

# **WILDLIFE**

## **FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: III**

RECOMMENDATIONS TO PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA



AMERICAN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION PARTNERS

# WILDLIFE FOR THE

## American Wildlife Conservation Partners

ESTABLISHED IN 2000

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

January 21, 2009

Dear President Obama:

American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP) is a consortium of 42 wildlife conservation organizations that works to safeguard our nation's wildlife resources and the interests of America's sportsmen and women. We congratulate you on your inauguration as the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States and we look forward to working with you and your administration on the opportunities and challenges facing wildlife conservation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Nearly 58 million hunters and anglers contribute over \$2 billion annually through excise taxes and through hunting and fishing licenses and fees to fund fish and wildlife restoration projects across our nation. These dedicated conservationists generate more than \$70 billion annually towards the American economy.

Sportsmen and women have cared passionately about our natural resources for over 120 years dating back to the founding of the Boone and Crockett Club in 1887, the nation's first conservation organization. AWCP serves to facilitate communication within the wildlife conservation community and between our community and policy makers at the federal level.

"Wildlife for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" presents our community's priority recommendations for resolving major national issues facing our hunting heritage and wildlife conservation. The issues addressed in this document are among those that were identified through a broadly inclusive and deliberative process during 2008, which culminated last October at the first ever White House Conference on North American Wildlife Policy. A number of these issues mirror your administration's environmental priorities, including the mitigation of the effects of climate change on natural habitats and wildlife populations.

AWCP hopes that you will find these recommendations useful. We are committed to cooperating with your administration to address these and other critical issues to help secure the foundations for the future of fish and wildlife in the United States well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Sincerely,

Susan Recce, Chair  
American Wildlife Conservation Partners

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ASSOCIATION OF FISH &  
WILDLIFE AGENCIES  
BEAR TRUST INTERNATIONAL  
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WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT  
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# THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: III

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE PRESIDENT FROM THE AMERICAN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION PARTNERS

### EDITORS

**Dan Dessecker**  
RUFFED GROUSE SOCIETY

**Steve Mealey**  
BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB



ARCHERY TRADE ASSOCIATION  
ASSOCIATION OF FISH & WILDLIFE AGENCIES  
BEAR TRUST INTERNATIONAL  
BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB  
BUCKMASTERS AMERICAN  
DEER FOUNDATION  
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**AMERICAN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION PARTNERS | [WWW.WILDLIFEPARTNERS.ORG](http://WWW.WILDLIFEPARTNERS.ORG)**

c/o Boone and Crockett Club ■ 250 Station Drive, Missoula, Montana 59801 ■ (406)542-1888



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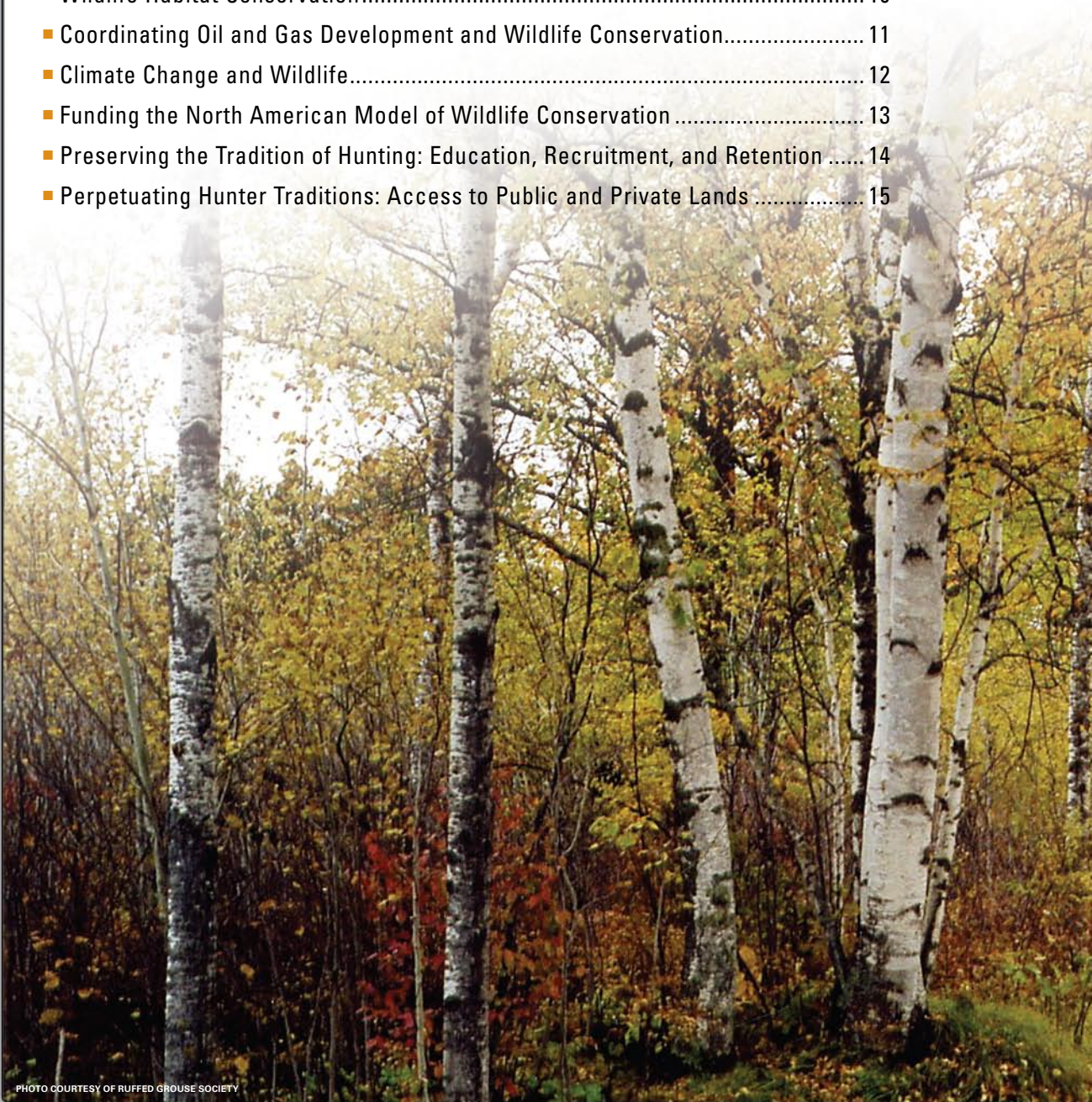


