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Hunters and Recreational Shooters Fund Wildlife Conservation

Hunting in America is more than a hobby or family pastime. It's a critical part of conservation efforts – both the dollars and cents of it and the people working to conserve our country's natural resources.

Combating Decades of Decline

The bountiful wildlife that sustained generations of Americans was driven to near extinction by the early 1900s. The slaughter of bison across the west and the disappearance of the passenger pigeon are well known. But the problem was much broader. Hunting at that time was largely unregulated. Bird populations were decimated to supply feathers for ladies' hats, and many species of wildlife, including white-tailed deer, were overhunted for food and hides to near extinction. Habitat across much of the country was excessively clear cut, mined, or otherwise degraded in America's rush into the industrial age.



In response, American sportsmen – including President Theodore Roosevelt and *Forest & Stream* editor George Bird Grinnell – led efforts to restore wildlife, manage game based on sound science, and conserve lands and waters that provide essential habitat for fish and wildlife. Hunters devised a “user pay” system through which taxes, licenses, and other fees paid by sportsmen would fund conservation. Their investment over many decades revived wildlife populations across the country – including wild turkeys, wood ducks, and white-tailed deer – and protected millions of acres of land that is open today for public recreation.

Hunters Provide Critical Conservation Funding

American sportsmen provide the majority of the funding for state fish and wildlife agencies. In fact, up to 75 percent of state agency budgets are funded by hunters, anglers, and shooting sports enthusiasts. These investments provide incredible benefits to all Americans. Significant sources of conservation funding include:

Excise Taxes: Under the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (also called the Pittman-Robertson Act), which hunters helped to pass in 1937, the federal government assesses excise taxes on rifles, shotguns, handguns, ammunition, bows, arrows, and certain archery equipment. This tax revenue is then allocated to states for a range of conservation activities, including acquiring and improving habitat, reintroducing wildlife into historic ranges, wildlife-related research, and hunter education. Between 1939 and 2017, excise taxes paid by hunters and recreational shooters generated more than \$10.7 billion for wildlife restoration and conservation.



Duck Stamps: Every migratory waterfowl hunter 16 years and older must purchase a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp – known as a “Duck Stamp” – every year. Other wildlife enthusiasts can also purchase these stamps, which are both collector’s items and useful for the access they provide to national wildlife refuges. Revenue from the Duck Stamps is allocated to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to purchase or lease wetlands and other waterfowl habitat for inclusion in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Since 1934, sales of these stamps have generated more than \$800 million, which has been used to buy or lease more than 6 million acres of waterfowl habitat.



Hunting Licenses: In general, hunters are required to purchase one or more licenses each year, depending on what animal(s) they hunt. For example, some states require one license to hunt deer and another for up-land game birds such as grouse. Nationwide, annual hunting license sales exceed an average of \$790 million. Along with excise taxes, hunting and fishing license revenues are a major source of funding for state fish and wildlife management agencies.

Conservation Investments Benefit All Americans

People protect the things they value. For hunters, anglers, and other people who enjoy the outdoors, that includes our natural resources. In addition to funding state fish and wildlife agencies, sportsmen contribute their own time, talent, and hard-earned dollars to on-the-ground conservation. All of these conservation efforts benefit Americans across the country – whether or not these Americans hunt or fish.

Open Land for Public Recreation: Land and waters purchased by state and federal governments are generally open to the public – and many of these purchases are made possible by taxes and fees paid by sportsmen. Americans who enjoy bird watching have incredible opportunities to pursue their passion across millions of acres of National Wildlife Refuges. Hikers, campers, and cross-country skiers share state lands with sportsmen.

Habitat Improvements That Benefit All Wildlife: Habitat that is conserved through funding generated by hunters and recreational shooters directly supports and benefits all wildlife – not just species that are hunted. Imperiled song birds benefit from intact forests, amphibians and turtles thrive in wetlands, and public land provides migratory corridors for a variety of wildlife.



Clean Water, Flood Control, and Other Public Benefits: Public lands also provide benefits to citizens in nearby communities and across the country. Undeveloped forests are critical sources of clean water that flows into our reservoirs and ultimately our homes. Wetlands absorb flood waters and help recharge groundwater supplies that feed drinking water wells of millions of Americans.

Get Involved

Americans who enjoy hunting and shooting sports fund critical conservation efforts that simply could not be accomplished without the taxes and fees that sportsmen pay at the local, state, and national levels. The Izaak Walton League and our members proudly support these conservation efforts and encourage all Americans to enjoy our great outdoors and get involved in conserving outdoor America for future generations.