

# PITTMAN-ROBERTSON FUNDING

FROM THE EDITOR



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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**In March, the Department of the Interior announced a record-setting distribution of nearly \$1.15 billion in funding from Pittman-Robertson, bringing the total from this excise tax program to \$25.38 billion (adjusted for inflation) since its inception in 1937.**

As much as we should laud this conservation milestone, we must also keep a sharp eye on the horizon. First, here's a little background. At a time when many species of North American wildlife faced a bleak and uncertain future in the early 1900s, the passage of the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937—most often referred to as the Pittman-Robertson Act (PR) for its sponsors Nevada Senator Key Pittman and Virginia Congressman Absalom Robertson—created an 11 percent tax on firearms and ammunition.

Since its inception, PR has provided a funding stream that has played a critical role in helping our state wildlife agencies restore many native species to healthy and abundant numbers. States must fulfill specific requirements to use money apportioned through PR, notably that none of the money from their hunting license sales may be used by anyone other than the state's own wildlife agency. Hunting license sales and PR dollars

account for 80 percent of their annual budget in some states. State hunting license sales are also key in determining a state's total PR allocation.

In the 1970s, amendments to PR created a 10 percent tax on handguns and an 11 percent tax on archery equipment. The amendments mandated that the revenue from these new taxes must be allocated for state hunter education programs and the development of public shooting ranges.

The Modernizing the Pittman-Robertson Fund for Tomorrow's Needs Act in 2017 allows for funding of hunter recruitment, retention, and reactivation efforts on the part of our state wildlife agencies. A great idea! This amendment points out a challenge ahead of us. Nearly all PR dollars came from hunting-related firearms and ammunition purchases for decades. In recent years, however, over 75 percent of PR dollars are generated from sales attributed to recreational shooting, not hunting.

Helping to convert these sport shooters into hunters is a core challenge for our community. The good news? As an optimist, I see a glass three-quarters full of "almost" hunters. I see individuals who purchase and use firearms. I see individuals who are more likely to take the next step "into the field."

I'm sure there are several good efforts in this direction, but I would like to point to the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) program as an especially "on target" example. First, each of their five core shooting locations also includes "Outdoor Education Center" as part of the range's name. And that's not just window dressing. "Regardless of your experience," the MDC notes, "or skill level, you can become a sharper, safer hunter or outdoors person. Our staff of specialists and trained volunteers can help you master firearms and archery, as well as map-and-compass, wildlife identification, and many more outdoor skills at our ranges."

MDC offers a basic "Learn to Hunt" seminar covering clothing and equipment selection, scouting, game cleaning, and game preparation. In addition, there are game-specific workshops. During the spring season, for example, I noted a series of turkey hunting programs, including one devoted exclusively to youth hunters.

## **WALK IN A SHOOTER, WALK OUT A HUNTER.**

When the Scholastic Clay Target Program (SCTP) began expanding in Tennessee, the state's Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) used PR funding to build additional shooting ranges. With over a

few thousand youngsters actively involved in SCTP, TWRA took a smart second step: they invited them all duck hunting.

Trusted mentors and good outreach programs are of special value to those interested in heading afield but did not grow up in a hunting family. Such newcomers are an increasingly important component in any growth of our sport.

So, let's all get together and "set our sights" on growing our ranks. Hope to see you down the trail. ■

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