

WILDLIFE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

VOLUME VI



A Publication of the American Wildlife Conservation Partners



The American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP) present the following recommendations, *Wildlife for the 21st Century: Volume VI*, for the next White House Administration and the next two Congresses. Adoption of these recommendations will improve federal agencies' stewardship of our nation's fish, wildlife, and habitats and enhance access to federal lands and waters for outdoor and wildlife-associated recreation, which contribute significantly to the quality of life and economic well-being of our citizens and future generations. The Outdoor Recreation Economy was estimated at 2.2 percent of our nation's Gross Domestic Product in 2017, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, and is growing. Conserving native fish and wildlife populations and the landscapes that they depend on is essential to sustaining this important part of our economy and national identity.

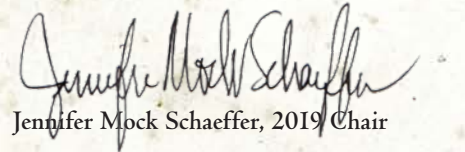
A prominent theme of our recommendations is that federal agencies support the goals and objectives of state fish and wildlife agencies in federal decision-making. The federal government holds in trust for all Americans specific responsibilities enumerated in the Constitution for land, water, and wildlife. However, state governments hold the authority for everything else and have principal authority for managing wildlife as a public trust resource within their borders while sharing management authority with the federal government on interjurisdictional species like migratory birds. Therefore, state and federal agencies must work cooperatively to meet the needs of our wildlife and our communities. This is not a nicety – it's a necessity.

Another important theme is that federal funding for conserving wildlife is complementary to the billions of state and private dollars spent each year on the care and enjoyment of wildlife and their habitats. Hunters pay directly through fees, self-imposed taxes, and contributions for wildlife management as well as supporting local economies through spending on trips, equipment, and supplies. Many of the actions included in this report focus on where federal funding contributions can make the biggest impact for fish, wildlife, and habitat conservation.

These recommendations represent a general agreement of the partners, and each partner organization reserves the right to establish independent positions on any issue herein for the next four years.

Previous volumes of *Wildlife for the 21st Century* have been developed for every Presidential election since 2000. In your Presidential campaign in 2020, we urge your consideration and adoption of these recommendations and look forward to working with you to create or reaffirm these federal administrative policies.


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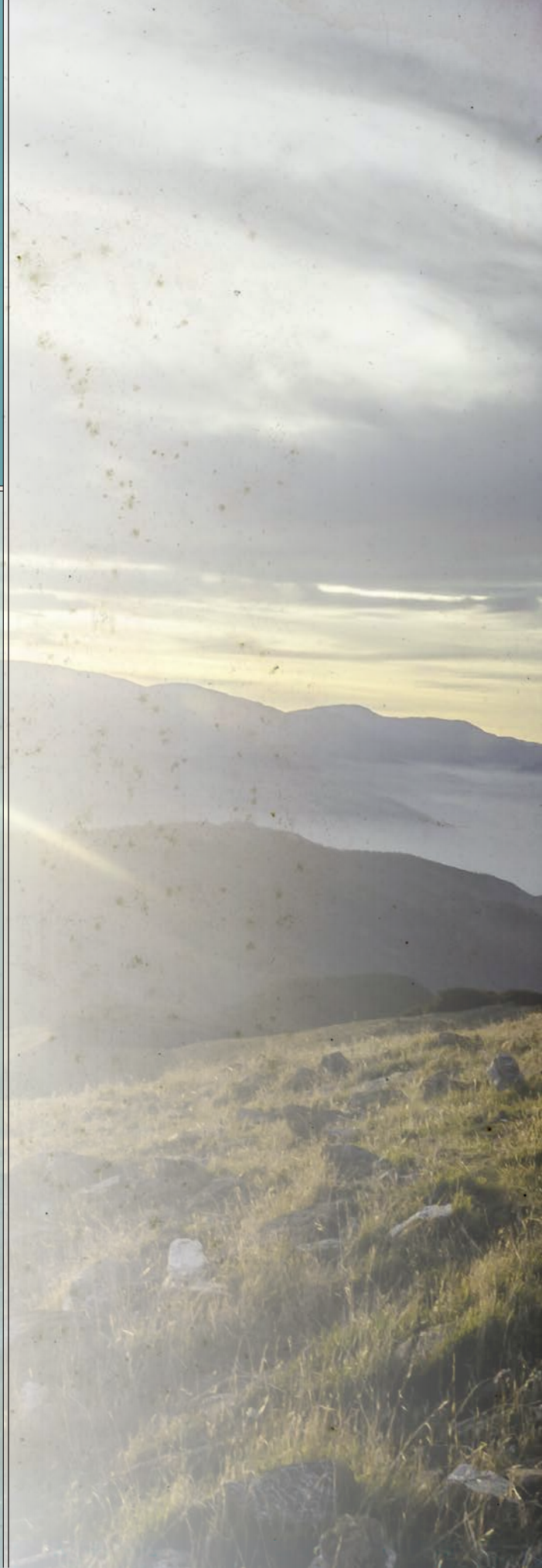

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HOW SPORTSMEN AND SPORTSWOMEN SUPPORT THE AMERICAN SYSTEM OF CONSERVATION FUNDING

LAST YEAR ALONE... \$2.96 BILLION

\$673
MILLION

generated by the Pittman-Robertson Fund, from hunting and recreational shooting-related excise taxes

\$896
MILLION

generated from hunting licenses



\$748
MILLION

generated from fishing licenses



\$649
MILLION

generated by the Dingell-Johnson/Wallop-Breaux Fund, from fishing and boating-related excise taxes

Since 1939 state fish and wildlife agencies have received over

\$65.1
BILLION

from sportsmen and sportswomen

60%

of funding for state fish and wildlife agencies is paid for by sportsmen and sportswomen

INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE CONGRESSIONAL SPORTSMEN'S FOUNDATION

Sportsmen and Women: Leading More Than a Century of Conservation

Hunting and recreational shooting has been driving wildlife management since the beginning of the fish and wildlife conservation movement over a century ago. At that time, wildlife could be taken by anyone without regulations and was done widely to supply markets for meat, hides, and feathers. Many species were depleted; several went extinct.

Hunters that were trained as naturalists, foresters, geologists, and biologists led the response. Leaders in this group joined Theodore Roosevelt in forming the Boone and Crockett Club in 1887 to activate the nation's sportsmen to develop wildlife laws, establish our network of federal public lands, and ensure that professional, scientific management was used to guide the conservation of our nation's natural

**\$44
BILLION**

in direct spending to the economy by hunting and target shooters, supporting **854,000 jobs**

SOURCE: NATIONAL SHOOTING SPORTS FOUNDATION

resources. The conservation community expanded with the establishment of the Wildlife Management Institute, National Wildlife Federation, and many others. In the 1930s, this community urged the redirection of an excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition to fund wildlife restoration

and management known as the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Program.

These values continue to this day through the American System of Conservation Funding. In

addition to the excise tax payments, hunters support conservation efforts through state license, stamp, and permit fees and contribute funds and volunteer work to state research, management, recreational target shooting, and education programs as well as numerous hunting conservation organizations.

Our community has worked together and with our elected officials for over a century to develop the laws, policies, and values that are now known as the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, a model that is the envy of the world. However, in spite of great successes in restoration of wildlife over the past 100 years, the changing structure of our society makes it necessary for wildlife managers and hunter-conservationists to work together more effectively to build on successes achieved in the past.

