

FROM THE PRESIDENT

My first message should be an introduction. I was born and raised in the Deep South in Mississippi, specifically Greenville, a Mississippi River town. It is often referred to as the most Southern place on earth.

My mother's family—Herrings—landed in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1642. They were from England, Scotland, and Wales. They had to leave as the king was burning them at the stake because of their religious beliefs. This was when gun ownership was reserved for the king and a perfect example of why we have the First and Second Amendments to our Constitution. We do not need to erase history. Instead, we need to learn from our mistakes and our successes. We must understand why we have the freedoms and rights that so many have died for and what makes this nation great. This includes gun ownership, the right to hunt, and wildlife held in public trust.

Our family later moved to North Carolina. In 1776, our gun and bayonet factory, named Herring and Devane, was destroyed by British forces, as we had a contract with the Revolutionary Army to produce weapons. In 1833, they moved to Mississippi, and the Governor appointed them to form Carroll County.

My parents and I currently own most of the original farm and home. In 1936, the Herring home was designated by *Progressive Farmer* as the fourth most beautiful

home in the Mississippi Valley. Until 30 years ago, the property was a working farm. The native forest cover has been restored and is managed for whitetail deer, Eastern wild turkey, waterfowl, and other wildlife. The best hunts and some of the best memories of my life have been on this wonderful place.

Less is known about my father's side of the family. I know my grandfather Cummins was a farmer and a logger, working for 50 cents a day cutting wood after the Great Depression. While my grandfather Herring did not hunt, my grandfather Cummins was a skilled hunter. He hunted for recreation but primarily for food, as he, too, was trying to survive on a cotton farm. He taught my father how to hunt and fish, and my father taught me. My passion for conservation was inspired by my uncle, Jack Herring, a biologist who later became Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife Conservation.

The Delta was a great place to grow up; it gave me many experiences and memories, as there was plenty of room to roam. Theodore Roosevelt discovered that, too. In 1902, with the help of famed guide Holt Collier, he hunted black bears near Onward, Mississippi. You know the story. Collier tied up a bear, and President Roosevelt refused to shoot the defenseless animal. This hunt is the most famous hunt to have taken place on American soil. It's the birthplace of fair

chase and the birth of the world's most famous toy, the Teddy Bear. Thanks to the Boone and Crockett Club, these sacred hunting grounds are now the Theodore Roosevelt National Wildlife Refuge. And about 40 miles to the north, the Club helped create America's only refuge named for an African-American, the Holt Collier National Wildlife Refuge.

About 20 miles south of Onward is Vicksburg, where Senator Key Pittman was born. He was the author of the 1937 Pittman-Robertson Act, which helps fund state wildlife agencies. Unfortunately, a bill was introduced this past July to repeal the Act. Tabling the bill was a community effort, a priority of the Club, and it was achieved swiftly. Several cosponsors withdrew support or indicated they would not support a subsequent effort. The Club has since turned our focus to ensuring greater awareness, understanding, and support of wildlife management legislation and programs.

My father was a mathematics teacher, and my mother managed a federal credit union. My main babysitter was Mother Nature herself; she was the best and kept me occupied for hours on end. My next-door neighbor was famed wildlife artist Bob Tompkins. While at Greenville High School, I was a science nerd. My eleventh-grade science project was on whitetail deer, specifically antler growth as it relates to age and soil nutrients.

I guess I am a deer nerd, too. I grew up playing football in the front yard of Laird Hamberlin, who is currently doing a phenomenal job as CEO of Safari Club International. I shot tournament archery for four years, winning the state



James L. Cummins
PRESIDENT

championship once. I am a biologist by training, with a B.S. from Mississippi State and M.S. from Virginia Tech. I am a former staffer for the late U.S. Senator Thad Cochran, a Republican from Mississippi.

I co-chair Boone and Crockett's Conservation Policy Committee with Simon Roosevelt and also co-chair the Club's Strategic Planning Committee with Mary Webster. I chair the Federal Policy Committee for the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation. I also serve as one of the six Americans on the Bi-national Softwood Lumber Council with Canada. For my day job, I am the Executive Director of Wildlife Mississippi. While I report to a board of directors—the finest in the State of Mississippi—I have numerous administrative duties, oversee our communications program, oversee our field operations, and conduct fundraising and government relations.

My primary mentor is Clarke Reed, the silver-haired kingpin of Southern politics. He takes his politics and his philosophy seriously. Although mostly behind the scenes, politically, he called many of the nation's shots from his perch on Rattlesnake Bayou in Greenville. I am very grateful to past Boone and Crockett president Bob Model for recruiting me in 2007 to join. I also want to recognize and thank Ben Wallace, also a past president of the Club, for his guidance and counsel over the years and for what he has yet to provide.