PHOTO COURTESY OF RUFFED GROUSE SOCIETY



## AMERICAN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION PARTNERS VISION FOR THE FUTURE

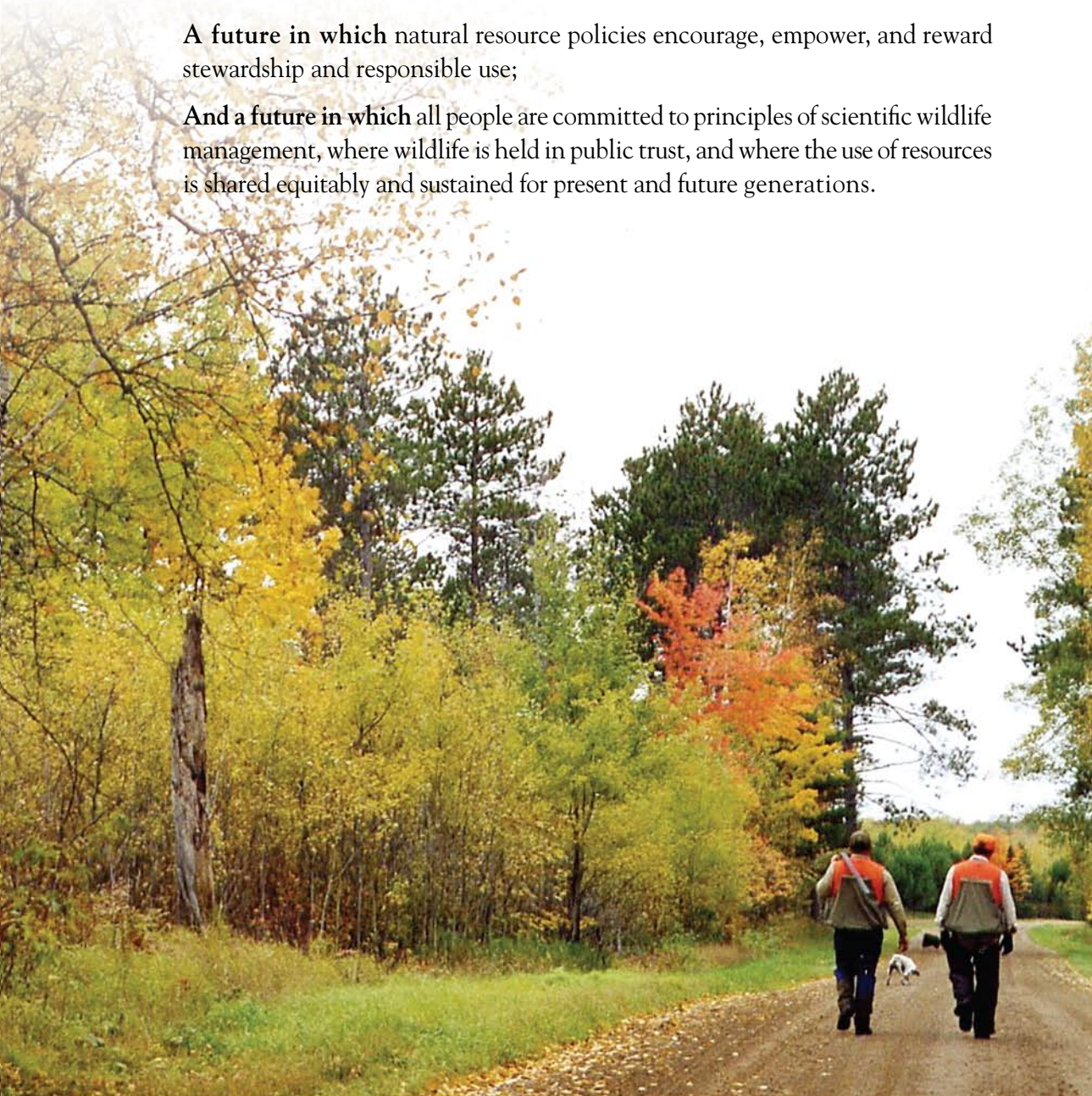
### We Envision:

