

# CONSERVATION IN 2020

FROM THE  
PRESIDENT



Timothy C. Brady  
PRESIDENT

**When we should be enjoying summer family rituals and finalizing details for fall hunts, we are instead continuing to endure a pandemic that has affected everyone and everything we do. In this brilliant technological age, where we are used to fixing anything quickly with the incredible science and engineering at our disposal, we can't fix this. At least not yet. We remain embroiled in a calamity not seen for more than three generations.**

Few aspects of our lives remain untouched by the 2019-2020 coronavirus (Covid-19). From the places we travel to the people we see and the goods we purchase, this contagion has altered life as we know it and ushered in a new, unfamiliar normal. Amid widely publicized effects of Covid-19 on health care, the economy, food systems, and education, impacts of the pandemic on wildlife and the conservation community are lesser known. But in fact, the conservation consequences of Covid-19 are widespread, revealing a deep yet fractured relationship between humans and the environment that warrants further contemplation by us all.

It has been fascinating to read multiple anecdotal reports of thriving and expanding wildlife populations that are less directly affected by humans during the pandemic. As smog has lifted and skies have cleared over urban centers and wilderness areas alike, animals are turning up in new locations and providing a glimpse into *The World Without Us*, in the words of Alan Weisman's award-winning 2007 book. Because of closures and travel restrictions, black bears, bobcats,

coyotes, and deer are reclaiming Yosemite National Park visiting areas typically used only by humans. Pronghorn have been observed in hot, low-elevation areas of Death Valley National Park where park staff haven't seen them in decades. Similar stories of flourishing wildlife populations come from Yellowstone and Rocky Mountain National Park and countless other locations throughout the country and parts of the world.

Unfortunately, Covid-19 has significantly changed the way we as outdoorspeople and conservationists enjoy our pursuits. Amid temporary restrictions on hunting, fishing, and boating, we've had to clear our schedules and turn to other forms of recreation and entertainment, wondering when normalcy will return. Charter services, lodges and hotels, and hunting and fishing guides, whose livelihoods depend on allowing us to do what we love, have suffered in unforeseen ways and either remain closed or unable to host visitors at 100 percent capacity. Some state fish and wildlife agencies have seen a decline in hunting and fishing license sales, exacerbating challenges to conservation funding observed well before the pandemic. Conservation organizations similar to ours that depend heavily on fundraising banquets as well as meetings of wildlife professional groups have been cancelled, postponed, or modified to a virtual format, severely affecting the financial and scientific lifeblood of the conservation community. Even regularly scheduled educational programs that take place at our very own Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch have been put on hold. In the meantime, Ranch staff

are working diligently to adapt some of their face-to-face lessons and activities to a more virtual format.

Instead, outdoorspeople and conservationists throughout the world have been at home. It feels like long ago since getting in a car, bus, or train, or hopping on an airplane to visit family and friends, a favorite hunting or fishing spot, a new state or national park or refuge. While the multitude of effects on Fair Chase hunting opportunities and wildlife management resulting from Covid-19 has yet to be fully realized and understood, decreased travel and human movement have also threatened the ecotourism industry and associated conservation efforts it supports—locally, nationally, and internationally. Ecotourism is defined as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of the local people. These areas, and the communities that surround them, regularly receive benefits through employment opportunities and social projects. However, the closure of borders, travel restrictions, various businesses and industry shutdowns have made it difficult, if not

impossible, for people to travel both domestically and internationally to pursue ecotourism opportunities.

In many locations, governmental leaders have closed state, national, and international parks, conservation lands, recreational areas, and sanctuaries, which normally require purchase of a daily or annual pass or payment of membership fees to obtain access. While we may have observed some positive responses among wildlife as a possible result of these closures, there have been fewer people purchasing passes or paying such access fees, thereby contributing to a substantial loss of income which sustains these lands. The United States (U.S.) Travel Association estimates that decreased travel due to Covid-19 could lead to a \$355 billion decline in total travel spending. A noteworthy portion of this

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money would normally be spent by American citizens and international travelers visiting U.S. national parks, monuments, and refuges and surrounding communities.