**\$971.5
MILLION**

to state fish and wildlife agencies in FY 2020 for Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Programs - **\$22.9 billion** in the history of the programs.

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

American Wildlife Conservation Partners: TWENTY YEARS OF COLLABORATION

The AWCP is a 20-year-old consortium of over 50 leading wildlife conservation groups in the country. The partners have diverse primary missions; however, the organizations share a central commitment to managing wildlife and sustainable, science-based public use and enjoyment of wildlife and the places where that wildlife lives.

AWCP represents the interests of America's millions of dedicated hunter conservationists, professional wildlife and natural resource managers, outdoor recreation users, conservation educators, and wildlife scientists.



Participants of the first summit hosted by the Boone and Crockett Club in August 2000 at their headquarters in Missoula, Montana. From this initial meeting the American Wildlife Conservation Partners was formed.

A photograph of two hunters in orange gear standing in a field at sunset. One hunter is in the foreground, slightly out of focus, holding a rifle. The other is behind him, also holding a rifle. The background is a bright, hazy sunset over a field.

15.7 MILLION
Americans hunted and
49.4 MILLION
people fished in 2018

SOURCE: OUTDOOR RECREATION FOUNDATION

Key to Cabinet Departments and Agencies

Agriculture - Department of Agriculture

Commerce - Department of Commerce

Defense - Department of Defense

DOJ - Department of Justice

Energy - Department of Energy

EPA - Environmental Protection Agency

GSA - Government Services Administration

Homeland - Department of Homeland Security

HUD - Department of Housing and Urban Development

Interior - Department of the Interior

Transportation - Department of Transportation

Treasury - Department of the Treasury

APHIS - Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Agriculture

BLM - Bureau of Land Management, Interior

BOEM - Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Interior

CG - Coast Guard, Homeland Security

COE - Army Corps of Engineers, Defense

FHA - Federal Highway Administration, Transportation

FS - Forest Service, Agriculture

FSA - Farm Services Administration, Agriculture

FWS - Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior

IRS - Internal Revenue Service, Treasury

NOAA - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Commerce

NRCS - Natural Resources Conservation Service

Secure Permanent and Dedicated Conservation Funding from Public and Private Sources

Since Theodore Roosevelt made conservation a national priority, it has been a core purpose of the federal government along with national defense, justice, property rights, and infrastructure for interstate commerce. However, federal funding for natural resources and the environment, known as Function 300 in the budget, has been cut in half since the 1970s and is now less than one percent of overall federal discretionary spending. In addition, pass-through funds from federal excise taxes paid by hunters, recreational shooters, and anglers no longer meet state fish and wildlife agencies' growing costs of conserving species in need. Ensuring robust and consistent funding for conservation is the top priority for sportsmen's organizations.

Priority Programs for Funding

Throughout this report, programs and priorities are referenced that will require federal funding for implementation. The following is a compilation of the top funding priorities and reference to the recommendation where more details can be found.

- **Recommendation 2:** Fund development of modern access data tools for federal lands.
- **Recommendation 3:** Establish a permanent program based on DOI Secretarial Order 3362, with assigned staff and adequate funding for research and implementation by federal and state agencies.
- **Recommendation 4:** Direct a portion of federal revenue from energy development on federal lands and waters to federal and state agencies to mitigate the losses of fish, wildlife, and their habitat from energy development.
- **Recommendation 5:** Fully fund and implement conservation programs authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill and encourage landowner participation in CRP, ACEP, EQIP, and other programs.
- **Recommendation 6:** Increase the U.S. Forest Service budget subaccounts supporting active management programs sufficiently to address the 80 million acres of national forest in need of restoration.
- **Recommendation 7:** Increase funding to recover listed species and improve implementation of the ESA by state and federal agencies.
- **Recommendation 8:** Appropriate \$50 million annually to support state efforts to manage, monitor, and prevent CWD and studies of disease management actions, improved detection, impacts of CWD on hunters and wildlife enthusiasts, and pathways of CWD transmission.
- **Recommendation 9:** Accelerate the pace of forest conservation in the U.S. Forest Service budget and with tax incentives for reforestation of private lands and marketing of wood products.
- **Recommendation 10:** Enhance opportunities and access for hunting and recreational shooting on federal lands through budget requests and appropriations that support this objective.

Protect Existing Dedicated Funding

- **Exempt the Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Funds from mandatory spending accounts that are subject to budget sequestration. Congress**

Erosion of discretionary spending is limiting federal land and state wildlife managers' ability to address threats of land conversion, climate change, and invasive species. As funding levels have decreased, these threats have increased. Even funds collected from hunters and anglers through

self-imposed excise taxes are being withheld by a 2 percent sequestration cut imposed on the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson/Wallop-Breaux funds. These shortfalls are leaving declining habitats and species populations to worsen, potentially beyond hope of restoration.

Attract Private Investment in Conservation

- Issue a regulation under the *Endangered Species Act* (similar to the 2008 rule under the *Clean Water Act*) to formalize accountable, enforceable, and transparent standards and mechanisms for offsetting habitat losses with gains that result in recovery of wildlife species. Interior/FWS

The private sector is a growing source of conservation funding. Properly designed and enforced, mitigation banks, water banking, green bonds, and other innovative mitigation strategies are offsetting the quantity and functional quality of lost habitat. It works as investors complete conservation projects for which they are later reimbursed by developers. In exchange, developers seeking approvals under the *Clean Water Act* and portions of the *Endangered Species Act* get faster decisions. These policies need more predictable, accountable standards to increase participation. The resulting investment opportunities leverage federal and state dollars with private money.



Enact New Conservation Funding Priorities

- Enact the *Great American Outdoors Act* and the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* to restore wildlife habitat, fix recreational infrastructure, and expand access to America's outdoor heritage. Congress

The *Great American Outdoors Act* (S.3422) is a bipartisan proposal to secure full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and solve the problem of maintenance backlogs on federal lands. The LWCF is an existing program that conserves important habitat for fish and wildlife while expanding public recreational access; it was permanently reauthorized in 2019 but funding was not made permanent in its reauthorization. At the same time, federal land management agencies have ever increasing “deferred maintenance” needs—the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has identified a backlog of over \$5 billion and the Department of the Interior’s (DOI) agencies have a backlog of more than \$16 billion. The *Great American Outdoors Act* would dedicate \$9.5 billion over five years for the maintenance backlog on DOI

lands as well as on USFS lands and would permanently fund LWCF at its authorized level of \$900 million per year.

The *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* (RAWA, H.R.3742) is another bipartisan proposal that would dedicate \$1.4 billion every year for state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies. This would allow the agencies to proactively manage at-risk species before they decline to the point of being listed under the *Endangered Species Act*, when recovery efforts are lengthier and far more expensive. The proposed RAWA funding would complement the contributions made by hunters and anglers but would not affect or replace those programs.



Enhance Access for Hunters and Outdoor Recreationists

Access to hunting and fishing is a primary concern of sportsmen and women, and federal lands and waters provide places where many people pursue these pastimes. In fact, the 2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation found that 34 percent of hunters used public lands for all or some of their hunting opportunities. Yet access is repeatedly cited as one of the most important limiting factors associated with hunting participation – without having a place to go, many hunters will simply stop hunting. Similarly, a recent survey of more than 1,500 anglers by Southwick Associates found that 27 percent list access to water as the biggest problem facing fishing today.

