

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR AFFAIRS, OCEANS, AND WILDLIFE
ON
“MANAGING OCEAN AND WILDLIFE RESOURCES IN A DYNAMIC
ENVIRONMENT: PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW ADMINISTRATION
AND THE 111th CONGRESS”**

**By John Baughman
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Thank you Madame Chairwoman. I am John Baughman, a member of the Sporting Conservation Council (SCC), which is an officially sanctioned FACA committee that advises both the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture on issues important to America's sportsmen and women – including those issues related to conservation of our wildlife resources. I am a biologist by training and have spent over 30 years as a wildlife conservation professional including 6 years as Director of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department and 4 years as Executive Director of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) which is an organization of the state and federal agencies charged with management of North America's fish and wildlife resources. At present I work for AFWA, from my home in Cody, Wyoming, as a liaison between state and federal agencies, industry, and non-profit organizations on energy development and wildlife conservation issues.

Our topic today is especially timely given the new Congress, the change in administrations, and the mega-issues of world population growth, global climate change, invasive species and diseases, a faltering economy, changing demographics and social values, and a growing list of tasks and problems to be addressed with a shrinking supply of money and personnel resources.

Over the past year, I have had the opportunity to be involved to some degree in three efforts that have analyzed the wildlife conservation issues of our time and made recommendations for maintaining our fish and wildlife resources in the future. The first effort was the Sporting Conservation Council's role in responding to Executive Order 13443, "Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation." In cooperation with the Council on Environmental Quality, the Department of Agriculture and Interior, the American Wildlife Conservation Partners, other conservation organizations, and state wildlife agencies; the SCC produced a series of white papers and recommendations on eight topics related to wildlife conservation and our nation's hunting heritage. Those white papers are contained in a report entitled "Strengthening America's Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation in the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities" which accompanies my written testimony.

The second effort was working with the American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP) to update their recommendations for the incoming administration. The AWCP is a consortium of 42 conservation organizations with a common goal to safeguard America's wildlife resources and the interests of sportsmen and sportswomen. Beginning in 2000, and then preceding each presidential election thereafter, the AWCP has prepared a series of recommendations related to the most important issues facing wildlife conservation and America's sporting traditions. The

revised recommendations, “Wildlife for the 21st Century: III” which were presented to President Obama, also accompany this testimony.

Finally, the AFWA also prepared a series of recommendations for the Obama administration. These recommendations represent the collective opinion of those agencies legally charged with the stewardship responsibilities for our nation’s fish and wildlife resources. Their recommendations accompany this testimony in a report entitled, “Furthering Conservation in the Public Trust: A National Fish & Wildlife Agenda.”

The purpose of all three efforts - to define and analyze today’s fish and wildlife conservation issues and produce actionable recommendations to ensure the future health and sustainability of these resources - is squarely on target with the purpose of this hearing. For a more in-depth discussion of the subject we are addressing I highly recommend that members of the committee and their staffs peruse these documents. Even though these three efforts were independent, the similarities between their recommendations are striking. The reports identify literally scores of issues, challenges, and opportunities, but I would categorize the really big issues – common to all three - as follows:

1. Global climate change.
2. Maintenance of fish and wildlife habitat.
3. Invasive species and diseases.
4. Disconnect between Americans and nature.
5. Lack of reasonable, assured funding.

Challenges:

Global Climate Change

While others work on the causes of and solutions for global climate change, the biggest challenges in managing aquatic and terrestrial habitats and wildlife will be in conserving functional ecosystems, lessening impacts of a warmer world on at-risk species, and developing and implementing wildlife and habitat monitoring systems with sufficient sensitivity to identify the emerging impacts of climate change so adaptive management strategies can be employed. Failure to meet these challenges will mean greater loss of habitat and wildlife populations, more species becoming jeopardized or even extinct, and far more resources spent on recovery of individual species than would have been needed to take early preventative actions.

Maintenance of Fish and Wildlife Habitat

Healthy, sustainable ecosystems and wildlife populations depend on a healthy, somewhat stable, and resilient habitat base. Major challenges to our ability to sustain fish and wildlife habitat include, but certainly aren’t limited to, urban sprawl, increasing frequency of catastrophic wildfire, poorly managed agricultural practices, impacts from domestic energy development, conversion of native habitat to agriculture and conversion of agriculture to urban/suburban landscapes, and all of these are compounded by and in addition to changes in habitat due to climate changes and invasive species. Failure to react adequately to these challenges will result in habitat loss and fragmentation, and the net effect will be fewer animals and more species at-risk.

Invasive Species and Diseases

Invasive species and diseases cause challenges on a number of fronts such as maintaining wildlife habitat; protecting human, wildlife, and livestock health; safeguarding the economic viability of agricultural and timber operations, etc. Perhaps the biggest challenges for Congress, the Administration, and all of us will be first and foremost developing and implementing better systems to prevent the spread of invasive species and diseases, and secondly, though even more challenging, developing and implementing programs to manage, control, and eliminate invasive species and diseases once they are introduced.