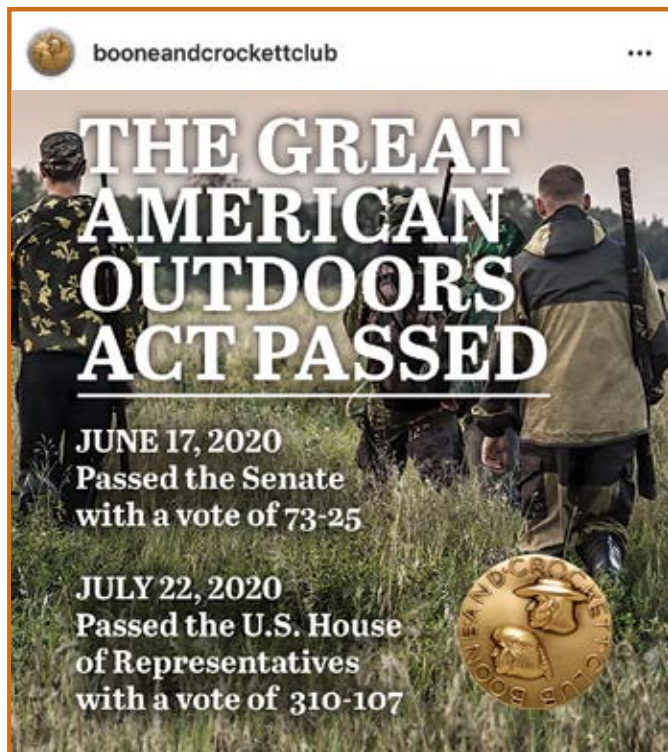
Less overall income results in a series of cascading effects for Fair Chase hunting opportunities and wildlife management. With less income, there will be reduced budgets to support ongoing and future conservation work. People who work in the hunting, fishing, and ecotourism industries have already and will continue to experience temporary and permanent reductions in pay, furloughs, or layoffs. Additionally, with less income and fewer employees, including law enforcement, there are fears that poaching and the illegal trade of wildlife products will increase. Overall, these negative effects may culminate in less protection for fish and wildlife.

But not all the news in Conservation during this pandemic is grim. In mid-June, the U.S. Senate passed the Great American Outdoors Act by an overwhelming bipartisan vote. In late July, the bill was easily passed by the U.S. House of Representatives and is bound for the President's desk where he has already indicated strong support. It will become law. The bill provides \$1.9 billion in deferred maintenance priorities annually for 5 years to the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Bureau of Indian Education. This significant legislation addresses a \$22 billion maintenance backlog that has been growing over the past forty years. The impact will be felt throughout our nation as parks put in much needed work towards improving trails, campsites, and scenic destinations. It also provides

\$900 million in permanent annual funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund which fulfills a promise made to the American people more than 50 years ago by providing increased hunting and fishing opportunities and better access to public lands.

Many within our community view passage of this Act as the most significant conservation achievement in generations and the Boone and Crockett Club played an influential role in garnering support for this historic legislation. What makes this success even more significant is with all the funding that has gone to pandemic-response measures, and the resulting dramatic increase in the federal budget deficit, it's been difficult to anticipate much congressional support for conservation related funding.

Even with this tremendous victory, those of us in the hunter-conservationist community will be enduring the fiscal impacts of COVID-19 for some time to come. It's more important than ever that we remain focused and committed to our mission and make good decisions with the funding we have available and continue to assist our nation's leaders in crafting responsible conservation policy. As our founder, Theodore Roosevelt said "Our nation's natural resources is our greatest national treasure and we must protect and conserve it. Because after all these resources don't belong to us...we are borrowing them from the next generation and we must pass on the same or better than what we inherited". This is our responsibility and our obligation. ■

**booneandcrockettclub**

**THE GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT PASSED**

**JUNE 17, 2020**  
Passed the Senate with a vote of 73-25

**JULY 22, 2020**  
Passed the U.S. House of Representatives with a vote of 310-107



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THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB ASKS THAT YOU PLEASE THANK OUR TRAILBLAZERS WITH YOUR PATRONAGE.