



Date: 26 March 2019

To: United States House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources

RE: Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife Legislative Hearing

From: The Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Jeffrey S. Crane
President

Dear Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member McClinton, and members of the Subcommittee:

The Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF) supports two bills that are being discussed during your Subcommittee's legislative hearing on March 26, 2019.

Established in 1989, CSF works with the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus (CSC), the largest, most active bipartisan caucus on Capitol Hill. With nearly 250 Members of Congress from both the House and Senate, current House CSC Co-Chairs are Representatives Marc Veasey (TX) and Austin Scott (GA) and Vice-Chairs are Representatives Debbie Dingell (MI) and Richard Hudson (NC).

The following two pieces of legislation are critically important to increasing public access for hunting, fishing, trapping, and recreational shooting, and to conserve critical fish and wildlife habitat:

H.R. 1326: ACCESS Act

Introduced by Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus Member Congressman Mike Thompson (CA), the Authorizing Critical Conservation and Enabling Sportsmen and Sportsmen Act, or ACCESS Act, is critically important to increasing public access for hunting, fishing, trapping, and recreational shooting, provides financial resources for on-the-ground fish and wildlife conservation programs, and directs wildlife managing agencies to conduct critical monitoring, assessment, and research on wildlife diseases. A few of the high priority items contained in H.R. 1326 for CSF include:

Title I – North American Wetlands Conservation Act Reauthorization

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) is an important program to ensure the conservation of critical wetland habitat. Originally passed in 1989, NAWCA helps support the conservation efforts of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan by providing financial resources to carry out wetland conservation projects in the United States, Canada, and

Mexico. To date, NAWCA has completed more than 2,833 on-the-ground conservation projects while conserving more than 29.8 million acres in all 50 states, Canada, and Mexico.

NAWCA requires that for every federal dollar contributed to the program, a non-federal source must equally match the federal contribution. However, the program is often matched at a rate of \$3 of non-federal money for every \$1 of federal money, a sign that conservation groups, including sportsmen and women, are willing to have skin in the game. In the last 30 years, NAWCA has received over \$1.6 billion in federal funds while being leveraged with more than \$4.68 billion in non-federal funds.

Title V – Fish Habitat Conservation

Title V will statutorily authorize the National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP) concept, which was first developed in 2001 by the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council to enhance public-private partnerships for fisheries conservation efforts. This title will provide Congressional oversight of NFHP by authorizing \$7.2 million for this important conservation program. Today, the NFHP has grown to 20 partnerships with numerous stakeholders, including federal, state, and local agencies; conservation and other sportsmen's groups; private landowners; and businesses. Working together, the partnership mission is to implement the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, protect and restore fish populations and enhance recreational fishing opportunities.

It is important to note that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has administered this program for more than a decade, but it was never intended to be the “top-down” approach it is today. Congressional authorization of NFHP through Title V would codify the roles of involved parties and help secure an avenue for consistent funding for on-the-ground fish and aquatic habitat conservation in the states. Providing Congressional oversight over the financial resources will also help ensure long term, dedicated funding is provided to the Partnership.

Title VI – Target Practice and Marksmanship Training Support

Title VI of H.R. 1326 amends the Pittman-Robertson Act to help increase public access to public target shooting ranges for sportsmen and women. This title provides flexibility to state agencies by reducing the state and local fund match requirements for the construction, operation, and maintenance of public target shooting ranges from 25% to 10%. Title VI would also allow state agencies to accrue funds for the construction and expansion of public target shooting ranges for a period of five years as opposed to the current limitation of two years, which will allow states to build and develop shooting range project multiple budget cycles while enhancing their ability to maintain existing ranges. Title VI also contains an important provision that would limit the unnecessary exposure to liability that land management agencies may face when providing recreational shooting opportunities on public lands.

Since enactment, the Pittman-Robertson Act has contributed nearly \$12 billion to wildlife conservation, a large portion of these funds are directly attributable to recreational shooters, who per-capita, spend far more money on firearms and ammunition than hunters. This title would amend the Pittman-Robertson Act to reflect the financial contributions of recreational target

shooters and manufacturers by increasing opportunities for sportsmen and women to safely participate in recreational shooting at new, or modified, public target shooting ranges.

As our nation's population is becoming increasingly urbanized and suburbanized, American's have far less opportunities to participate in our time-honored sporting traditions, which can in part be addressed by this title.

Titles X and XI – Chronic Wasting Disease

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a progressive, degenerative, and always-fatal neurological disease affecting both farmed and free-ranging cervids (deer, elk, and moose). Since first identified in 1967, CWD has been detected in wild and/or farmed cervid populations in 26 states and several Canadian provinces, and has recently been detected in areas and facilities that had previously been CWD-free. There is no known no vaccine or cure. As such, the number one objective in the management of CWD must be to prevent its spread into areas that are presently CWD-free. However, a lack of reliable information about the disease and its transmission pathways presents this objective as an arduous task. Titles X and XI of H.R. 1326 seek to address this issue by providing necessary financial resources and will help ensure that our nation's professional wildlife managers and agencies have accurate and reliable scientific information on CWD.