**A future in which** all wildlife and private and public habitats are abundant, maintained, and enhanced;

**A future in which** hunting, trapping, and other outdoor interests are supported by the public to maintain America's great wildlife conservation heritage and cultural traditions;

**A future in which** natural resource policies encourage, empower, and reward stewardship and responsible use;

**And a future in which** all people are committed to principles of scientific wildlife management, where wildlife is held in public trust, and where the use of resources is shared equitably and sustained for present and future generations.





# WILDLIFE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

## FOREWORD

In August 2000, America's leading wildlife conservation organizations gathered as guests of the Boone

and Crockett Club in Missoula, Montana. These dedicated hunter/conservationists met for one purpose: To identify how best to work collectively to help chart the course for the future of wildlife conservation in the United States.

The American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP) evolved from this initial gathering. AWCP is not an organization per se; rather, it is a consortium of 42 organizations, representing over 6 million individual members. AWCP is designed to facilitate communication within the wildlife conservation community and between our community and elected and appointed officials and policy makers at the federal level.

We are encouraged by the many successes made possible through the cooperation of dedicated conservationists within the private and public sectors. Still, the future of wildlife conservation and our hunting heritage

faces many challenges.

In August, 2007, President Bush signed Executive Order # 13443; *Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation*. AWCP partner organizations subsequently met at various locales throughout the country with members of Congress and their staffs, federal, state, tribal and local natural resource management agencies, other nongovernmental organizations and additional interested publics to collaboratively identify opportunities to meet the stated objectives of the Executive Order. This lengthy deliberative process culminated in the development of 8 issue-specific white papers and associated policy recommendations that were presented and refined at the White House Conference on North American Wildlife Policy in Reno, Nevada, on 2-3 October, 2008. These white papers and recommendations have been published under separate cover and closely parallel the insight presented here in *Wildlife for the 21st Century: III*.

These recommendations represent a general agreement of the partners and are, in our judgment, necessary to help ensure the continued success of wildlife and wildlife management in America. While unity is a goal of the partners, each reserves the right to establish independent positions on any issue. In addition, not all partners necessarily support each and every position or recommendation. Together, we stand ready to help secure the future for wildlife into the 21st Century.

### STEERING COMMITTEE 2009

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Susan Recce, Chair

**WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE**  
Steve Williams, Vice-Chair

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Jay McAninch

**ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND  
WILDLIFE AGENCIES**  
Matt Hogan

**BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB**  
Steve Mealey

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FOUNDATION**  
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David Hoskins

**POPE AND YOUNG CLUB**  
Mike Schlegel

**RUFFED GROUSE SOCIETY**  
Dan Dessecker

**THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY**  
Laura Bies

# E 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: III

Conservation means development as much as it does protection. I recognize the right and duty of this generation to develop and use the natural resources of our land; but I do not recognize the right to waste them, or to rob, by wasteful use, the generations that come after us.

## Conservation

Theodore Roosevelt  
August 1910 (Kansas)



Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919) established the Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge – America's first national wildlife refuge – with a stroke of his pen in 1903. This single act set in motion the creation of what would become the world's largest system of public lands managed for the benefit of wildlife.

During his visit to the Breton National Wildlife Refuge in 1915, Roosevelt viewed a landscape that was a mixture of private and state lands, and the embryonic Federal refuge; some of the low-lying Gulf of Mexico islets and sandbars since have disappeared entirely, victims of shifting tides and tropical storms.

As recorded in one of his autobiographies, "A Book Lover's Holidays in the Open," Roosevelt tramped the shorelines and bird rookeries of Breton refuge, watched a flight of black skimmers, and contemplated the world, as he approached the final four years of his life, from this solitary perch here on Bird Island.

PHOTO COURTESY OF U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE



## THE NORTH AMERICAN MODEL OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Wildlife policy in America evolved from one that viewed wildlife as a commodity to be consumed, often for profit, to one that recognized the need to conserve wildlife as a public trust. This evolution was captured in seven principles that comprise the foundation of

what we now call the “North American Model of Wildlife Conservation” (Model). This Model has been extremely successful in driving conservation efforts throughout North America. At the heart of the Model are citizens, often hunters, who serve as the very stewards of the wildlife that they pursue. Equally important to the success of the model is the delivery of conservation programs at the state and local levels by the state fish and wildlife agencies in cooperation with their federal and nongovernmental partners.

Unfortunately, wildlife abundance in America today is often taken for granted. Citizens of the United States have come to expect wildlife diversity as part of their cultural heritage, yet remain largely uninformed of the heroic efforts that led to what we enjoy today.