Disconnect Between Americans and Nature

As American society becomes more urban and opportunities for fish and wildlife-related recreation diminish, our citizens become more and more disenfranchised from nature. People who don't understand the uniqueness and success of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation have little reason to actively support its continuance. Those who don't comprehend the link between habitat and wildlife aren't likely to participate in and support political and on-the-ground processes that ensure perpetuation of these resources. America is raising an entire generation whose only link to the out-of-doors is through a TV screen or computer monitor, and it is not surprising that child obesity is epidemic. The challenge is to increase our nation's understanding and appreciation of nature and their participation in hunting, fishing, and other wildlife-related recreation. To maintain the public's support and participation, there is also a challenge to ensure access to opportunities for quality recreational experiences.

Lack of Reasonable Assured Funding

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation was founded on a user-pays concept where the cost of fish and wildlife conservation was almost exclusively funded by hunters and anglers through their purchase of licenses, permits, and stamps and taxes on their equipment and supplies along with federal appropriations for national programs (e.g. wildlife refuges, interstate law enforcement, national fish hatchery system). This method of funding worked well for much of the 20th Century when wildlife conservation meant establishing regulations, law enforcement, and raising and stocking fish and wildlife to establish and supplement natural populations. The challenges now in providing adequate funding for fish and wildlife conservation are two-fold: 1) less money available, 2) lots more to do. Hunters and anglers who once provided most of the funding for all fish and wildlife conservation are declining as a percentage of the population nation-wide, and with the national economy and federal budget priorities, federal appropriations for fish and wildlife conservation have less flexibility and purchasing power than 30 years ago. Fish and wildlife conservation still includes establishing regulations, law enforcement, and stocking fish and wildlife, but it also includes major additional programs to manage and conserve all wildlife resources for all citizens (e.g. environmental protection, maintaining biodiversity, species at-risk recovery, conservation education, watchable wildlife programs, managing human/wildlife conflicts, wildlife/livestock/human disease control, etc.).

Opportunities:

As mentioned earlier in my testimony, there are literally scores of opportunities identified in the reports from the SCC, the AWCP, and the AFWA. I will highlight a few of the most important opportunities, i.e. things that can actually make a significant on-the-ground difference under each of my five major categories.

Global Climate Change

1. Enact comprehensive climate change legislation that regulates greenhouse gas emissions.
2. Dedicate a portion of the revenue from carbon credits or other cap-and-trade protocols to state and federal programs that identify and remediate the impacts of global climate change.

Maintenance of Fish and Wildlife Habitat

1. Ensure continuance of meaningful conservation features in future Farm Bills.
2. Support delivery of habitat conservation through landscape-level conservation initiatives based on strong federal, state, corporate, private partnerships and highly leveraged federal dollars (e.g. North American Waterfowl management Plan, National Fish Habitat Action Plan, Health Lands Initiative).
3. Support tax credits and other incentives to encourage private landowners to voluntarily preserve habitat and incorporate conservation practices.
4. Support legislative and administrative changes in federal energy development processes to better balance the needs of domestic energy development with conservation of fish and wildlife resources, and develop the appropriate capacity to run these processes with federal, state, and industry funding from rents, royalties, receipts, and income.
5. Incorporate state and regional wildlife plans (e.g. State Wildlife Action Plans, Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy, Mule Deer Conservation Plan) into federal land use planning processes.
6. Develop and implement landscape-level programs to treat at-risk forest, grassland, and wetland habitats.

Invasive Species and Diseases

- Secure comprehensive legislation to address importation, possession, and management of invasive species (including pathogens and regulation of ballast water).

Disconnect Between Americans and Nature

1. Support existing and create new programs to encourage children and adults to participate in fish, wildlife, and nature-based outdoor recreation.
2. Develop federal training programs designed to give in-coming employees an understanding of wildlife conservation and the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.
3. Develop and support programs that enhance access to public and private lands for fish, wildlife, and nature-based recreation including incentive-based programs to encourage private landowners to voluntarily provide public access.
4. Include natural resource agencies in any forthcoming “No Child Left Inside” legislation.

5. Improve and revise the Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937 to create a Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation-like entity to promote hunting, shooting, and wildlife related outdoor recreation.

Summary and Conclusions:

Most of the big issues we face in managing our ocean and wildlife resources in this dynamic environment can be included under one or more of my five categories: Global Climate Change, Maintenance of Fish and Wildlife Habitat, Invasive Species and Diseases, the Disconnect between Americans and Nature, the Lack of Reasonable and Assured Funding. If the new Congress and Administration dedicate themselves to seizing a few of the very top priority opportunities for each of these categories we will have “moved the needle” in making a real difference in conservation of these resources. If we are going to continue to be successful we will have to do a few things differently from the way we operated over the past 100 years: 1) we have to address issues at a much larger landscape-level scale, 2) we (federal and state governments, industry, tribes, NGOs, private individuals) have to work together much better, everything should be done in partnership, 3) all conservation dollars need to be leveraged, and 4) contributions from hunters and anglers and federal appropriations are not adequate, and probably not appropriate, as the primary source to fund wildlife conservation in America for the 21st Century; new streams of adequate assured funding must be developed. Leadership from Congress and the new Administration will be essential.