It was not hard to fall in love with Boone and Crockett...it has 135 years of thoughtful and measured commitment to conserving wild places and wild things.

I grew up on the banks of the mighty Mississippi, which is unique in its own way, and the state is also unique for several other reasons. It is the birthplace of America's music—blues, country, and rock and roll. I don't have the space to list all of them, but the list of famous musicians is well over 100. While you may think we sound funny, the rest of the world takes our music seriously.

We believe in service and giving back. Rabbit Kennedy once lived in my current hometown of Amory. He is one of the most decorated U.S. soldiers in history. He went through a divorce late in life, and in the divorce decree, he had to mow his ex-wife's grass for the rest of his life. So, be careful of our women. Mississippi is the most generous state in the nation, giving the highest percentage of its income to charity of any state. And yes, you need to increase your contribution to the Boone and Crockett Club!

And speaking of giving, we've also given birth to some pretty good entertainers. James Earl Jones, Morgan Freeman, Oprah Winfrey, Sela Ward, Gerald McRaney, Tom Lester, John Dye, and Jim Henson are all native to Mississippi. My office is only a few yards from where Kermit the Frog was born.

Yes, we can read down here. A few of us can even write. My favorites are William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Nash Buckingham, Shelby Foote, and Julia Reed. No other state has more honored and awarded writers than Mississippi. The city of Greenville is at the top of that list.

Contrary to popular belief, we also wear shoes. Some of us even wear cleats. Have you ever heard of Jerry Rice, Brett Farve, Archie Manning, and his sons Eli

and Peyton? The Mannings deer and duck hunt, where I occasionally do near Booger Den, Mississippi.

A few of us have a little bit of sense down here. And we love science. Stennis Space Center has almost 1,500 engineers and rocket scientists. This center is where many of our rockets are designed and tested. We are pretty good on the medical front too. Mississippi is home to the first heart transplant. And the first lung transplant. And the first kidney transplant.

And while you may be starting to think we are not all that backwoods, you are wrong. We truly are. It all started when L.Q.C. Lamar of Mississippi worked with the Club and Congress to pass the 1891 Timberland Reserve Bill. This legislation enlarged Yellowstone (and yes, my favorite show has the same name), and it also set aside 13 million acres of America's first timber reserves.

For me, it was not hard to fall in love with the Boone and Crockett Club, respect and admire it. My values and its values are practically the same. Its founder, Theodore Roosevelt, is my philosophical soul brother. As the oldest conservation organization in North America and the second oldest in the world, it has 135 years of thoughtful and measured commitment to conserving wild places and wild things. And we do so in a manner that balances human and wildlife needs, such as the wise use of our natural resources for hunting or managing our forests as a partial solution to climate change.

The Club is the pioneer and architect of North

America's conservation movement, having led the way in creating the National Forest System, National Park System, National Wildlife Refuge System, and the federal agencies that oversee them. In addition, Club members established a system of state wildlife agencies (and the mechanisms to fund them) and modern-day game laws, a system of wildlife research based on science, and programs for the conservation of private lands.

I am married to a wonderful lady, Martha Dalrymple, who is also my best friend. She is a direct descendant of Davy Crockett and Samuel Clemens. When I asked her father for her hand in marriage 23 years ago, he said he "would have to check his insurance policy to see what his liabilities were for giving up a loaded gun." That was an understatement! She was an avid whitetail deer hunter, and after we married, I asked her when she would start deer hunting again. She said, "When you kill one larger than I have." Well, she still hasn't started back! She is also a philanthropist and superb businesswoman,

having served on our state Commission on Environmental Quality for 14 years, including as its first female chair.

When I am not working to help this great organization or the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, or running Wildlife Mississippi, I am hunting big game somewhere in North America or Africa, fly fishing, photographing wildlife, or working on our family's farm.

It is truly humbling to be the President of the Boone and Crockett family. Our immediate past presidents, Tim Brady and Jim Arnold, have done a fabulous job leading this organization over the past four years. They had the help of their talented wives, Betty and Rhonda, a great board of directors, and a dedicated staff. They have handed the reigns over to me and the entire team, with the Club in its best financial shape as we accomplish more for conservation and hunting than we ever have. I am truly looking forward to trying to take it to the next level. ■



RIGHT: Squirrel hunting with a dog and a Stevens .410 was how James started hunting. For the record, these clothes did not come from Bass Pro. **BELOW:** A 12-foot alligator with a 44-inch circumference tail James took on the Mississippi River near Vicksburg.

