

PUBLIC LAND STEWARDSHIP

I want to thank John Organ and Russ Mason for their review of public lands from a historical perspective and the evolution of the management of public lands, as well as for their thought-provoking conclusions.

Most of us have been major witnesses to the recent efforts in Washington, D.C. to transfer federal trust lands to states, or otherwise buy or sell these lands. Federal lands are the foundation of the most successful conservation system in the world, which was established by Theodore Roosevelt and the founders of your organization, the Boone and Crockett Club.

However, public lands are being inadequately managed due to reduced funding, routine litigation, and complicated regulations. These issues are not simple, but they could and should be fixed through a stronger commitment to good public policy, including the legacy of American conservation. But, to manage the intricate system of public lands, adequate funding is needed, which contributes more to the problem than whose name is on the deed.

Winston Churchill once said, "The farther back you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see." For the past 30 years, funding for conservation has been declining. In 1982, approximately four percent of the federal budget was dedicated to natural resources, the environment, and environmental enhancement programs. Function 300 includes all of the federal agencies that have a conservation mission (e.g.,

Bureau of Land Management, United States Forest Service, National Park Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). Currently, our nation spends less than one percent on natural resources, environmental, and conservation programs.

Besides the obvious benefit to conservation, spending money on natural resources also makes economic sense. According to a 2011 study by the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation and further analysis by the National Shooting Sports Foundation, sportsmen and sportswomen spend approximately \$90 billion annually on hunting and fishing in the United States. This kind of spending places the hunting and fishing industry in an equivalent spending category as the number 24 company on the Fortune 500 list, above companies like Kroger and Procter and Gamble. This spending is more than the combined global sales of Apple's iPhone and iPad products, for which on average, we spend approximately \$2,407 per year.

In 2011, there were 37.4 million people that hunted or fished in the United States, which is more than the population of the State of California. If every one of us had voted in the 2012 presidential election, we would have comprised approximately 30 percent of the total votes cast. Now that is a political force to be reckoned with! Hunting alone creates hundreds of thousands of jobs and generates \$11.8 billion in taxes.

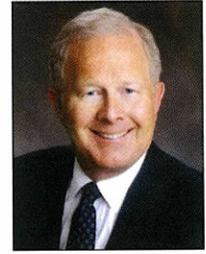
These numbers show the significance of hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing to our great nation's economy.

In the previous 10 years, the expenditures by hunters have grown by 55 percent. For a nation that places such importance on conservation and recreation, investing only one percent on something so important is irresponsible.

Litigation is also becoming more of a problem than a solution. Originally, citizen lawsuits were intended to keep the bureaucracy honest. Today, honest attempts by agencies to do their jobs are the main targets of litigation. This is transforming our system of federal lands from one that is managed to one where preservation is the only "management" option. In the past 30 years I have witnessed litigation over the management of public lands move from the Northeast and the Pacific Northwest to the Southwest, Midwest, and the Southeast. Part of the reason for this is that the federal government reimburses the lawyers before the government, under the Equal Access to Justice Act.

Lowell Baier, past President of Boone and Crockett Club has spent a great deal of

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personal time and resources researching the origins and intention of the Equal Access to Justice Act, and he has written extensive articles on this subject in the past (*Fair Chase*, Summer 2011, and B&C e-newsletter, May 2011 and April 2012). His research has led to an amendment of the Act that is now included in the Sportsmen's Act of 2015, which is currently moving through Congress. Lowell and the Club are supporting this amendment with the intent to get the Equal Access to Justice Act realigned with its original intentions.

Lastly, regulations intended to protect public lands are complicated. These regulations are not limited to just those involving natural resources. These complicated and burdensome regulations are preventing the very management that many of our public lands were established under and a major source of frustration for professional agency personnel as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

It appears that we have come full circle from the late 1800s and 1900s when most of our public land administration was formal and managed aggressively to protect and enhance the habitat on a sustainable-use basis.