In many instances, federal land agencies control access. Maintaining or increasing access opportunities to federal lands will ensure that hunters and anglers have somewhere to go. Investing in infrastructure that supports recreational access, acquiring or placing easements on lands that will be open for recreational access, and providing updated and easily-accessible mapping systems to make it clear where federal lands are open for access will all help reduce this barrier to participation.

Maintain robust funding for federal land roads and trails

- Increase Highway Bill funding for the Federal Lands Transportation Program and Federal Lands Access Program. Congress
- Enhance interagency cooperation between the Federal Highway Administration and other federal land management agencies to expedite and streamline funding transfers and increase cooperation and communication with state agencies. Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/FS; Transportation/FHA

America's Transportation Infrastructure Act of 2019 (S. 2302) proposes funding and direction to federal land management agencies through the Federal Lands Transportation Program and Federal Lands Access Program. This provides for improved interchanges, roads, and trails on and leading to federally-managed public lands. Current annual allocations – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS, \$30 million), U.S. Forest Service (USFS, \$17 million), and Bureau of Land Management (BLM, competes for a portion of \$24 million) – are inadequate to address road and bridge projects needing attention. The FWS has a backlog of repairs and improvements of \$102 million annually, and the USFS, with more than 65,000 miles of roads accessible by passenger vehicle, has more than \$3 billion in maintenance needs. Roads to and through National Park Service (NPS) parks and preserves often



provide access to other lands for recreation and hunting and must also be maintained. Funding is critical to improve safety and access to these federal lands as visitation for hunting and other recreation continues to grow.

Improve public land access databases

- Publish modern, data-rich access tools to provide better access and user experiences on federal lands. Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/FS; Defense/COE
- Fund development of modern access data tools for federal lands. Congress

Better digital maps of federal lands would greatly increase the public's ability to use these lands. Benefits of an accurate and continuously updated system include improved users' experiences, reduced resource damage, and avoidance of inadvertent illegal trespassing and activities. To address this, Congress enacted and the Department of the Interior (DOI) implemented the *John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act*. Section 4105 addresses inaccessible federal lands by directing the USFS and BLM to develop a database and priority list for lands to open for public access. In addition, DOI Secretarial Order 3356 directs BLM to develop a National Public Lands Access Geodatabase for similar purposes.

However, neither the USFS nor the BLM is currently equipped to determine where access rights exist across private lands. Many of the agencies' access easement records are held on paper files and cannot be integrated into digital mapping systems necessary for a complete evaluation of access issues. The USFS estimates it holds 37,000 recorded easements but most (32,000) have not been digitized. An effort to digitize this information must be accelerated to serve the growing availability of web-based and handheld Global Positioning System (GPS) technologies used by the public.

Ensure land transactions enhance federal land access

- Advance land transaction programs that benefit access and habitat conservation and increase management efficiencies including FLTFA, *Small Tracts Act* amendment, and BLM and USFS land-adjustment legislation. Congress; Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/FS
- Allocate the public access share of LWCF funding to priority rights-of-way and parcels that create access to land-locked federal lands. Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/FS

The sportsmen and women community's staunch support for keeping federal lands open includes support for trading or selling small and low value tracts of BLM and national forest lands in exchange for high value additions to the federal land system. Properties that provide little to no benefit for access or wildlife habitat can also create management inefficiencies. In order to more efficiently and cost effectively manage the federal estate, and to benefit access and habitat conservation, agencies have authorities through the *Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act* (FLTFA), *Small Tracts Act* amendment, and USFS land-adjustment legislation for the sale of federal lands with low

conservation and access values. Revenues generated by the sale of these lands are used for acquisition of high priority lands, particularly those that improve opportunities for hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting, and to conserve wildlife habitat.

Additionally, permanent reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) in 2019 dedicated 3 percent or a minimum of \$15 million annually for securing public access. This funding should be allocated to acquiring rights-of-way and parcels that open land-locked federal lands.



Require Collaboration on Big Game Migration Corridors and Habitats

Big game populations across North America move between summer and winter habitats. The quality of each habitat and the ability to move between them is a fundamental element in the ecology and management of mule deer, pronghorn, elk, bighorn sheep, moose, and others. Advancements in wildlife tracking technology have allowed researchers to document the importance and location of migration in the West. In addition, identification of big game “stopovers” – areas along migration corridors where animals spend significant time foraging and resting between movements – has allowed managers to focus conservation efforts on these vital habitats as well.

At the same time, an increasing human population across the western U.S. has expanded housing, industrial development, and transportation infrastructure now interposed with seasonal habitats and migratory pathways of big game species. Increased vehicle traffic has caused more wildlife-vehicle collisions and direct mortality of big game along traditional migration corridors. Even in areas without development, habitat quality on seasonal ranges has deteriorated due to invasive species, wildfires, overgrowth of non-forage vegetation, and other issues, all of which can result in declining populations.

Department of the Interior Secretarial Order 3362 (SO 3362), signed in February 2018, has helped direct broad engagement and focus on the challenge of researching, managing, and conserving big game migration corridors and seasonal habitats. In addition, the Western Governors’ Association (WGA) passed a resolution in June 2019 supporting the conservation and state-led management of wildlife migration corridors. This resolution also calls on federal agencies to support locally developed initiatives to conserve migration corridors and habitat.

Continued and expanded collaboration on this issue will enhance efforts of state and federal agencies and non-profit conservation organizations that are beginning to make significant progress on these challenges.



Improve Transportation Planning to Reduce Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions

- Support passage of a federal highway bill with new innovative provisions to address wildlife corridor/transportation conflicts, specifically the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program in Section 1125 and the Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Research in Section 3007 of the *America's Transportation Infrastructure Act of 2019* (S.2302). Congress
- Develop a priority project list in coordination with state transportation and wildlife agencies for wildlife-vehicle collision reduction and improvement of habitat connectivity. Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/FS; Transportation/FHA

Every state has named increasing traffic volumes on highways as a primary issue impacting conservation of big game and other wildlife species. These animals face direct impacts such as wildlife-vehicle collisions and loss and fragmentation of habitat, along with indirect impacts through habitat avoidance and altered or lost migrations. Across the West, properly constructed infrastructure such as highway overpasses and underpasses designed for wildlife crossings have reduced mortality by as much as 80 percent. Recently funded migration studies (via SO 3362) are helping to identify important migration intersections with highways and roads to inform wildlife crossing placement.

While the current highway bill allows for the use of federal funds for fish and wildlife crossings, there are no guarantees that state departments of transportation will prioritize such projects or that these projects will be integrated into the Federal Highway Administration's (FHA) priorities. As such, there is a clear need for dedicated federal funding and federal agency direction



to advance construction of fish and wildlife crossing infrastructure on the ground and in the next highway bill. Equally important to federal funding is coordination between wildlife and state/federal transportation agencies to resolve the impact of highway infrastructure and traffic on big game and other wildlife movement. While administrative flexibility for such coordination exists, it is not exercised often. Without such support, coordination, and action, wildlife managers are at a disadvantage in applying results of their research to conserve corridors and wildlife species for future generations.

