

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Witness Statement

Testimony of
Mr. Richard Cabela
Chairman of the Board, Cabela's Inc.
on behalf of
Cablea's Inc. and the Wildlife Legislative Fund of America
before the
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Conservation,
Wildlife and Oceans
U.S. House of Representatives
on H.R. 4790, the Hunting Heritage Protection Act
July 20, 2000

Mr. Chairman thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding H.R. 4790, the Hunting Heritage Protection Act. My name is Dick Cabela, and I am the Chairman of the Board of Cabela's Inc. I am also a member of the Board of Directors of the Wildlife Legislative Fund of America (WLFA). I am appearing before you today on behalf of both Cabela's and WLFA. In both capacities, I strongly support enactment of H.R. 4790. Let me add that WLFA and Cabela's appreciates the leadership and support for angling and hunting provided by this Subcommittee and we thank you for promptly scheduling today's hearing.

When WLFA began to prepare a proposal to President Clinton to sign an Executive Order that recognized the importance of the hunting heritage in this country, I was immediately interested on both a professional and personal level. I founded Cabela's 39 years ago, based on my love of the outdoors, and of hunting, fishing, and all types of outdoor recreation. I have pursued a professional and personal life that actively involves being a sportsman, and that supports and encourages the similar passions of our nation's sportsmen and sportswomen.

I became involved with the Wildlife Legislative Fund of America because, through my work as a wildlife conservationist, I found WLFA to be the preeminent organization supporting the rights of hunters and sportsmen in the country. The WLFA is a coalition of national sporting and conservation organizations and includes hundreds of state and local hunting, fishing and trapping clubs representing over 1.5 million American hunters and anglers.

The proposed Executive Order would help assure continued access to our federal public lands and I, like many others was disappointed that our 60-plus organization coalition did not receive a response of any kind from the Administration. Therefore, I was heartened when leaders of the House Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus Rep. Saxby Chambliss, Rep. Collin Peterson, along with Resources Committee Chairman Young,

and Representative Cunningham introduced this legislation. If the Administration is unwilling to recognize hunters and the importance of the hunting tradition to our country, I am grateful that Congress appears willing to do so. Enactment of this bill would be an important step forward and it would direct federal land management agencies to support, promote, and enhance recreational hunting opportunities.

As you know, hunters remain among the most committed conservationists, regardless of how we may be portrayed by forces wanting to limit our opportunities to pursue our sporting heritage. We care about the lands we use, and are committed to making sure that they remain open and available for our use, and for the use of future generations of sportsmen. Further, hunters understand the intrinsic value that hunting has as an appropriate and often necessary wildlife management tool. Unfortunately, our access to public lands for hunting is continually threatened by an array of anti-hunting and animal rights extremists. In addition, our role as valuable and committed conservationists is unrecognized by much of the public. The current atmosphere is not particularly friendly to hunters, and we fear that it may become less so as our society becomes more urbanized.

On a professional note, supplying hunters and sportsmen with the goods and services they need is my livelihood. If hunters do not have anywhere to use our products, they won't buy them. Loss of hunting opportunities for the average hunter would result in major financial loss for my business, and for other businesses, large and small, that are focused on meeting the needs of the hunting and sporting community. Thousands of small businesses, many situated in rural communities, are dependent on continued hunting access to public lands. The policy of no net loss of hunting opportunities codified in H.R. 4790 would benefit not only those who hunt, but those who depend on hunting and hunters for their livelihood.

Anglers and hunters founded the conservation movement over a century ago, and since then, hunters specifically have raised billions of dollars for wildlife conservation, through licenses, permits, stamps and excise taxes. The excise taxes paid by my company and my customers have helped to protect our national lands for use by all recreationists, hunters and non-hunters alike. Given this history and commitment, it is time for the federal government to recognize the role we play as stewards of responsible resource use and to support and encourage our sport as a valid use of those resources. The Hunting Heritage Protection Act does just this. I look forward to its passage by Congress.

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