Title X of H.R. 1326, Chronic Wasting Disease Management, will provide \$35 million to support state and tribal agencies to develop and implement management strategies and control methods, and will provide \$10 million for additional research on the causes of CWD. The \$35 million provided to managing agencies will be distributed in the following ways:

- \$20 million is to be set aside for use by state fish and wildlife agencies
- \$5 million is to be set aside for tribal agencies
- \$10 million is allocated to a rapid response fund, which will go to state and tribal agencies to control the spread of CWD when it is detected in deer, elk, or moose populations that were not previously infected.

Title XI of H.R. 1326, Chronic Wasting Disease Transmission in Cervidae Study, will help address the issue of lack of reliable information surrounding CWD by directing United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA APHIS), United States Geological Survey (USGS), and state wildlife and agricultural agencies to conduct studies on CWD.

Deer, elk, and moose are some of the most popular big game animals in North America. The recovery of these species from their historically low numbers at the close of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century is a battle that was hard-won on the backs of our nation's original conservationists – sportsmen and women – through investments of time, resources, and capital through the American System of Conservation Funding. Titles X and XI will help ensure healthy populations of deer, elk, and moose for future generations to enjoy.

H.R. 877: Modernizing the Pittman-Robertson Fund for Tomorrow's Needs Act

Introduced in the House by CSC Co-Chair Congressman Austin Scott, and cosponsored by CSC Leaders Representatives Veasey, Dingell, and Hudson, the Modernizing the Pittman-Robertson Fund for Tomorrow's Needs Act is a bipartisan piece of legislation that is critical to maintaining our nation's outdoor heritage. This legislation will clarify that one of the purposes of the Pittman-Robertson Fund is to provide and extend financial and technical assistance to the states for hunter and recreational shooter recruitment efforts.

The Pittman-Robertson Act directs existing excise taxes on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment to state wildlife agencies for wildlife management, species and habitat conservation, scientific research, population monitoring, hunter education and hunting and target shooting access. Through these excise taxes and associated purchases of hunting licenses, archery enthusiasts, hunters, and recreational shooters are the nation's primary funders of wildlife conservation. Unfortunately, this "user-pays, public-benefits" system of conservation funding that benefits all citizens is in jeopardy.

In 1978, 16.2 million of the nation's 222 million citizens purchased a hunting license, representing 7% of the U.S. population. Now, there are over 328 million people in the United States, 13.3 million of which are certified hunting license holders, or less than 4% of the nation's population. This steady decline in participation over the past four decades threatens not only America's hunting heritage, but also represents a fundamental challenge to maintaining funding streams that are vital to state-based wildlife conservation.

To confront this challenge, state wildlife agencies need added flexibility to use Pittman-Robertson funds to develop and implement strategies to recruit, retain, and reactivate (R3) the nation's next generation of hunters and target shooters, the primary objective of H.R. 877. Doing so will ensure that America's sportsmen and women continue to serve as a crucial source of funding for wildlife conservation that benefits citizens in every state.

It is also worth noting that the Dingell-Johnson/Wallop-Breaux Sport Fish and Restoration and Boating Safety Trust already allows state agencies to use their apportioned funds for recruitment, education, and outreach of fishing and boating programs to the general public. This legislation will provide parity for state agencies to use Pittman-Robertson Funds R3 related activities as they are already doing on the fishing and boating side with Dingell-Johnson/Wallop-Breaux Funds. This legislation does not mandate a state agency use their funds for R3 efforts, but simply provides them the flexibility to do so as they judiciously see fit.

Summary

In summary, H.R. 1326 and H.R. 877 are common sense, non-controversial pieces of legislation. These bills are good for the American economy, our treasured lands and waters, and our nation's fish and wildlife. On this date exactly one month ago, the House passed S. 47, the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act. Nearly three months ago, the 2018 Farm Bill was signed into law, and a little over a year ago, the 2018 Omnibus became law. The successful passage of each of these bills clearly demonstrates that increasing sporting related access and conserving fish and wildlife habitat is strongly bipartisan and widely supported by the

American Public. We are hopeful these bills can follow similar paths forward without falling short due to political gridlock.

CSF would like to thank Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member McClinton, and the members of the Subcommittee for holding a hearing on these critically important pieces of legislation. We look forward to working with you to pass these bills out of Committee, out of the House, and enacted into law. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Crane".

Jeffrey S. Crane
President