Federal-State Coordination

- Establish a permanent program based on DOI Secretarial Order 3362, with assigned staff and adequate funding for research and implementation by federal and state agencies. Congress; Interior/all bureaus
- Develop a companion effort to SO 3362 at the U.S. Department of Agriculture through the U.S. Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service. Agriculture/FS, NRCS
- Establish a Wildlife Corridors Grant Program to provide matching funds for states and tribes to re-connect wildlife corridors through voluntary partnerships with private landowners, ranchers, farmers, and other stakeholders. Congress

Both state and federal governments recognize not only the need but also the challenge of conserving big game migration corridors across the West. Secretarial Order (SO) 3362 provided a critical infusion of resources for states to gather additional information on big game migration and to implement measures designed to conserve migratory corridors and improve winter range condition. In addition, federal funding has been leveraged for habitat restoration in migration corridors and seasonal ranges identified in the SO 3362 State Action Plans. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Shared Stewardship vision is based on the same principles, and the USFS administers much of the big game summer

range habitat in the U.S. The process of coordination between DOI, USDA, and the states has only just begun as significant new state data on seasonal big game migrations now is starting to emerge.

The Administration should support recent federal and state policies and recommendations set forth by SO 3362 and the WGA resolution. This includes substantive funding and continued coordination for federal land management agencies to conserve or restore state-identified migration corridors and seasonal habitats and to collaborate with state agencies to implement management efforts.



Tom Koerner/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Integrate Industry, State, and Federal Wildlife Goals Early in Energy Planning

In 2018, the U.S. had the largest annual increases in energy development ever recorded by any country, mostly powered by the shale gas revolution. Combined with wind and solar farms and liquid natural gas (LNG) export terminals, production of domestic energy resources can have significant effects on wildlife and habitats. At the same time, developing a new energy economy could cause energy costs to rise and threaten the affordability of working lands and forests, forcing landowners to sell land for development resulting in habitat fragmentation and conversion to less wildlife-friendly environments.

The developed energy resources and our natural resources provide economic benefits for the country, and both are needed for future generations. Achieving both, however, will require early consideration of effects on goals for habitat, wildlife, and water in order to balance energy development and wildlife management.

Ensure Renewable Energy Development Does Not Negatively Impact Wildlife

- Ensure that energy projects minimize wildlife and habitat impacts. Give preference to and encourage siting in areas proactively identified that avoid key habitat, wildlife migration corridors, and migratory bird flyways. Interior/BLM; Agriculture/FS
- Revise pre-planning and planning processes to include consultation with state fish and wildlife agencies early and often before public notices are published. Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/all bureaus; Defense/all bureaus
- Approve native grasses and wood from sustainably managed forests as feedstocks for renewable fuels. EPA; Agriculture/all bureaus; Interior/BLM
- Support research on the effects to wildlife and habitat of producing nonnative biofuels. EPA; Agriculture/all bureaus

Placement of climate-beneficial technologies, such as some wind projects and their associated transmission lines, should be planned with the same care as carbon-based developments to avoid fragmenting wildlife corridors or impeding migratory bird flyways. Siting these projects in areas with minimal wildlife impacts, such as former industrial sites, rooftops, parking lots, landfills, abandoned mines, and brownfields should be chosen wherever possible. In addition, government mandates to include corn ethanol and soy biodiesel in fuel supplies have driven the conversion of millions of acres of grasslands

and wetlands to agriculture. This has eliminated habitats for pheasants, ducks, and other gamebirds and also reduced important carbon sinks.

We encourage prudent development of renewable energy as part of our nation's overall goals toward energy security along with responsible development of oil and gas resources. However, renewable energy siting and production also must engage state wildlife managers early and often in the process to reduce potential impacts to wildlife populations and their habitat.

Integrate Wildlife Population and Habitat Objectives Early in Energy Project Planning

- Revise energy development planning rules to give equal consideration to wildlife and habitat resources both site-by-site and also cumulatively across developed energy areas. Interior/BLM, BOEM, FWS; Agriculture/FS
- Update the *Energy Policy Act* and *Mineral Leasing Act* to provide for the needs of wildlife and habitat during energy development planning and implementation. Congress
- Update the Secretarial Memo of September 10, 2018, to ensure that federal agencies include state fish and wildlife agencies as cooperating agencies in planning energy and transmission projects and incorporate state recommendations for achieving wildlife population and habitat goals. Interior/BLM
- Develop a process for resolving conflicts between objectives for energy and fish and wildlife management to ensure equal treatment of fish and wildlife and to preclude unnecessary litigation. Interior/BLM; Agriculture/FS
- Fund research to develop specific guidelines for the location and operation of energy projects that avoid, minimize, or mitigate potential negative impacts on wildlife. Energy; Interior/BLM; Agriculture/FS
- Direct a portion of federal revenue from energy development on federal lands and waters to federal and state agencies to mitigate losses of fish, wildlife, or their habitat from energy development. Congress

Energy development sites as well as pipelines and electrical transmission lines can fragment habitats, disrupt wildlife movements, and impair water quality and quantity, significantly degrading habitat. The current scale of development exacerbates this problem for many local species populations and, in at least one case, for an entire species – the greater sage-grouse. Infrastructure and transmission lines often conflict with wildlife, including imperiled species like the lesser prairie-chicken. In addition, hydraulic fracturing for shale gas requires tremendous amounts of water, and disposal into surface water bodies is problematic for drinking water and wildlife habitats.

These problems can be addressed by state and federal wildlife, land management, and utility regulatory agencies working together with the energy industries. For example, when the sage grouse was petitioned to be listed under the *Endangered Species Act*, agencies and stakeholders responded with a plan for conserving the bird in and around energy and infrastructure projects. This is the largest



coordinated conservation plan between state and federal governments in our nation's history – 11 western states are involved. However, such efforts would be easier and more effective if undertaken from the beginning of planned developments. A general policy to begin coordination in the earliest stages of the projects, when most options are open, will lead to more success incorporating energy planning with landscape-scale mitigation policies, resource management plans, and conservation actions on private working lands.



Incentivize Private Landowners to Conserve Wildlife and Habitat and Provide Access for Hunting

More than two-thirds of the land area in the United States is privately owned in farms or ranches (915 million acres) and private forests (300 million acres). Regulatory programs protect many habitats and ecosystems, but the core of private land conservation policy in the U.S. drives voluntary, incentive-based programs to improve habitat while also promoting markets for sustainably-managed agricultural products. These programs incentivize habitat conservation on private lands by offering cost-shares and grants to landowners and producers that improve both their bottom line and the quality of wildlife habitat on their land.

Wetlands and Grasslands Conservation

- Reaffirm a national policy goal of no net loss of wetlands while protecting and enhancing remaining wetlands and streams.
EPA; Defense/COE

President George H.W. Bush first set a national policy goal of “no net loss” of wetlands in 1989. The next Administration should reaffirm this national policy goal and achieve no net loss of wetlands while also enhancing and protecting the nation’s remaining wetlands and streams. Incentive and cost-share programs for wetlands restoration, management, and protection contained in the *North American Wetlands Conservation Act* (NAWCA) and Farm Bill programs should be pursued vigorously to sustain conservation and water quality and quantity in North America.

Other Farm Bill provisions such as conservation compliance and Sodsaver ensure that federal farm policy precludes wetland drainage or conversion of native grasslands. Under this direction, landowners must



conserve wetland and grassland habitats on their land in exchange for participating in federal farm programs. These practices must be maintained to ensure that agricultural production does not work at cross-purposes to basic conservation standards that have been a normal part of farming operations for decades.