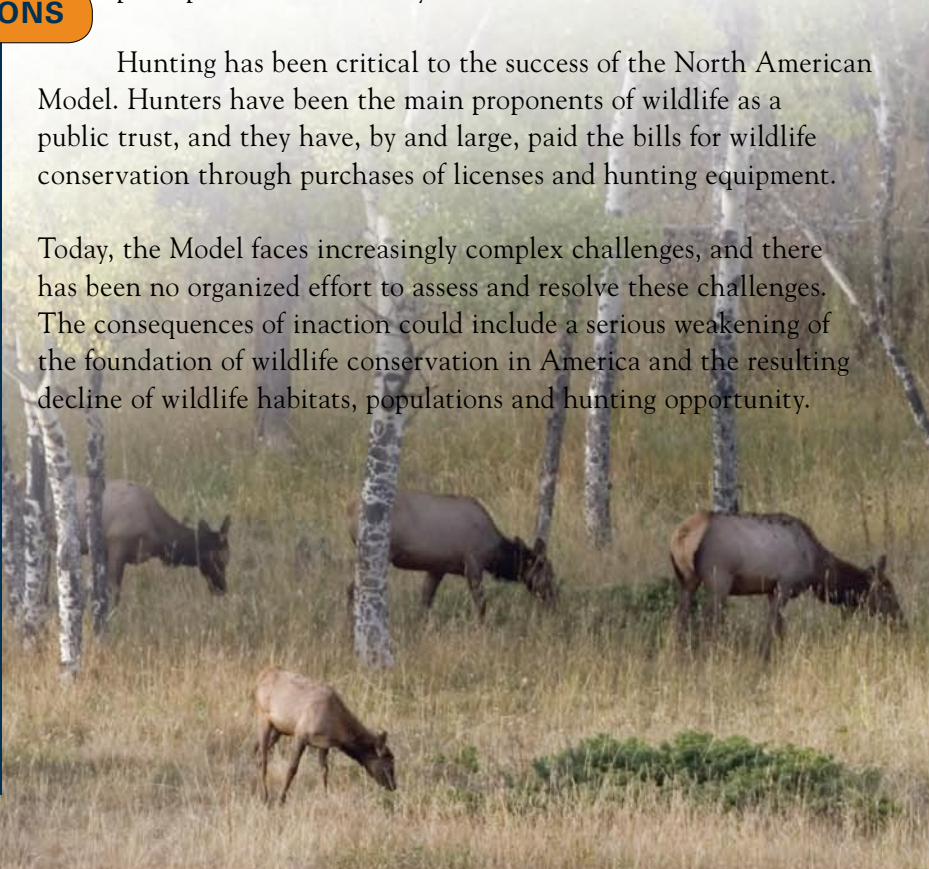
Much is threatened by this general lack of understanding, including wildlife diversity and abundance as well as our cherished tradition of open access to wildlife and wild places. In an increasingly populous world with an ever expanding demand for energy and other resources, we now face enormous challenges in conservation. We cannot hope to succeed in our efforts to safeguard wildlife if we do not understand the policies, laws, and principles that collectively contribute to its continued existence.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Enhance public understanding of the historic and current roles of the North American Model and the Public Trust Doctrine in the conservation of wildlife in America.
2. Establish training programs for incoming natural resource professionals at the state and federal levels to promote a thorough understanding of the foundation of wildlife conservation in America.
3. Reinforce the authority of state fish and wildlife management agencies to manage populations of resident fish and wildlife and enhance their capacity to do so.

Hunting has been critical to the success of the North American Model. Hunters have been the main proponents of wildlife as a public trust, and they have, by and large, paid the bills for wildlife conservation through purchases of licenses and hunting equipment.

Today, the Model faces increasingly complex challenges, and there has been no organized effort to assess and resolve these challenges. The consequences of inaction could include a serious weakening of the foundation of wildlife conservation in America and the resulting decline of wildlife habitats, populations and hunting opportunity.





## FEDERAL, STATE, AND TRIBAL COORDINATION

Wildlife conservation efforts aimed at managing populations, habitats, and people must be coordinated in order to achieve landscape-scale goals. Although the need for such collaboration is most apparent in addressing migratory species, interstate fishery resources, and other federal trust species, it is also important in the management of resident species and/or populations that cross state or tribal or national boundaries. Federal, state, and tribal land management plans and actions should be developed in concert because actions taken on one jurisdiction may affect habitats and wildlife on adjacent jurisdictions. Although some level of collaboration and coordination exists today and numerous federal laws authorize or require coordination, it is apparent that improvement is necessary to meet the fish and wildlife conservation challenges of tomorrow.

