

**Melissa Simpson**  
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**Testimony on H.R. 1444, "Recreational Fishing and Hunting Heritage Opportunities Act" and**  
**the "Cabin Fee Act of 2011"**  
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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to share my views, the views of Safari Club International, and the sportsmen's community, all of whom support H.R. 1444 and H.R. 2834.

My name is Melissa Simpson. I serve as the Director of Government Affairs for Safari Club International (SCI). SCI's missions are the conservation of wildlife, protection of hunting, and education of the public concerning hunting and its use as a conservation tool. SCI works both nationally and globally to protect hunting opportunities and strengthen the link between hunting and wildlife conservation.

Safari Club International believes that U.S. Federal lands should be managed under the principles of multiple-use. Outdoor recreation, including hunting and fishing, have been and should continue to be a primary use of U.S. Federal lands. The opportunity to hunt and fish on Federal lands should be a priority for every land and resource management plan. H.R. 1444 and H.R. 2834 would require Federal agencies to ensure abundant hunting and fishing opportunities are provided for unless hunting and fishing are determined to be incompatible with a specific unit of land.

Mr. Chairman, in the past some organizations have stated that this legislation is unnecessary. This could not be further from the truth, hunting is under attack. Litigious anti-hunting organizations have misused well-meaning environmental laws to stop hunting and fishing anywhere possible. These organizations are aggressively seeking to undermine hunting opportunities on America's Federal lands. An attempt to end hunting in the National Wildlife Refuge System was recently defeated, but even now anti-hunting organizations are at work to eliminate hunting on our National Forests and BLM lands. If Congress does not expressly designate hunting and fishing as priority uses of our federal lands it is only a matter of time before we lose these opportunities that have been central to the North American Model of Conservation.

In August of 2000, America's leading wildlife conservation organizations met to identify how best to work collaboratively to help chart the course for the future of wildlife conservation in the United States. These organizations formed the American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP), a consortium of over 40 organizations representing over 4 million hunters at the time. The impetus for this historic meeting was the urgent recognition that habitats on federal forests and rangelands were deteriorating; declines in hunter participation was putting America's hunting heritage at risk, and along with it, the tradition of America's game management; public

conflict and polarization over wildlife issues were increasing; and finally, the stewardship of federal lands was hampered by conflicting laws and regulations guiding the management of these lands. AWCP subsequently presented “Wildlife for the 21st Century” policy recommendations to President George W. Bush in both his terms and to President Barack Obama in 2009.

In the decade that AWCP has engaged the Administration, sportsmen have tirelessly worked to resolve the same ongoing issues with the federal land management agencies. During the Bush Administration, I served as a liaison to the sportsmen’s community through high level positions at the Department of the Interior and US Department of Agriculture, focusing on facilitating relationships between the Bureau of Land Management and the US Forest Service with the sportsmen’s community to better integrate sportsmen’s issues into agency decision making, specifically focusing on access to public lands.

In 2005, I organized a conference between Interior and AWCP to advance their policy recommendations. Policy sessions with high-level Administration officials, the Interior Secretary, Interior Counsel and AWCP executives led to the recognition that the hunting community needed a more direct conduit to engage the Administration. Consequently, the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture established the Sporting Conservation Council (SCC); a federal advisory committee specifically for members of the hunting community to advise on access, conservation funding, habitat management, and hunter recruitment and retention. The SCC recommendations resulted in President Bush’s Executive Order #13443: Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation, which called for a White House Conference on North American Wildlife Policy and a ten year Recreational Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Plan. The ten year plan was referenced by the Obama Administration in the charter for the current sportsmen’s federal advisory committee, the Wildlife Hunting Heritage Conservation Council.

In 2006, 40 hunting, fishing and wildlife organizations and three federal agencies signed the Federal Lands Hunting, Fishing, and Shooting Sports Roundtable Memorandum of Understanding with the purpose of “implementing mutually beneficial projects and activities.” The chief of the US Forest Service has repeatedly reminded field staff of the importance of hunting and sport shooting on national forest lands through directives. Lastly, the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council was established to benefit recreational fishing. Despite all these efforts and the supposed commitment of the present Administration to hunting and fishing opportunities, the reality is that the policies and regulation currently being proposed actually undermine the efforts of the past ten years.