Farm Bill Conservation Programs

- Fully fund and implement conservation programs authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill and encourage landowner participation in CRP, ACEP, EQIP, and other programs. **Congress; Agriculture/NRCS, FSA**
- Continue and expand the successful Working Lands for Wildlife partnership, as directed under the 2018 Farm Bill, to encourage conservation of habitats for at-risk species on agricultural land and provide producers with regulatory certainty. **Agriculture/NRCS; Interior/FWS**
- Ensure that vegetation planted as part of CRP or other Farm Bill conservation programs provides benefits to wildlife in addition to soil health, water quality, and carbon sequestration, including by encouraging the use of native vegetation in conservation program implementation, where practicable. **Agriculture/NRCS, FSA**

The Farm Bill is the largest single source of funding for conservation on private lands, with the current *Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018* dedicating approximately \$6 billion in annual funding. There are a number of individual programs within the Farm Bill that provide important wildlife habitat conservation benefits.

USDA must implement all authorized programs to realize all intended benefits. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) should be enhanced to ensure that vegetation planted and managed on enrolled land provides wildlife habitat values as well as soil erosion, water quality, and carbon sequestration benefits. Financial assistance programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) are also essential to encourage wildlife conservation benefits. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) initiative, Working Lands for Wildlife, adds the benefit of regulatory certainty to participants in Farm Bill conservation programs.

Easement programs, such as the Agricultural Conservation

Easement Program (ACEP), which includes Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) and Agricultural Land Easements (ALE), and the Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP), provide significant benefits to both wetland and upland wildlife while also promoting long-term stewardship of private lands. We urge USDA to maximize public investment in ACEP, including maintaining historical allocations for both ALE and WRE, while prioritizing easements that will enhance wildlife conservation benefits of land being protected.

The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) provides block grants to state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies to fund recreational access and habitat improvement programs on private lands. In addition, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) has proven to be a huge success in its ability to leverage private dollars to maximize federal investment in innovative, creative, and tailored conservation projects throughout the country. We encourage USDA to continue supporting these highly successful and popular programs.

Conservation Easements

- Reaffirm the federal government's commitment to supporting land and habitat protection through conservation easements that encourage keeping existing wetlands, grasslands, and forests in conservation uses. **Interior/FWS; Agriculture/NRCS, FS**
- Provide mandatory funding for Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) and modify it so it would have two categories of eligible land: general forest land and forest land of special significance. **Congress**

The sale or donation of easements preserves agricultural landscapes, helps producers keep their working lands working, and protects wetland and grassland habitats. Easements available through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, funded through purchases of federal Duck Stamps and NAWCA funds, have been the backbone of habitat conservation in the Prairie Pothole Region and other core habitats for nearly sixty years. We encourage the

Administration and Congress to reaffirm the importance of these tools that conserve and protect the public benefits of these landscapes for future generations to enjoy. We urge that mandatory funding be provided for HFRP and that it be modified to increase its applicability to forests beyond those that harbor important species, but are worthy of protection for other uses.

Increase Active Management of Federal Lands and Reduce Litigation through Collaboration

The U.S. has the most extensive network of federal lands in the world. Sportsmen and women are committed to making this federal land estate work to sustain fish and wildlife populations, provide access for hunting and other recreation, retain ecosystem services for our citizens, and allow careful, science-informed development that helps sustain the country's economy.

Controversies over how lands should be used and managed have hamstrung agencies responsible for caring for the lands. Conflicting direction in organic acts and policy changes in Congress and the White House, declining federal funding, and routine litigation have paralyzed federal land management and reduced agencies' effectiveness. Federal land management agencies need to work collaboratively to manage federal lands actively to improve their value for wildlife, recreation, and other uses.

Increase Collaboration, Reduce Litigation

- **Authorize collaboration in federal land decisions and protect collaboratively based decisions from litigation.** Congress; Agriculture/FS; Interior/FWS, BLM; Defense/COE
- **Authorize alternative remedies to litigation, including arbitration, and limit fee reimbursement to cases of direct and personal interest as defined in the *Equal Access to Justice Act*.** Congress; Agriculture/FWS, BLM; Defense/COE; DOJ

Collaboration is the voluntary work of citizens with each other and federal agencies to develop plans and projects. These locally driven solutions achieve buy-in from diverse stakeholders. New policy must place collaborative agreements on par with lawsuits in determining the

direction of federal land conservation. Arbitration between litigants and collaborative groups can avoid costly and disruptive litigation on projects where stakeholders have already agreed upon the best approach.

Invasive Species

- **Increase funding and capacity for education, management, and prevention to combat the invasive species epidemic across all lands and waters.** Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/FS, NRCS; Defense/all bureaus; EPA; Transportation/FHA; Commerce/NOAA; Homeland/CG

Invasive species are a serious threat to America's fish and wildlife as well as federal lands and waters. Invasive species are a leading cause for habitat loss, a key contributing factor to threatened and endangered species listing, and they exacerbate risks of wildfire across the landscape.

Each year, public agencies and utilities spend \$140 billion to manage and mitigate impacts of invasive species. State and federal agencies lack the capacity to manage and implement adequate prevention programs, and thus rely on restrictive measures on recreational uses of public lands and waters to mitigate invasive species spread. Unfortunately, the nation is losing the battle, and the

cost of managing invasive species grows exponentially once they are established.

Outdoor recreation is one way invasive species and pathogens are transported and spread. Consequently, hunters, anglers, and boaters are also poised to be the best line of defense in preventing their spread. Local, state, and federal agencies should increase their focus on public education and collaborate closely with the sportsmen's and women's conservation community to ensure stakeholder and public user concerns are considered prior to management decisions. Federal agency budgets to manage invasive species should reflect the growing seriousness of the threat.

Include State Wildlife Managers in Federal Land Management

- Amend federal land planning policy to integrate state wildlife management objectives. Congress; Agriculture/FS; Interior/BLM; Defense/all bureaus
- Align federal land hunting access with state regulations on seasons, means, and methods. Congress; Agriculture/FS; Interior/all bureaus; Defense/COE
- Provide clear direction in Wilderness Area designations for federal land management agencies to honor existing agreements and provide access for management of wildlife and habitat, water developments, hunting, and other infrastructure. Agriculture/FS, Interior/all bureaus

Federal land agencies are managing the habitat for wildlife populations that are managed by state wildlife agencies (or FWS). Habitat and population management must be better coordinated in several ways. Federal land managers should be required to integrate state wildlife management goals in plans and projects. Federal rules for hunting

access should match those established by states. Access to federal lands, particularly to Wilderness Areas, should be provided for state wildlife management activities. Several recent Department of the Interior Secretarial Orders direct cooperation and deference to states; however, other policy conflicts with this direction.

