

CONSERVATION FUNDING

FROM THE
PRESIDENT



Morrison Stevens, Sr.
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I want to thank Hannibal Bolton, of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, one of the Club's new professional members, and James Cummins, our Club's vice president of conservation, for their article about the status of conservation funding in the U.S. Their leadership and perspective on the current model of securing funding for the conservation of our wildlife and natural resources is always appreciated.

If our nation is to continue to maintain healthy wildlife habitats and populations, we must make sure that conservation programs are not only well-funded, but cost-effective; in other words, we must continue to do all we can to produce the most bang for our buck! Our nation is on an unsustainable fiscal path, and it is important for us as a Club to work with the current and changing administration and Congress to develop a comprehensive approach to address our nation's fiscal problems. Many elected officials only focus on discretionary spending, but if we are to attempt to get our fiscal house in order, we must make changes in entitlement and tax programs, as well as changes in federal contracting procedures and cost-effectiveness of certain programs. Discretionary spending, which goes through the appropriations process, represents about 30 percent of the annual federal budget. Mandatory spending (i.e., social security, welfare payments, farm program payments, etc.) represents the balance.

By solely focusing on discretionary spending programs, which include spending on conservation, we as a nation are disproportionately targeting programs, which results in poor fiscal policies overall and frustration among the public. For example, in 1982, approximately 4 percent of the federal budget was dedicated to natural resources, environmental, and conservation programs. This 4 percent was allocated to all of the federal agencies that had a conservation mission (e.g., Bureau of Land Management, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Forest Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Park Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, etc.). Currently, our nation spends less than 1 percent on natural resources, environmental, and conservation programs. While budget cuts are inevitable, we must reflect on all federal government spending—including discretionary, entitlement and tax programs—if we are to continue to prosper financially. Additionally, we must consider adjustments in federal contracting procedures and increase the cost-effectiveness of certain programs.

The U.S. government distributes or allocates funds for conservation through a variety of mechanisms: conservation trust funds, such as the Pittman-Robertson Act; discretionary spending programs such as those in the annual appropriations process; mandatory spending programs, such as some of the

conservation programs in the Farm Bill; fines and settlements, such as those from the Exxon Valdez and the Deepwater Horizon; and, tax programs such as those for conservation easements.

In the following article, Hannibal and James have provided a thorough description of the Pittman-Robertson Act and how it functions. Boone and Crockett Club members were instrumental in establishing the Wildlife Restoration Act, commonly referred to as the Pittman-Robertson Act, almost 80 years ago. The Club was also involved in many of the amendments to the act. These amendments include:

- making the funds permanent and indefinite (1951);
- increasing the excise tax from 10 percent to 11 percent on ammunition and firearms (1954);
- adding the excise taxes from pistols and allowing the use of these funds for hunter education (1970);
- creating an 11 percent excise tax on archery equipment and allowing the use of these funds for hunter education (1972);
- changing the tax formula on arrows and arrow components (1997);
- setting aside \$8 million for hunter education and shooting range development (2000); and
- exempting certain small manufacturers from paying excise taxes on firearms (2005).

Of special significance—which Hannibal and James discuss in the conclusion of their article—is the partnership behind the U.S. system of wildlife conservation funding. The core of this model is intact; that is, hunters, anglers, and the industries that outfit them comprise the funding engine for fish and wildlife conservation in America. As hunter-conservationists, we are pleased to do whatever we can to fund wildlife research and management efforts. However, we need to do a better job of communicating our story to other members of the public who may not be as interested as we are in contributing financially to conservation. Communicating our relevancy and value to the more general public is essential, especially in these times of cutthroat competition for available conservation funds.

Regarding discretionary spending for conservation, the Omnibus bill that passed in December 2015 makes significant investments in conservation and begins to reverse a decades-long decline in funding for fish and wildlife, as well as hunting and fishing. Whether you hunt public or private lands, fish freshwater or saltwater, or just enjoy one of our nation's wonderful national parks, this is good news. This is also good news for our nation's economy, as so much of it is directly

related to our quality of life and the outdoors.

Our public lands, like our national forests, have been underfunded for decades. In fact, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has lost 12 percent of its workforce in the last four years alone. The forest service has had to cut 39 percent of its personnel working on land management, timber production and recreation since 1998. With funding increases across the board—12 percent for the forest service and 5 percent for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—our land managers finally have the resources they need to improve habitat for a diversity of animals.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which is home to the National Marine Fisheries Service, will receive \$325 million in 2016 through the Omnibus bill. That's a 6 percent boost to improve fisheries data collection and management, a significant benefit to the nation's marine fisheries and our seafood industry.

The spending bill also includes a three-year reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund—a hugely successful tool for improving access to national, state, and local lands—and boosts its funding next year by \$100 million. These are dollars that forest rangers and state fish and wildlife agencies can use to purchase in-holdings and easements to create better access for our sportsmen. This fund also helps improve parks in our own neighborhoods.

The Boone and Crockett Club has recently convened a

Thought Leadership Council to do some long-range strategic thinking about critical problems in the hunting and conservation world. The long-term funding of conservation is one area I have tasked the council to work on together.

We must think about the future of hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing, and reflect on a future system of conservation in the U.S.—one that can be maintained by a consistent, reliable funding source. This system will have to be supported by a growing and diverse population, incorporate both public and private lands/waters, and funding (e.g., excise taxes, appropriations, mandatory spending, tax credits and deductions, other forms of tax policy, energy-derived revenue, eco-assets such as species credits, water quality credits, and wetland/stream credits, etc.). This system will also have to account for efficiency and cost-effectiveness, which are often overlooked.

On March 2, 2016, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation issued a press release on the results of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining American Fish and Wildlife Resources, which was initially assembled in 2014. It was co-chaired by David Freudenthal, former governor of Wyoming, and John Morris, noted conservationist, founder of Bass Pro Shops and a regular member of the Boone and Crockett Club. The panel includes representatives from the outdoor recreation retail and manufacturing sector, the energy and automotive industries, private land owners,

educational institutions, sportsman's conservation organizations, and state fish and wildlife agencies. The panel has excellent representation and perspective on what funding level is necessary for the states to manage our wildlife and natural resources going forward. The panel's recommendation would redirect and dedicate \$1.3 billion (out of \$10 billion) each year from energy development (both renewable and traditional) and mineral development on federal lands and waters. The panel's recommendation would help pave the way for our state fish and wildlife agencies to have access to the resources they need to manage wildlife and our natural resources properly.

Sam Walton once said, "Capital isn't scarce; vision is." Your Club had a vision in 1887 that forever changed the world. Almost 130 years later, that vision has not changed. And it is still the right vision. We just have to make sure the capital continues to be there. ■



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