While sportsmen and women began with high hopes for the Administration, it has become increasingly clear that these hopes were based on paper promises. The continual stream of regulations that discourage participation in outdoor recreation has come from many different agencies and appears to be a coordinated affront to our hunting heritage. In the last two years, anti-hunting regulations have come from most of the public land agencies including the Forest

Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Fish and Wildlife Service. Nor has the current Administration made progress in implementing the ten year Recreational Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Plan.

Mr. Chairman, at the beginning of the last century sportsmen saw the problems that over-utilization can do to wildlife. Hunters and anglers asked to contribute to conservation through license fees and excise taxes to ensure that wildlife would be around for future generations. Over the last century sportsmen and women have upheld our end of the bargain and provided billions of dollars to conserve wildlife including over 75% of all funding for state conservation agencies. Now we need your help. We need Congress to pass H.R. 1444, H.R. 2834 and the handful of other pro-sportsmen bills that members have been introduced in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress and help protect our outdoor heritage.

Thank you for the opportunity and I would be happy to answer any questions that the Committee might have.

## **List of Anti-hunting Regulatory and Administrative Actions over the last 12 months**

### **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Vision Document**

A second draft of the refuge vision document was recently published by the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The document is to provide direction for National Wildlife Refuges for the next generation. The newest version of the vision document again neglects hunting and recreation while greatly expanding the FWS's mission to include controversial climate change adaptation. The Hunting Advisory Council created by the Administration (Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council) has recommended changes to the vision document after the first draft was released, and even their recommendations are ignored in the second draft.

### **Forest Service Planning Rule**

The Forest Service released the Draft Planning Rule on February 10, 2011 (76 FR 8480). When it is finalized (Fall 2011) this Rule will affect every land management plan on the 193 million acres of the National Forest. SCI and many other hunting and conservation groups filed comments expressing fundamental concerns with the rule.

- The Draft Planning Rule makes negligible mention of hunting and offers little in the way of express protections for hunting, potentially inviting the courts to resolve questions over the role that hunting will play on National Forests in the future.
- The definition of the phrase “sustainable recreation” makes no specific mention of hunting. In addition, the definition is troublesome because it restricts “sustainable recreation” to opportunities, uses and access that are ecologically, economically and socially sustainable, without providing a definition of what qualifies as “socially sustainable.”

### **Secretary Vilsack's Memorandum**

Secretary Vilsack has issued memorandum for the last three years that reserve all decisions over road construction, or timber removal to the Secretary's office. (Secretarial Orders 10420-154,10420-155,10420-156) These orders take the power of land management away from local decision makers and concentrate that power in Washington, D.C. By removing these powers from local land managers, the Secretary's office is greatly limiting the ability of local land manager to thin forests to reduce the chances of catastrophic wildfire, mitigate insect infestation, and manage forest habitat for the benefit of wildlife.

### **BLM Shooting Range Policy**

Earlier this year the BLM issued a draft shooting range policy. This policy fails to acknowledge the traditional and historic use of public lands for recreational shooting. Even worse the policy maintains the BLM's current policy of not operating shooting ranges or issuing new leases for shooting ranges because of the "potential liability related to lead contamination of the environment." This is a false concern because, as the BLM is fully aware, the EPA has developed guidance for management of spent lead ammunition at shooting ranges. SCI believe that this policy sends a negative message to land managers about the role that recreational shooting should have on BLM land.

### **Wild Lands Order**

In December 2010 Secretary Salazar issued Secretarial Order 3310, containing the controversial Wild Lands policy, without any public input. This policy would have allowed the BLM to circumvent Congressional authority over designating wilderness by allowing the BLM to use the public resource management planning process to designate certain lands with wilderness characteristics as "Wild Lands." Sportsmen and the Association of State Fish and Wildlife Agencies (representing the 50 state fish and wildlife agencies) opposed this order because it would undermine states' authority by creating unnecessary barriers to fish and wildlife management and related recreation on public lands. The Secretary reversed this Order only after Congress acted to remove funding for this policy.

### **FWS Importation Problems**

Importation of hunting trophies into the United States has become more difficult over the past few years. SCI members have been subject to an increasing frequency of seizures of hunting trophies that are being imported into the United States by the Fish and Wildlife Service. These seizures seem to be the result of minor paperwork problems and seizure or forfeiture of expensive wildlife trophies is an outsized penalty for minor paperwork errors, especially when many of these errors are caused by wildlife officials in developing countries.

Additionally, the administration was unwilling to support a beneficial definition of "hunting trophies" at the last Conference of the Parties of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) in 2010 that would have helped reduce the seizure problem.