

CONSERVATION POLICY

FROM THE
PRESIDENT



Morrison Stevens, Sr.
PRESIDENT

I want to thank Jeff Crane and Gary Kania of the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation for their articles on the Sportsmen's Act and the American System of Conservation. Their leadership and insight into policy affecting sportsmen and sportswomen is always appreciated.

The historic accomplishments of the Boone and Crockett Club resulted from a process in which highly influential and visionary members, in addition to other individuals with different assets or strengths in a specific area, would come together to identify, discuss, and solve problems related to hunting and conservation in North America. Sometimes this type of problem-solving would include direct action from the Club or one of its members. In other situations the Club would rely on its connections and direct the issue to the appropriate government agency or organization, or even facilitate the formation of a new organization or coalition of organizations. The formation of this highly effective consortium of organizations, known collectively as the American Wildlife Conservation Partners, is the most recent effort of the latter.

The Boone and Crockett Club's Strategic Plan has four strategic goals; two of them are directly related to conservation policy. These two goals are, first to improve the system of conservation throughout North America, and second to create an atmosphere where conservation and hunting can thrive.

The Club has a bold and aggressive policy program as outlined in this Strategic Plan. As the leader of the hunting and conservation community, the Club is still very much challenged today, but not as greatly challenged as Roosevelt was in the later part of the 1800s. If I were proposing to you today that we, like Roosevelt did, establish a framework for conservation, a forest service, a park service, and a fish and wildlife service, while lobbying the Congress to set aside 36 million acres of national forest lands and expand Yellowstone, then that would not at all be possible. However, it is our duty, as both citizens and as members of the Club, to maintain as best we can what our conservation leaders before us created.

That is, more often than not, easier said than done. Today obstacles to carrying out the Club's mission, vision, and beliefs are increasing in number and complexity. America's land management and hunting traditions are being distorted by many factors, including urbanization, demographic changes, ecosystem management, biological diversity, and our crowded, fast-paced lives. As hunters, we represent a small portion of the larger society. Thus, as wildlife conservation becomes more of a global concern, non-hunters and other societal groups are questioning our hunting heritage, tradition, and deep appreciation for these resources, further complicating our ability to accomplish our vision and mission.

In spite of the many great conservation successes of the past, these changes make it necessary for fish and wildlife managers, hunters, and conservationists to work together on policy initiatives to ensure longevity of our cherished habitat and resources. There are many conservation groups doing many good things, but there is a need for today's fish and wildlife leaders to unify their collective strengths and apply them to common challenges and opportunities to protect fish and wildlife, habitat, hunting, trapping, and the hunter-conservationist's way of life. Functioning at our highest level of effectiveness will require focus and prioritization, greater internal and external communications, the formation of unique partnerships, and enhanced long-term strategic thinking. Furthermore, we do not need to do what everybody else is doing. We need to focus on what everybody is not doing or is not good at, but most importantly, what is needed.

Recently, we have worked with two partners—the American Wildlife Conservation Partners and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership—on funding conservation, which has been in a decline for the past 30 years. In 2015, the total amount we as a nation spent

on natural resources was approximately one percent of our total budget. The last time our nation spent such a large percentage of its budget on natural resources was during the Reagan Administration (four percent).

As a result of this collaborative effort, I am pleased to report that the omnibus appropriations bill, which funds federal government programs through September 30, 2016, will provide funding boosts for many conservation programs. For example, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will receive an increase of \$69 million, the National Park Service an increase of \$237 million, the U.S. Geological Survey an increase of \$20 million, and the Bureau of Land Management will receive an increase of \$117 million. One key provision of this bill was the three-year reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which will receive an increase of \$150 million. This bill directs \$2.5 billion to the U.S. Forest Service for non-fire related activities, which is a \$35 million increase; \$4.2 billion was designated for Wildland Fire Management.

**"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."
- Margaret Mead**