

STATE BY STATE BREAKDOWN PRIVATE LAND VS. PUBLIC LAND

	USA
% Public	39.8
% Private	60.2

US BUREAU OF THE CENSUS, STATISTICAL ABSTRACT OF THE UNITED STATES: 1991 (11TH ED.) WASHINGTON, DC, 1991, P.201.

Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
State	AK	NV	UT	ID	OR	AZ	WY	CA	NM	CO	WA	MT	NY	FL	MI	MN	HI	NJ	NH	WI	AR	VA	WV	PA	VT
% Public	95.8	87.8	75.2	70.4	60.4	56.8	55.9	52.1	47.4	43.3	41.9	37.5	37.1	29.2	28.1	23.5	19	18.3	18	17.8	17.3	17.1	16.5	16.1	15.8
% Private	4.2	12.2	24.8	29.6	39.6	43.2	44.1	47.9	52.6	56.7	58.1	62.5	62.9	70.8	71.9	76.5	81	81.7	82	82.2	82.7	82.9	83.5	83.9	84.2

Rank	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
State	NC	TN	KY	SC	MO	MS	LA	GA	ND	SD	MD	DE	AL	MA	CT	ME	OK	IN	OH	TX	IL	IA	NE	KS	RI
% Public	14.6	14.1	11.8	11.8	11.2	10.9	10.7	9.7	9.1	8.9	7.6	7.4	7.1	6.3	6.2	5.7	4.6	4.5	4.2	4.2	4.1	2.8	2.8	1.9	1.5
% Private	85.4	85.9	88.2	88.2	88.8	89.1	89.3	90.3	90.9	91.1	92.4	92.6	92.9	93.7	93.8	94.3	95.4	95.5	95.8	95.8	95.9	97.2	97.2	98.1	98.5

PRIVATE LANDS POLICY AND WILDLIFE

JAMES L. CUMMINS

B&C REGULAR MEMBER

Executive Director of Wildlife Mississippi

All too often we associate public land with wildlife, but private lands are vitally important to the conservation of wildlife in the United States. Private lands constitute 73 percent of the land ownership in the lower 48 states. In addition, 50 percent (890 million acres) of the land-base in the contiguous United States is managed as cropland, pastureland, and rangeland.

The successes in conservation and wildlife management we have been able to achieve in this country are anchored by key pieces of legislation that have been passed in the last 100 years. One such critical piece of legislation is the Farm Bill, which had its beginning in the 1930s. Back then, it was known as the Agricultural Adjustment Act.

This initial legislation was intended to help steer the country out of the Great Depression. It addressed widespread domestic hunger, falling crop prices for farmers, and the catastrophic Dust Bowl that resulted in massive soil erosion. This act restricted agricultural production by paying farmers subsidies to

not plant part of their land, to let natural vegetation grow, and to remove excess livestock. The purpose was to reduce the surplus of agricultural commodities and therefore effectively raise the value of crops. Periodically the legislation is re-authorized, often improving conservation policy, addressing commodity payments such as disaster assistance payments and crop insurance, as well as supplemental nutrition assistance programs.

The recent Farm Bill is a compilation of many different acts that have been passed by the United States Congress to enhance agricultural productivity and conservation on private lands. The Farm Bill is not a single piece of legislation but a dynamic series of acts implemented over the past eight decades that include new programs or revise existing ones. The Farm Bill affects every citizen. Each Farm Bill has a name and a five-year shelf life before it requires any reauthorization by Congress.

From a sportsmen's perspective, the most effective conservation provisions of the Farm Bill are the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE), and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). These provisions directly impact wildlife habitat and the health of upland game bird, waterfowl, and big game populations.

The CRP has been the

single largest contributor in securing upland bird habitat, as well as native grass food sources and cover for whitetail deer, mule deer, and elk. The WRE has restored over 1 million acres of bottomland hardwoods and wetlands in the Lower Mississippi River Valley, which is aiding in recovery of the federally threatened Louisiana black bear. The WHIP is a cost-effective program that has helped install a variety of fish and wildlife improvement projects on approximately 7 million acres under 40,000 different contracts.

Landowners enrolled in these programs receive incentives for land conservation practices. These include native grass establishment, wetland restoration, and forest restoration or enhancement. These programs gained traction in the 1980s, after the prevailing farming practices of the 1970s, when farmers began to cultivate fencerow to maximize production. These practices removed what native habitat was left for wildlife to survive, which also had a detrimental effect on soil quality.

The Boone and Crockett Club's Conservation Policy Committee, under the leadership of Bob Model, has left its mark on past Farm Bill legislation. In 1996 the Club played an active role in getting WHIP included as part of the Farm Bill. In 2005 it was active in including provisions in CRP to conserve bottomland

hardwoods, as well as establishing the Healthy Forests Reserve Program. In 2008 the Club was able to include provisions for an emergency forest restoration program and endangered species recovery.

The 2014 Farm Bill, which also involved the Boone and Crockett Club, consolidated 23 existing conservation programs into 13 programs, while strengthening tools to protect and conserve land, water, and wildlife, as well as reduce the federal deficit by \$23 billion. By streamlining programs, the Farm Bill provides added flexibility and ensures conservation programs are working for producers in the most effective and efficient way possible.

Other important private lands policies include the USFWS's Partners for Wildlife Program, conservation easements through the federal tax code, and environmental asset mitigation programs such as those for wetlands and streams, as well as carbon, water quality, and threatened and endangered species.

Theodore Roosevelt, said, "There can be no greater issue than that of conservation in this country." While our country is facing some mighty grave issues, I just have to believe TR would be proud of how America has advanced the system of conservation he created to expand beyond lands the government owns to those of the private landowner. ■