

AMERICA'S WILDLAND FORESTS AND WILDLIFE

FROM THE EDITOR



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Early wildlife conservationists in the United States learned a painful—yet productive—lesson when they realized that while the full protection of a particular species might be a necessary first step, protectionism alone could lead to disastrous results.

Many of you are familiar with the story of mule deer on the Kaibab Plateau. Fully protected in the Grand Canyon National Game Reserve, which included efforts to eliminate predators, deer populations skyrocketed in the early 1920s. These large herds soon overbrowsed their range, causing a rapid deterioration of their food sources. This undermined their own subsistence, which caused mass starvation and population collapse.

Led by the pioneering work of Boone and Crockett member Aldo Leopold, wildlife scientists gained a better understanding of the relationship between wildlife populations and their habitat, including the critical concept of carrying capacity. Today, scientists have a range of options, from habitat expansion

and improvement to regulated hunting, in order to successfully manage wildlife populations over time. Healthy and growing populations of many native species of North American wildlife are a proud legacy of such management efforts.

Like early wildlife conservationists intent on saving wildlife, early forest managers also employed a single strategy to protect forests from the ravages of wildfire. It was a protective approach, intending to put out every forest fire as quickly as possible.

Decades of fire suppression, however, had the unintended consequence of fostering the growth of a thick forest understory—the vegetation that becomes fuel for today's high-intensity wildfires. Those fires destroy wildlife habitat and have a range of long-term detrimental effects, from altering soil chemistry and structure to releasing carbon and toxic pollutants.

As with modern wildlife management, today's foresters have various effective tools to manage our

forests better and reduce the risk of catastrophic burns. Beyond suppression, such efforts include harvesting trees, thinning dead and dying trees, creating fuel breaks, and using prescribed and managed burns.

Such active management projects improve the health of our forests while also improving wildlife habitat by increasing forage production and creating more dynamic and resilient landscapes.

The Boone and Crockett Club has a long history with wildland forest management. In the early 1900s, the Club worked to develop and pass legislation that created the National Forest System and the Forest Service to manage these forests. More recently, the Club worked with Congress to help pass legislation to expedite thinning in the wildland-urban interface. In addition, we helped create the Good Neighbor Authority to administer forest health projects and sought to protect the Forest Service budget against the rising costs of fighting wildfires.

Last year, the Club released a new factsheet

outlining the need for \$45 billion in federal infrastructure investments in forest management and restoration on federal lands over the next decade. "Restoration and management of America's national forests is an investment in our natural infrastructure that protects our communities, municipal water supplies, and fish and wildlife habitat—and provides natural climate solutions. These projects also deliver jobs to American workers in communities across the country," commented Club President Jim Arnold.

Healthy, diverse, and balanced wildlife populations go hand in hand with healthy, diverse, and balanced wildland forests.

Hope to see you down the trail. ■

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Read about the Club's policy efforts to implement active forest management projects.