There are challenges that must be addressed to maximize collaboration and achieve stated goals. Some federal and state agencies and tribal governments are unaware of existing opportunities to collaborate. Irregular and somewhat voluntary meetings occur among federal and state agencies and/or tribal governments regarding land management planning activities and wildlife population objectives. Often state agencies and tribal governments lack the capacity and knowledge of the process to fully engage in federal planning activities. Even though state agencies may become involved in federal agency planning processes in a “cooperating agency” status, not all elect this approach. Due to the sovereign status of tribes, tribal governments desire, and federal policy mandates, a “government to government” approach.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure that federal and state resource management agencies and tribal governments regularly and routinely communicate and collaborate in resource management project planning, decision-making and implementation in order to achieve seamless implementation and integration of wildlife objectives regardless of land ownership.
2. Identify and enhance existing resources or develop a new multi-agency regional clearinghouse to track ongoing planning and implementation efforts by federal and state wildlife agencies and tribal governments.
3. Ensure that federal and state agencies and tribal governments collaborate in wildlife conservation efforts aimed at managing populations, habitat, and people to achieve landscape scale goals.



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# AWCP RECOMM

## WILDLIFE HABITAT CONSERVATION

lands account for a significant proportion of the land base of most states. Habitat conservation on private lands is a key to sustaining populations of game and non-game wildlife – this is particularly the case in the eastern United States where most lands are in private ownership.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Convene a panel of well-qualified natural resource management and legal professionals to conduct a rigorous assessment of existing federal environmental laws and regulations to identify opportunities to enhance the compatibility of these laws and regulations consistent with the primary objectives thereof.
2. Fully incorporate assessments that weigh the short-term risks of proposed habitat management projects against the long-term benefits of these projects to fish and wildlife into federal land management decisions, including Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultations.
3. Develop and implement a clear framework that reinstates strong federal protection for isolated wetlands, streams and other waters through regulation and/or statute.
4. Create new and expand existing financial incentives, including giving permanent status to the federal tax incentive for donation of conservation easements, for private landowners to sustain wildlife habitats on their lands and decrease the likelihood of the conversion of these lands to other uses.
5. Support appropriations for federal farm bill conservation programs and the implementation of these programs at fully authorized levels.
6. Increase management efforts to restore at-risk forest, rangeland, grassland, and wetland habitats.

Land and resource management projects conducted by federal agencies on federal lands can significantly affect the ability of states to attain or sustain fish and wildlife population goals – this is particularly the case in the western United States where federal

Conflicting statutory and regulatory guidance within and between federal agencies can complicate efforts to balance the short-term risk to a species from a particular management strategy with the long-term benefits to that species from that strategy. Because these conflicts can preclude the implementation of important on-the-ground habitat management initiatives, they may work to the disadvantage of both federally listed species and those species that rely on forest, rangeland and grassland habitats created through periodic disturbance, or where insects, disease or invasive species threaten ecosystem health and function.

Surveys indicate that over 80% of our nation's native grasslands have been eliminated and the rate of destruction has recently increased. Many of the remaining prairie habitats are becoming increasingly fragmented into such small tracts that they are no longer able to sustain their important biological function.

The accelerating loss of wetland habitat is a significant challenge to the nation's ability to address its growing water resource challenges. Recent judicial decisions and administrative regulatory actions have significantly curtailed Clean Water Act jurisdiction over many of the nation's remaining wetlands and streams.

Grain-based and cellulosic ethanol offer opportunities to increase our nation's energy independence and benefit rural economies. However, the development of these new sources of energy on a finite land base must be balanced with the demonstrated wildlife habitat and other environmental benefits derived from existing conservation programs. Any significant reduction in the acreage enrolled in existing conservation programs would negatively affect game and nongame wildlife populations and hunting opportunity.



Energy development is a major wildlife concern in significant parts of several western states that contain the largest onshore natural gas reserves in the nation. These areas also contain some of the best game and nongame wildlife habitats in the West, and their future as prime habitat in the face of actual or potential energy development is uncertain.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administers the energy minerals on these mostly federal lands following a minerals policy directed by various acts of Congress. Existing statutes require that the development of minerals be balanced with the need to sustain wildlife habitats and populations for future generations. As energy security concerns and energy prices increase, so does the national priority to expand the domestic production of oil and natural gas and encourage new energy minerals exploration.

With energy activities in the West increasing, concerns about maintaining game and nongame wildlife species, populations, and habitats at the wildlife-energy interface are also increasing. Given the magnitude of present and anticipated energy development in the West, maintaining wildlife habitats and populations at desired levels will require increased interagency collaboration, reducing on-site habitat impacts and developing landscape-scale efforts to enhance habitats off site similar to the 2007 U.S. Department of the Interior's Healthy Lands Initiative. Improved collaboration during project analysis, planning and implementation at the site- and landscape-level is essential to achieve a meaningful balance between energy development, wildlife conservation and hunting opportunity.

## COORDINATING OIL AND GAS DEVELOPMENT AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Federal land management agencies, in collaboration with state and tribal governments, should incorporate specific wildlife habitat and population goals and objectives and a plan to achieve these goals and objectives, into energy development project land management plans and related decision documents.
2. Federal land management agencies should complete landscape-level ecological assessments before energy development in project areas with important wildlife and/or recreational values; these agencies should establish a landscape assessment task force to develop general assessment standards and protocols for on-and off-site considerations.
3. The BLM should reemphasize the discretionary authority of state directors to temporarily defer leasing of specific tracts of land that support important wildlife habitats, populations and recreational values
4. Federal land management agencies should establish a cooperative conservation partnership with the Western Governor's Association (WGA) to jointly explore the feasibility of implementing recommendations in the WGA Wildlife Corridors Initiative developed by the WGA Oil and Gas Working Group.



