number one priority of state fish and wildlife agencies across the nation. It is also the critical element to ensure that conservation remains relevant to Americans. State agencies have experienced an expansion of their mission to include the conservation of all fish and wildlife species, not just those that are hunted, trapped, or fished. These agencies must reflect the desires of the American public and respond to the demands of federal protections, which are very different from when the agencies were first established.**

Habitat loss and degradation driven by human population growth, the need for increased energy production, climate change impacts, and invasive species are just a few of the challenges facing 21<sup>st</sup> century state fish and wildlife agencies. The current revenue stream derived from license and permit fees, excise taxes on hunting and fishing equipment, limited state general fund support, and contributions from conservation organizations are inadequate to meet the expanded responsibilities and challenges facing agencies today.

Lacking a new source of dedicated funding, business and industry will become increasingly stymied by land use restrictions associated with hundreds of species that fall or will fall under protection of the federal Endangered Species Act, and similar state laws intended to maintain the

rich species diversity that occurs across the country. This is not just a fish and wildlife concern; it is a job-related and economic concern. Businesses are forced to address the needs of species that currently receive little or no attention. Increased funding could result in conservation efforts that provide the regulatory certainty that these companies need to deploy capital and resources to develop jobs and our economy. This is a natural investment that would provide tremendous returns to our nation and its resources.

Recognizing the critical issues facing state agencies, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies formed the Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources. The simplified objectives of the Blue Ribbon Panel are to identify dedicated and sustained funding for the thousands of species identified in State Wildlife Action Plans. The stakes are high for these species and the businesses and industries that impact their habitats. Many species are candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act and are in desperate need of conservation efforts. Without conservation, the species may require stringent efforts to avoid harming individuals and land management actions that would curtail development activity taking place across our nation's landscapes.

Former Wyoming Governor Dave Freudenthal and Bass Pro Shop's founder Johnny Morris co-chair the Blue Ribbon Panel. Both of

these individuals have demonstrated a lifelong commitment to fish and wildlife conservation. Other members of the Blue Ribbon Panel include national leaders in fish and wildlife conservation, business, energy, manufacturing, and agriculture. A number of Boone and Crockett Club regular and professional members are members of the Panel. This collection of diverse stakeholders is not only unprecedented but also entirely necessary for finding a solution to the conservation funding challenges facing the nation.

The discussion topics have included previous attempts to fund conservation using expanded excise taxes (the Teaming with Wildlife approach) and offshore energy royalties (the Conservation and Reinvestment Act approach). Although both of these approaches showed promise, neither could cross the legislative goal line. Based on needs and history, the Panel developed criteria necessary to achieve the goal of dedicated and sustained funding. Funds should be focused on species at risk and their habitats. The funds should emanate from a sustainable trust fund capable of providing \$1.3 billion annually. Legislation needs to be passed that provides funding within the next five years. Funds should be derived from an expanded contributor base (more than hunters and anglers) and be supplemental to (rather than supplanting) existing funds available to state fish and wildlife

agencies. Finally, the Panel recognized that existing administrative mechanisms provide administrative efficiency and equitable allocation of funds to all states.

The Blue Ribbon Panel's consensus is that redirecting existing energy royalties and fees coupled with private/public partnerships provide the best means to achieve success. Immediate and long-term actions are being developed and will be discussed at an upcoming meeting in Houston in December. The Panel has identified legislative opportunities for increased funding within the current Congressional session. The Panel understands the importance of clear communications, messaging, and public outreach. All members of the Boone and Crockett Club should be ready to mobilize when the opportunity to confront and conquer the greatest challenge facing the nation's species is in most need of our attention. The Blue Ribbon Panel has convened an unprecedented level of broad-based conservation leaders. Their work will provide a powerful blueprint; it is up to all of us to build the foundation and structure where the future of conservation will be housed. ■