Implementing the USDA Shared Stewardship Vision

- Increase the USFS budget subaccounts supporting active management programs sufficiently to address the 80 million acres of national forest in need of restoration. Congress; Agriculture/FS
- Authorize and fund the USFS to rebuild staff capacity that has been lost over years of “fire borrowing” practices. Congress; Agriculture/FS
- Formalize Shared Stewardship as policy to increase effectiveness, efficiency, and scale of landscape conservation to improve active management of federal lands. Expand Shared Stewardship to other federal land management agencies. Agriculture/FS; Interior/all bureaus; Defense/COE
- Fund Shared Stewardship agreements to leverage non-federal funding, capacity, and expertise. Congress; Agriculture/FS; Interior/all bureaus

The USDA adopted the Shared Stewardship vision in 2018 to address the challenges of catastrophic wildfires, more public demand, degraded watersheds, and epidemics of forest insects and disease. More than 80 million acres of national forest land are in critical need of attention to restore environmental function, provide quality habitat, and protect human infrastructure. Across 11 western states, there are more than 6.3 billion standing dead trees.

These conditions have contributed to the increase in catastrophic wildfires that is furthering the damage and consuming billions of dollars diverted from other

intended purposes to cover fire costs. This so-called “fire borrowing” was stemmed recently by Congress, but the lost funding has not been restored. This deficit is a major obstacle in implementing Shared Stewardship and proceeding with restoration.

The U.S. Forest Service must begin an unprecedented scale and pace of restoration projects. The Shared Stewardship approach brings together the necessary partners, but Congress and the Administration must fund these efforts. Non-federal funding, capacity, and expertise is available to help.

Achieve Greater Results from an Improved ESA Program

Species conservation is principally governed by state authority. While states have primary authority for management of fish and wildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and federal land management agencies have strong authorities as well. This means that state and federal agencies must work together to effectively manage fish and wildlife populations. The work includes keeping healthy populations healthy, providing and enhancing habitat, and sometimes either recovering or reducing population sizes and densities according to available habitat, balance with predator and prey species, social tolerance, and goals for public outdoor recreation, hunting, and fishing.

Two main areas of policy can ensure successful long-term species conservation. One is the *Endangered Species Act* (ESA), which is intended to prevent extinction and recover at-risk species. Another is the federal land management authorities that affect the quality of habitat on which wildlife depend.

Help Species Before the ESA is Needed

- Issue and enforce objective, measurable, and transparent criteria for considering voluntary conservation actions that preclude the need to list species under the ESA. Interior/FWS; Commerce/NOAA
- Expand the Working Lands for Wildlife partnership between the NRCS and FWS for landowners who qualify for existing Biological Opinions. Agriculture/all bureaus; Interior/FWS
- Provide dependable funding for state-based, proactive, voluntary conservation of declining fish and wildlife species through the Farm Bill, *Recovering America's Wildlife Act*, NAWCA, and the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program (see Recommendation 1: Funding for Conservation for more details). Congress; Agriculture/FWS; Interior/FWS; Defense/all bureaus
- Provide funding for a national coordinator to support Conservation without Conflict, engaging agencies in broad public/private collaborative approaches to conservation. Congress; Interior/FWS; Agriculture/FS; Defense/all bureaus
- Increase funding to recover listed species and improve implementation of the ESA by state and federal agencies. Interior/FWS; Commerce/NOAA; Agriculture/FS

Addressing threats to at-risk species before these species warrant listing under the ESA is the most efficient way to improve species conservation. This requires the combined authorities and resources of state, private, and federal entities working together. A growing number of solutions are emerging from people with diverse goals and values that focus on common conservation interests—a promising solution known as Conservation without Conflict. This is demonstrating to policy makers, funders, conservation groups, and the public and private sectors that collaboration delivers results for wildlife, habitat, and the values we ascribe to stewardship. Regulations will always have an important role in conservation, but regulatory action often does not promote collaboration, and can create counterproductive and adversarial tensions. Conservation without Conflict is, in essence, the idea that voluntary proactive approaches

to conservation that help species and keep working lands working can achieve far more conservation benefit than approaches that are top-down, mandated, and regulatory.

Current ESA regulation provides little support for collaboration and productive efforts struggle for funding. The FWS needs stronger authority to defer listing when these efforts are likely to produce results. Policies issued in the 1990s, such as Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances and Safe Harbor Agreements, attempt to do this. However, these agreements often lack specific, measurable criteria that enable FWS to acknowledge them in listing decisions. The process for approving these agreements is lengthy and costly. They must be clearer in purpose and accountability, better funded, and easier to obtain.

Improve the ESA

- Hold hearings and actively engage in updating the ESA to focus on improving species recovery and reducing litigation. Congress
- Amend Section 4 of the ESA to create a science-based, reliable process for listing and delisting species. Congress
- Delist species when their populations have reached recovery goals. Interior/FWS; Commerce/NOAA
- Update Section 7 of the ESA to clarify that requirements for reinitiating consultation do not apply at the planning level and are triggered only by significant, peer-reviewed, published new information. Congress; Interior/FWS; Commerce/NOAA

The goal of the ESA is broadly supported, but conflicting values on how the ESA should be implemented has resulted in gridlock. Revision of the ESA has been impossible since the last viable effort in 1997. The solution is more efficient use of funds and more funding.

Listing and delisting species has been overtaken by litigation. Delisting, which returns conservation and management of a species to state authority, is supposed to occur when recovery goals are met. However, recovery goals can be shifted. Also, lawsuits prevent delisting by exploiting outdated provisions of the ESA. One such provision concerns whether the listed “entity” is an entire species or a population of a species. For example, the gray wolf occurs in populations in the Midwest, Southwest, and Rocky Mountains. Delisting in the Rockies was repeatedly prevented by the courts until Congress intervened in 2011 to reinstate a delisting decision and preclude further lawsuits. Delisting in the Midwest is still being denied. A more reliable process requires updating the ESA.

Under the ESA, the FWS must review every federal government action that may affect a listed species. As a result, this FWS consultation process is one of the longest, most litigated, and inconsistently applied aspects of the program. Recent litigation has made the problem worse. In *Cottonwood Environmental Law Center v. Krueger* (2015), the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals required federal



land management agencies to repeat consultations on plans and programs (e.g., Forest Plans) each time a new species or habitat is listed, or new information is received. Congress in 2018 enacted a five-year partial exemption and deferral from this requirement for species listing and critical habitat designation but failed to define or limit new information as a trigger for re-consultation. Further steps are necessary to ensure requirements for re-consultation are based only on verifiable, peer-reviewed scientific information and applied only when productive for conservation purposes rather than as an obstruction to decision making.



Support and Assist States in Addressing Chronic Wasting Disease and Wild Sheep Pneumonia

Two wildlife diseases have become priority problems for sportsmen and women. Chronic Wasting Disease is threatening the legacy achievement of restored deer, elk, and moose populations – referred to as “cervids” from the Latin name for the deer family. Pneumonia is preventing restoration of bighorn sheep (Desert and Rocky Mountain) and threatening other wild sheep (Dall’s and Stone’s). Both diseases threaten not only the wildlife, but the enormous economy driven by hunting.

Implement Congressional Direction for Controlling Sheep Pneumonia

- Elevate ongoing congressional direction for reducing risk of pneumonia on federal lands to a formal policy in law or rule. Congress; Interior/BLM; Agriculture/FS
- Evaluate federal agency management separation strategies that are intended to address the risk of pneumonia outbreaks, assess their effectiveness, identify and implement new solutions, and integrate them into federal land management agency grazing programs. Interior/BLM; Agriculture/FS

Domestic sheep in the U.S. tolerate several species of bacteria that cause fatal pneumonia in wild sheep. In addition to potential contact on private-land hobby herd/farm flock operations, the two types of sheep can encounter each other on federal lands where domestic sheep grazing is permitted within wild sheep ranges. State wildlife agency goals for maintaining wild sheep herds and restoring herds in unoccupied habitat are thwarted by die-offs of infected wild sheep herds and occupancy of suitable ranges by domestic sheep.