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# AWCP RECOMM

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND WILDLIFE

Scientists now generally agree that the concentration of heat-trapping gases already in the atmosphere is causing and will cause significant adverse impacts to the environment.

Thus, a comprehensive government-wide

program must address not only the causes of climate change, but also the effects of the changes we already face. Mitigation through the regulation of greenhouse gas emissions, enhanced sequestration of carbon and natural resource

### RECOMMENDATIONS

adaptations are important elements of any comprehensive strategy. New dedicated funds will be required to enhance the health and resiliency of ecosystem components, including fish, wildlife, and their habitats.

The nation's Climate Change Science Program (CCSP) provides valuable information on projected effects of climate change on fish and wildlife habitats at a coarse spatial scale. However, it does not systematically and rigorously examine the present and future effects of climate change on specific species, populations and habitats, and at spatial scales relevant to management opportunities and actions. Currently, U.S. resource management agencies have limited capability to document the likely effects of climate change on habitats at the scale needed to safeguard fish and wildlife habitat, maintain ecosystem services (water quality, flood attenuation, etc); and provide for the capture of carbon. Changes in priorities of the CCSP are needed to enable federal and state natural resource and fish and wildlife managers to respond effectively. Federal and state adaptation programs must be based on sound science and be directed and coordinated through multi-agency strategies at both the state and federal levels.

1. A comprehensive national program to address the environmental consequences of climate change should seek to reduce the causes and the effects of climatic change.
2. Dedicated and assured funding for federal, state and tribal natural resource agencies and their partners will be required to manage and conserve functioning ecosystems in the face of climate change.
3. The CCSP should be expanded to include studies of the effects of climate change on at-risk species, populations and habitats, and should develop modeling and forecasting programs that link physical climate changes to biological responses.
4. CCSP agencies and the natural resource management community should use expanded research partnerships to foster collaborative relationships among natural resource agencies to design, construct, and implement adaptation strategies for at-risk species, populations, and habitats.



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## FUNDING THE NORTH AMERICAN MODEL OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

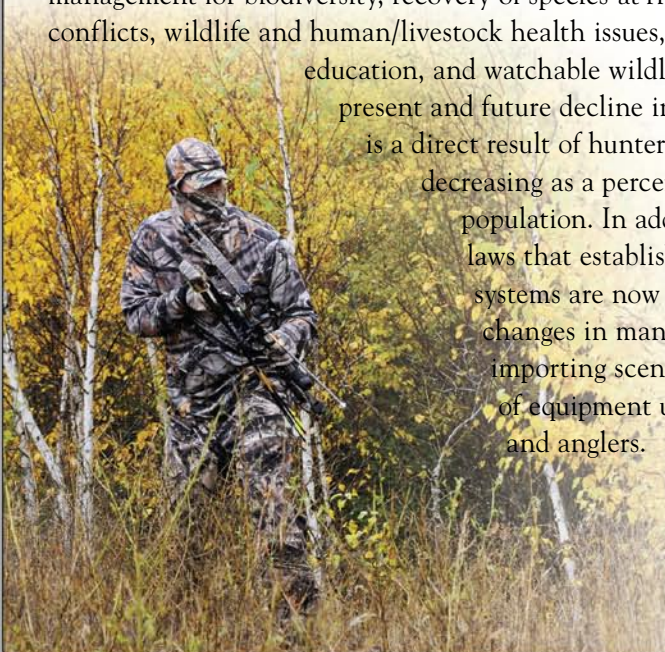
Over the past century, the United States developed and maintained a highly successful system for funding conservation of the Nation's fish and wildlife resources. This system has been based on a user-pays philosophy where hunters and anglers, who were originally seen as the primary beneficiaries of vibrant wildlife populations, supported wildlife conservation through their purchase of licenses, permits and stamps. This worked well through the early part of the 1900s when wildlife management focused on setting regulations, law enforcement, and raising and stocking fish and wildlife to supplement native wildlife or establish new populations.

Later in the 20th Century the user-pays system of funding fish and wildlife conservation was expanded by imposing federal excise taxes on sporting arms and ammunition, then later on handguns and archery equipment (Wildlife Restoration Program 1937, 1970, 1972) and on fishing equipment (Sport Fish Restoration Program 1950). Other classes of fishing and boating equipment were subsequently added to the program, as well as the federal tax on motorboat fuel (1985). These funds are collected by the federal government then distributed back to the states for the conservation of fish and wildlife. Together with the receipts from licenses, permits, and stamps this revenue has allowed the states to retain adequate staffs of well-trained employees and to develop programs for habitat management and public access.

