

BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB'S

POACH AND PAY PROJECT



MAJOR FINDINGS FROM THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB'S POACH AND PAY RESEARCH



This research was funded by the Multistate Conservation Grant Program (Grant# F22AP00699), which is jointly managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.



REDUCING THE ILLEGAL TAKE OF WILDLIFE BY INVESTIGATING THE MOTIVATORS, EVALUATING THE ASSOCIATED CONSERVATION COSTS, AND IMPROVING DETECTION RATES OF POACHING.

The visibility and notoriety of illegal wildlife take exacerbate the public's tendency to equate "poaching" with "hunting," further undermining the positive conservation benefits derived from lawful take. In 2016, the B&C launched a comprehensive effort to combat illegal take and clearly differentiate it from lawful, regulated hunting. The findings from Phase 2 of this multi-year research yielded the following:

POACHER TYPOLOGIES & MOTIVATIONS

- Poacher typologies identified in this study include Trophy Poachers, Commercial Poachers, Subsistence Poachers, Backdoor Poachers, Recreational Poachers, Protective Poachers, Tradition or Protest Poachers, Challenge Poachers, and Thrill-Kill Poachers.
- According to officers, trophy poaching (57.6%) was the most common behavior, followed by opportunistic poaching (51.1%).

STAKEHOLDERS

- Stakeholders (hunters, landowners, officers) have concerns about the impacts of poaching at the state (>85%) and national (>90%) level as well as the negative biological/social impacts (>70%).

JUDICIAL & PROSECUTORIAL BARRIERS

- Prosecutors (48.0%) agreed that the illegal shooting or killing of animals whose replacement value exceeds \$2,500 should be treated as felony theft (unlawful taking of a public resource).
- The top three factors deemed most important for a successful prosecution by prosecutors was the type of animal illegally taken, the number of animals illegally taken, and witness testimony (often the officer).
- Prosecutors identified the confiscation of equipment used in the crime (60.6%) and the suspension or revocation of hunting licenses (56.7%) as the most effective measures to deter poaching.

DETECTION RATES

- Our mean estimated detection rate is 4.3% (dark figure=95.7%), with a 95% credible interval of 3.3% to 5.3%.
- Detection rates for other (non-wildlife) crimes are: aggravated assault (57.1%), rape and sexual assault (46.0%), burglary (42.7%), robbery (42.4%), simple assault (40.9%), and larceny/theft (24.8%).
- We set a conservative 5% benchmark for the detection rate (95% dark figure) when calculating conservation costs associated with illegal take of big game.

CONSERVATION COSTS

- A 95% dark figure (5% detection rate) translates to a minimum nationwide loss of \$302.6 million in fines and \$1.13 billion in replacement costs each year.
- The total calculated conservation cost resulting from the undetected levels of illegal take of big game was more than the total 2023 Wildlife Restoration apportionment (\$1.185 billion) for all 50 states combined.
- The total calculated conservation cost resulting from the undetected levels of illegal take of big game was more than the total gross revenue for 2023 hunting license sales in the U.S. (\$1.015 billion) for all states.
- A 95% dark figure (5% detection rate) translates to an average state level loss of \$6.1 million in fines and \$22.7 million in replacement costs for each state annually.
- The average conservation cost associated with the illegal take of big game exceeds the total 2023 Wildlife Restoration final apportionment for 34 states.
- The average conservation cost associated with the illegal take of big game exceeds the total 2023 gross revenue from hunting license sales in 39 states.

THEORETICAL & PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO REDUCE POACHING

- If there is no capable guardianship, potential offenders will have low perceived certainty of detection.
- Poachers may downplay their actions through denial of injury or victim, portray themselves as victims, or argue that their actions are victimless crimes because they do not harm anyone.



SOLUTIONS FOR REDUCING LEVELS OF ILLEGAL TAKE OF WILDLIFE - IN BRIEF

INCREASE “BOOTS ON THE GROUND”

Officers believe that manpower is the most effective factor for increasing detection and citation rates, while reward/financial incentives, anonymous poaching hotlines, and public education campaigns were most important in increasing reporting rates.

CREATE EASIER PATHWAYS & INCENTIVES TO REPORT INCIDENTS

Hunters and landowners ranked poaching hotlines to turn in illegal take of wildlife as the most important factor. The increased presence of law enforcement, monetary incentives, and non-monetary incentives were the next most important. They ranked covert anti-poaching units and Internet searches for poaching activities as least important.

RECLASSIFY CRIMES FROM MISDEMEANORS TO FELONIES

Elevating certain illegal activities from misdemeanors to felonies, which may involve mandatory minimum sentences, could deter all poacher types.

USE RECIPROCAL LICENSE SUSPENSIONS THROUGH INTERSTATE WILDLIFE VIOLATOR COMPACT

License suspensions across multiple states are less effective for subsistence and backdoor poachers, who typically engage in illegal activities near their homes.

PUBLIC SHAMING OF THE PERPETRATORS

Public perception and offender shaming may deter all poacher types.

EDUCATING PROSECUTORS AND STAFF

Prosecutors need to have a better understanding or awareness of wildlife crime for themselves, and they need personnel specifically dedicated to or trained in environmental and conservation issues.

EDUCATING THE PUBLIC

Officers identified public education as most effective factor in boosting conviction rates for illegal take, followed by the establishment of court dockets dedicated to wildlife or environmental crimes, and the hiring of specialized prosecutors focused on these offenses.

DEVELOP CONSISTENT AND JUSTIFIABLE REPLACEMENT COSTS

Develop scientifically defensible replacement costs that are consistent across states and reflect species rarity and ecological value in the jurisdiction.

[READ THE FULL REPORT, AND GET MORE BACKGROUND ON B&C'S POACH AND PAY PROJECT](#)