Sportsmen and ranchers have worked together for decades to address these risks collaboratively. In several cases, stakeholders have resolved problems through agreements and voluntarily waived, re-designed, or converted grazing permits to other types of livestock. In other cases, where solutions have not been found, the agencies have been compelled by policy or litigation to close domestic sheep grazing allotments. In too many cases, the difficulty of finding solutions and the controversy around imposed solutions has left the disease risk unmanaged by taking no action at all.



Brett Wiedmann/North Dakota Game & Fish Dept.

In keeping with sportsmen’s long-held commitment to multiple use, we have worked with ranchers to promote a federal policy driving collaborative solutions. Since fiscal year 2016, congressional appropriations have directed the USFS and BLM to implement a variety of solutions to address the risk of deadly pneumonia outbreaks where wild and domestic sheep encounter each other on grazing allotments. This congressional budgetary direction must be formalized into the grazing programs of the USFS and BLM.

Create a Comprehensive Chronic Wasting Disease Response

- Enact a federal CWD program that authorizes appropriations for state management and prevention of the disease, applied research, and coordinated roles for USDA and DOI working with state fish and wildlife agencies. Agriculture/APHIS; Interior/GS; Congress
- Appropriate \$50 million annually to support state efforts to manage, monitor, and prevent CWD and studies of disease management actions, improved detection, impacts of CWD on hunters and wildlife enthusiasts, and pathways of CWD transmission. Congress
- Conduct a third-party evaluation of, and modernize accordingly, the USDA Herd Certification Program to better control CWD, improve surveillance, eliminate risks that spread the disease, penalize non-compliance, and ensure indemnification for depopulation of infected herds. Agriculture/APHIS

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has become an imminent risk for all cervid populations in North America. As of March 2020, CWD has been found in 26 states: in wild populations in 24 states and in captive populations in two additional states. Three Canadian provinces have detected CWD as well. In captive cervids, the disease appears even at farms in compliance with the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's (APHIS) CWD Herd Certification Program.

Chronic Wasting Disease is unique among diseases of deer, elk, and moose in North America. It is ALWAYS fatal, its causative agent is a non-living protein that is shed by infected animals and can persist and remain infectious for years in the environment (thus, it is unaffected by vaccines, high heat, and common sterilization chemicals), and it is easily transmitted from animal to animal or via contaminated feed and habitat. Infected animals may appear healthy for months until symptoms appear. If unchecked, CWD can spread rapidly within a herd, with prevalence rates exceeding 80 percent in some captive herds. There is no viable, reliable live-animal test to determine if an animal is infected, and no practical decontamination methods for removing the infectious proteins from habitats of wild cervids. Consequently, it is nearly impossible to eradicate the disease once it becomes established within wild cervid herds.

Management of currently infected herds and prevention

of further spread of the disease are the only options. One of the principal management tools now available to slow transmission is to reduce the size of wild populations and eliminate infected captive herds. This can be done only at the high cost of culling wild cervids and eliminating captive ones. Smaller wild populations mean less hunting, less economic benefit from hunting, and loss of participation in hunting. Prevention will require taking strong, proactive measures to eliminate the risk of spreading the disease to new herds or areas. States are currently funding CWD control out of their base budgets at the expense of other wildlife management priorities and programs. No persistent long-term commitment of federal funds has been made to support management or prevention.

Research is the other priority. Some state and federal funds, and a rising contribution of private funds, are going toward discoveries of better means of management, prevention, and a more thorough understanding of the disease's epidemiology that may lead to management breakthroughs.

Based on recent technical papers and recommendations from the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Congress and the Administration should authorize a comprehensive CWD program, appropriate funding for that program, and implement a coordinated effort between USDA and DOI that supports states' needs and actions.



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Focus Climate Policy on Habitat Conservation and Restoration

America's sportsmen and women are experiencing firsthand the consequences of increasing temperatures, prolonged droughts, record forest fires, more powerful hurricanes, inland flooding, spread of invasive species and wildlife diseases, and algal outbreaks. These cascading problems degrade habitat, threaten fish and wildlife, and reduce hunting and fishing opportunities. As a result, communities and the recreation economy are put at risk.

Habitat conservation and restoration are a key part of the solution. Habitat sequesters greenhouse gases, which is a major factor in mitigating emissions. Restoring natural resources and improving practices on working lands can achieve more than 30 percent of the emission offsets necessary to achieve net-zero emissions nationally before 2050. Land conservation also boosts the resilience of habitat to changing conditions, which accelerates recovery of imperiled wildlife, expands hunting and fishing opportunities, and revitalizes local economies.

Sequestering Carbon in Forests, Wetlands, Grasslands, and Other Habitats

- Accelerate the pace of forest conservation in the U.S. Forest Service budget and with tax incentives for reforestation of private lands and marketing of wood products. Congress; Agriculture/FS
- Enact a comprehensive National Grasslands Initiative modeled on the successful *North American Wetlands Conservation Act* to achieve a goal of "net gain" of grasslands and prairie habitats. Congress; Agriculture/FS, FSA, NRCS; Interior/BLM, FWS
- Establish federal tax incentives that reward additional tons of long-term carbon sequestration in agriculture, rangeland, and forest management in a manner similar to existing incentives for carbon capture, utilization, and storage technologies. Congress; Agriculture/all bureaus; Interior/all bureaus; Energy; EPA; Treasury/IRS
- Increase funding of Farm Bill conservation programs and better target them to address natural sequestration opportunities, soil health, and methane emissions reductions. Congress; Agriculture/all bureaus; Interior/all bureaus; Energy; EPA; Treasury/IRS
- Require federal agency investment in buildings to measure embodied carbon baselines in buildings and set achievable reductions over 5 and 10 years. EPA; GSA; HUD; Agriculture/FS

Habitat sequestration should receive the same level of policy support as technologies that reduce emissions. Many existing programs accomplish this objective, but the one ecosystem in the U.S. with significant potential to sequester carbon that does not yet have a concerted conservation policy is grasslands. A National Grasslands Initiative to protect remaining native grasslands and shrublands from conversion, and to restore native grasses across their historic range, would expand the portfolio of habitat solutions to sequester carbon.

In addition, ecologically-appropriate forest restoration and reforestation on federal, state, and private lands will optimize sequestration by reducing risks of catastrophic fires. Wood products from sustainable forests move sequestered carbon into buildings and products. Supporting these markets can increase the use of wood as a preferred building material. The added benefits include restored watersheds, fisheries, habitat values, and reduced costs for disaster response and indemnity payments.

Minimizing Habitat Impacts from the Transition to Clean Energy

- Identify public areas for siting clean energy projects away from priority habitats, migration corridors, or flyways. Energy; Interior/BLM, BOEM; Agriculture/FS; Commerce/NOAA
- Encourage siting of clean energy projects on former industrial sites, rooftops, parking lots, landfills, abandoned mines, and brownfields. Congress; EPA; HUD; Energy; Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/FS
- Prevent the continued conversion of native habitats for cultivation of biofuel feedstocks and promote the research and adoption of more sustainable, next-generation feedstocks. Congress; Agriculture/all bureaus; Interior/all bureaus

In restoring ecosystems to reduce emissions and bolster resilience, we must also ensure these ecosystems are not unwittingly degraded as we develop cleaner sources of energy.