As we enter the 21st Century, adequately funding the conservation of fish and wildlife resources is challenged on two major fronts: the public's demands are expanding and diversifying, and the traditional revenue from user-pays funding sources is decreasing. In addition to traditional programs, today's fish and wildlife conservation needs include management for biodiversity, recovery of species-at-risk, human wildlife conflicts, wildlife and human/livestock health issues, conservation education, and watchable wildlife programs. The present and future decline in user-pays funding is a direct result of hunters and anglers decreasing as a percentage of the U.S. population. In addition, the federal laws that established the excise tax systems are now outdated due to changes in manufacturing and importing scenarios and the types of equipment used by hunters and anglers.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A long-term source of dedicated funding for fish and wildlife conservation should be secured through energy, climate-change or other legislation.
2. Initiate an analysis of the revenue sources and collection systems for the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs and identify improvements for the sustainability and growth of this revenue.
3. Establish federal budget priorities that will restore wildlife conservation funding to the 1980 levels.



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# AWCP RECOM

## PRESERVING THE TRADITION OF HUNTING: EDUCATION, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Create a Hunting and Shooting Sports Foundation similar to the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation.
2. Provide sufficient and assured long-term funding and establish the institutional framework and priorities for education, recruitment, and retention of hunters.
3. Nationally disseminate educational programs for natural resource students as well as state and federal resource management agency personnel and the general public to promote understanding and an appreciation for the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation and its relevance.
4. Direct federal land management agencies to expand public outreach through educational exhibits at visitor contact points and to place additional emphasis on hunting, shooting, and fishing events on federal lands.

Participation in hunting has been declining in the United States for more than two decades. This is part of a larger trend away from nature-based recreation of almost all types and a nationally recognized disconnect between children and nature.

Hunters, trappers, and anglers provide critical sources of revenue for the management of fish and wildlife resources. This revenue comes

largely from license sales and excise taxes on the sale of equipment used in these outdoor activities. In addition to their financial contributions to resource management, sportsmen and women typically form the backbone of many of the organizations that provide political support for policies that form the basis of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

Studies have shown that educational programs are vital to the preservation of our hunting tradition. A variety of programs aimed primarily at youth and women have demonstrated that Americans are still interested in learning traditional hunting and fishing skills. These educational programs have been successful in increasing target audience participation in hunting, have increased sales of licenses and equipment, and have increased the interest of participants in natural resource management.

Failure to stem the decline in hunting participation will jeopardize funding for state and federal agencies, as well as conservation organizations, which could negatively affect wildlife habitats, populations and outdoor recreational opportunities. It will also erode the political support required to maintain healthy wildlife populations and to preserve our American heritage of hunting and fishing.



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## PERPETUATING HUNTER TRADITIONS: ACCESS TO PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LANDS

Hunting and recreational shooting with firearms and archery equipment are important elements of America's outdoor heritage. Opportunities to engage in these activities are dependent upon public access to federal, state and private lands. Constraints on access have been identified as one of the leading impediments to sustaining and growing participation in these activities. Inadequate opportunities for recreational shooting can have a significant impact on recruiting and retaining hunters and teaching safe, ethical and responsible shooting.

The loss of public access for hunting and shooting can cause state fish and wildlife agencies to lose much-needed revenue through reductions in license and permit fees and Pittman-Robertson excise taxes on sporting equipment. Access limitations can also reduce the ability to utilize hunting to maintain wildlife populations at desired levels. In addition, the loss of hunting and shooting opportunities can negatively impact state and local economies.

As access to private lands becomes increasingly constrained, public lands bear an increasing burden to provide hunting and shooting opportunities, which can cause overcrowding and diminish the quality of the recreational experience. Urban encroachment and inadequate funding for the management of recreational shooting facilities could exacerbate the ongoing loss of opportunities on federal lands.

Providing public access to federal and other public lands that are surrounded by private lands can dramatically improve hunting and shooting opportunities. Opening access to blocked public lands requires either the purchase of easements to provide public access across private lands or the outright purchase of portions of these private lands from willing sellers. Funds for these types of purchases have historically been extremely limited. In addition, funding for state-sponsored hunter-access programs is not sufficient to meet current and future demands. Financial incentive programs for private landowners, such as "Open Fields", can effectively enhance hunting opportunities on private lands.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Draft and enact comprehensive tax incentives legislation at the federal level and liability legislation at the state level for landowners who provide public access to their property and/or enhance wildlife habitat.
2. Create a "one stop shop" website that provides easily accessible information about hunting and shooting opportunities on federal lands.
3. Fund high priority opportunities that will open land-locked federal lands to public access through the acquisition of land or easements, or through land exchanges, and fund road improvements and signage that will improve public access.
4. Fully incorporate hunting and recreational shooting into federal land management planning processes.



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**ARCHERY TRADE ASSOCIATION/BPA**  
Jay McAninch • 703-266-4134  
jaymcaininch@archerytrade.org



**INTERNATIONAL HUNTER  
EDUCATION ASSOCIATION**  
Wayne East • 303-430-7233  
exdir@iheaa.com



**ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK  
FOUNDATION**  
Jack Blackwell • 406-523-4513  
jblackwell@rmef.org



**ASSOCIATION OF  
FISH & WILDLIFE AGENCIES**  
Matt Hogan • 202-624-7890  
mhogan@fishwildlife.org



**IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA**  
David Hoskins • 301-548-0150  
dhoskins@iwl.org



**RUFFED GROUSE SOCIETY**  
Dan Dessecker • 715-234-8302  
rgsdess@chilbardun.coop



**BEAR TRUST INTERNATIONAL**  
A.C. Smid • 406-523-7779  
acsmid@aol.com



**MULE DEER FOUNDATION**  
Miles Moretti • 801-747-3344  
miles@muledeer.org



**SAFARI CLUB INTERNATIONAL**  
Merle Shepard • 313-382-9022  
scishep@aol.com



**BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB**  
Robert Model • 307-587-0040  
rmodel@mooncrest.com



**NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION**  
Susan Recce • 703-267-1541  
srecce@nrahq.org



**SAND COUNTY FOUNDATION**  
Brent Haglund • 608-663-4605  
bhaglund@sandcountynet.net



**BUCKMASTERS  
AMERICAN DEER FOUNDATION**  
Andy Huggins • 334-387-2647  
ahuggins@buckmasters.com



**NATIONAL SHOOTING SPORTS  
FOUNDATION**  
Lawrence G. Keane • 203-426-1320  
lkeane@nssf.org



**SHIKAR SAFARI CLUB**  
Donald Berg • 214-219-6800  
donaldberg@sbcglobal.net



**CAMP FIRE CLUB OF AMERICA**  
Leonard Vallendar • 914-769-5506  
lvallen491@aol.com



**NATIONAL TRAPPERS ASSOCIATION**  
Jim Curran • 775-867-2239  
jcurran@cccomm.net



**TEXAS WILDLIFE ASSOCIATION**  
Kirby Brown • 210-826-2904  
K\_brown@texas-wildlife.org



**CATCH A DREAM FOUNDATION**  
Jimmy Bullock • 601-529-1144  
jbullock@resourcegmt.com



**NATIONAL WILD TURKEY  
FEDERATION**  
James Earl Kennemer • 803-637-3106  
jkennamer@nwtf.net



**THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY**  
Laura Bies • 301-897-9770  
laura@wildlife.org



**CONGRESSIONAL SPORTSMEN'S  
FOUNDATION**  
Jeff Crane • 202-543-6850  
jeff@sportsmenslink.org



**NORTH AMERICAN BEAR  
FOUNDATION**  
Brian Bachman • 218-746-3774  
nabf@nabf.org



**THEODORE ROOSEVELT  
CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP**  
George Cooper • 202-508-3421  
gcooper@trcp.org



**CONSERVATION FORCE**  
John Jackson, III • 504-837-1233  
jjw-no@worldnet.att.net



**NORTH AMERICAN GROUSE  
PARTNERSHIP**  
Ralph Rogers • 406-462-5487  
RRogers@grousepartners.org



**US SPORTSMEN'S ALLIANCE**  
Richard Story • 614-888-4868  
Rstory@ussportsmen.org



**CONSERVATION FUND**  
Larry Selzer • 703-525-6300  
lzelzer@conservationfund.org



**ORION  
THE HUNTER'S INSTITUTE**  
James Posewitz • 406-4498-2795  
orionhi@bresnan.net



**WHITETAILS UNLIMITED**  
Peter Gerl • 920-743-6777  
pgerl@whitetailsunlimited.com



**DALLAS SAFARI CLUB**  
Ben Carter • 972-980-9800  
Ben@biggame.org



**PHEASANTS FOREVER INC.**  
Dave Nomsen • 320-491-9163  
dnomsen@pheasantsforever.org



**WILD SHEEP FOUNDATION**  
Gray Thornton • 307-527-6261  
gthornton@wildsheepfoundation.org



**DELTA WATERFOWL FOUNDATION**  
Joel Brice • 701-222-8857  
jbrice@deltawaterfowl.org



**POPE AND YOUNG CLUB**  
Mike Schlegel • 208-630-3001  
mws@ctcweb.net



**WILDLIFE FOREVER**  
Douglas Grann • 763-253-0222  
dgrann@wildlife-forever.org



**DUCKS UNLIMITED**  
Alan Wentz • 901-758-3825  
awentz@ducks.org



**QUAIL UNLIMITED**  
Donnie Buckland • 803-637-5731  
dbuckland@qu.org



**WILDLIFE HABITAT COUNCIL**  
Robert Johnson • 301-588-8994  
rjohnson@wildlifehc.org



**HOUSTON SAFARI CLUB**  
Chris Susilovich • 713-562-7223  
chris@houstonsafariclub.org



**QUALITY DEER MANAGEMENT  
ASSOCIATION**  
Brian Murphy • 800-209-3337  
bmurphy@qdma.com



**WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE**  
Steve Williams • 717-677-4480  
swilliams@wildlifemgt.org

**AMERICAN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION PARTNERS | WWW.WILDLIFEPARTNERS.ORG**  
c/o Boone and Crockett Club ■ 250 Station Drive ■ Missoula, Montana 59801

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