Just as there are habitat impacts from conventional energy development, there are wildlife risks that should

be minimized when developing wind, solar, geothermal, advanced nuclear, and carbon capture, utilization, and storage. It is essential to consider and curtail impacts to wildlife as the nation deploys additional sources of clean energy.

Investing Carbon Revenues in Natural Solutions

- Dedicate at least 25 percent of all proceeds derived from or dedicated to climate policies toward restoring forests, wetlands, grasslands; improving the sequestration capacity and resilience of working lands; and reclaiming abandoned mines, degraded waterways, Superfund sites, and brownfields. Congress
- Prioritize early investments in remediating degraded natural resources and expanding the outdoor economy in regions and frontline communities, such as in Appalachia, that are disproportionately impacted by the transition to a low-carbon future. Congress; Agriculture/FS; Interior/all bureaus; EPA; Energy

Should Congress enact a carbon pricing policy or fund climate programs, a significant portion of the money should be dedicated to investments in natural solutions, which can provide 30 percent of the necessary emission

reductions and increase resilience. We acknowledge there are several options for pricing carbon and support a productive debate on this idea.

Bolster Resilience through Natural Defenses

- Incorporate natural defenses and climate-smart conservation practices into all land management practices, facility management plans, and infrastructure investments, such as a highway bill. Congress; Transportation/FHA; GSA; Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/all bureaus; Defense/all bureaus
- Encourage restoration of natural defenses by increasing support for the *North American Wetlands Conservation Act*, the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, Community Development Block Grants, and the hazard mitigation and flood abatement programs of the Army Corps, Department of Transportation, and Federal Emergency Management Agency. Congress; EPA; Interior/FWS; HUD; Homeland/FEMA; Defense/all bureaus; Transportation/FHA

Natural defenses like wetlands, forests, and grasslands have the capacity to help communities withstand extreme weather events such as flooding and hurricanes. In recent years, regions with healthier natural resources have suffered less damage, because natural systems can blunt

and absorb the brunt of the impacts. These solutions are often more effective than engineered solutions and provide additional benefits through enhanced habitat, water quality, and carbon sequestration.

Require Collaboration for Wildlife Conservation, Hunting, and Recreational Shooting on Federal Lands

The hunting conservation community has been actively engaged on natural resource management issues for well more than a century. Sportsmen and women led the way on recognizing fish and wildlife, and the habitats they depend on, as sustainable resources that can be successfully managed for future generations. The tenets that were developed over time and the commitment of private funding, now known as the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, are unique in the world. The future of our nation's conservation and hunting heritage depends on dedicated attention to the sportsmen's community in federal wildlife and resource management institutions. The essential objectives in maintaining this heritage are providing continued access to federal lands, maintaining habitat quality there, and engaging more Americans in these traditional outdoor pastimes.

Use Secretarial Orders to Drive Pro-Hunting Conservation Policy

- Support active and meaningful participation by the federal agencies that are signatories to the Federal Lands Hunting, Fishing, and Shooting Sports Roundtable Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in meeting the goals and objectives of the agreement. Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/all bureaus; Defense/all bureaus
- Incorporate Executive and Secretarial Orders related to public access and opportunities for hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting into federal land management policies. Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/FS; Defense/all bureaus
- Enhance opportunities and access for hunting and recreational shooting on federal lands through budget requests and appropriations that support this objective. Congress; Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/FS; Defense/all bureaus

The Federal Lands Hunting, Fishing, and Shooting Sports Roundtable MOU, updated in 2020, formalizes an agreement between 46 national organizations and federal land management agencies. The Roundtable provides a forum for regular discussions on issues associated with access, including closure of federal lands to hunting,

fishing, or recreational shooting. We encourage the USDA to issue Secretarial Orders (SOs) for the USFS similar to DOI SOs 3346, 3347, 3356, 3362, 3370, 3373, and 3374, and for both agencies to translate those orders into complementary, pro-hunting conservation policy.



Support R3 Efforts

- Foster a greater understanding and appreciation among federal land managers for the role hunters and recreational shooters play in the American System of Conservation Funding by creating a conservation funding training curriculum for federal land management agency employees at the National Conservation Training Center. Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/FS; Defense/all bureaus
- Support the national hunting and shooting sports recruitment, retention, and reactivation (R3) movement. Specifically, through Secretarial Orders, direct federal land management agencies to take concrete steps to facilitate outdoor experiences for groups of prospective hunters and recreational shooters by decreasing barriers for organizers of such groups to obtain permits for access to federal lands and waters to facilitate R3 programs. Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/FS; Defense/all bureaus

Unfortunately, participation in hunting and, until recently, shooting sports has been steadily declining since the 1980s. The decline in these activities, which sustain a multi-billion-dollar industry, poses an ever-increasing threat to wildlife conservation in America. These long-term declines in hunting and recreational shooting participation have sparked a national movement to recruit, retain, and reactivate (R3) hunters and recreational shooters among America's public. Part of this movement is focused on educating the public about the role hunters and recreational shooters play in providing funding for state-led wildlife conservation. In support of these efforts, this movement should be recognized and supported by all federal partners including development and delivery of a conservation funding curriculum for federal land management agency employees at the National Conservation Training Center. Additionally,



federal lands that are open to hunting and recreational shooting can and should serve as a resource for R3 programs. Reducing barriers to programs of this nature should be prioritized through SOs and federal land management agency directives that define the role these agencies can play in facilitating R3 activities in an efficient and collaborative manner.

Engage Sportsmen's Community

- Convene the next White House Conference on North American Wildlife Policy and update the 10-year Action Plan per E.O. 13443. Council on Environmental Quality; Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/all bureaus; Defense/all bureaus
- Pursue permanent reauthorization of the Hunting and Shooting Sports Conservation Council so it can continue to advise the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture on federal land management issues and policies from the perspective of sportsmen and women. Congress; Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/all bureaus
- Work in partnership with the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus to build a strong future for wildlife conservation, hunting, and recreational shooting in the 21st century. Congress; Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/all bureaus; Defense/all bureaus

In 2008, Executive Order (EO) 13443 reaffirmed the key role that hunters play in restoring and conserving our wildlife resources, in order to address modern challenges to wildlife conservation and to shape wildlife conservation and wildlife-dependent recreation in the 21st century. With this EO, the administration formed the first hunting and shooting sports advisory council, convened a White House Conference on North American Wildlife Policy, and developed the Recreational Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Plan. This 10-year Action Plan identified 58 actions to implement the EO. The time is right for the Administration to convene a third conference, one that is smaller and more strategically focused, to update the Plan.

In addition, permanently authorizing the current advisory council, the Hunting and Shooting Sports Conservation Council, would affirm the indispensable link between wildlife conservationists, hunters, recreational shooters, and federal land management agencies. These partners, working closely with the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus (the largest bicameral, bipartisan caucus of any kind in Congress), provide sportsmen and women with a significant link to development of sound wildlife conservation policies, including increasing access to federal lands while supporting efforts to enhance multiple use of wildlife habitat.

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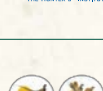
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