

# **Committee on Resources**

## **Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans**

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### **Witness Statement**

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**Statement of  
Frank Blaha  
Foundation for North American Wild Sheep  
on the Hunting Heritage Protection Act, H.R. 4790  
to the  
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans  
U.S. House of Representatives  
July 20, 2000**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of the Hunting Heritage Protection Act - H.R. 4790. My name is Frank Blaha and I am speaking today on behalf of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep ("Foundation"). The purpose of the Foundation is to promote and enhance increasing populations of indigenous wild sheep on the North American continent, to safeguard against the decline or extinction of such species, and to fund programs for professional management of these populations. We are vigorously involved in the conservation, propagation and intensive management of the remaining wild sheep populations and their habitats.

To achieve our goals, we have always relied on the assistance and support of the hunting community. Hunters are among this nation's most ardent conservationists. They are dedicated to conserving our natural resources and public lands, and to maintaining wildlife habitat on those lands. H.R. 4790 and its focus on maintaining and securing hunting access to federal public lands is of particular interest to the Foundation because the majority of North American wild sheep habitat is on public land. Over the last century, hunters have raised billions of dollars through excise taxes, licenses, permits, and the like for wildlife conservation. This money has gone to conserve and protect public lands used by the hunters themselves, by non-hunters and other recreationists, and magnificent species such as our wild sheep. This invaluable contribution should be publicly acknowledged and rewarded.

The Wildlife Legislative Fund of America approached us last winter, asking for the Foundation's support of a proposal to President Clinton asking him to sign an executive order that recognized the importance of hunting in the United States. We immediately supported WLFA's proposal, as did some 70 other hunting and conservation organizations. We were, of course, disappointed when the Administration did not respond to our petition. Therefore, when we learned of the bill introduced by Representatives Chambliss, Young, Cunningham, and others, we were encouraged to see Congress stepping in to take action on this important issue. The Hunting Heritage Protection Act is a bill whose time has come.

The Hunting Heritage Protection Act takes positive steps towards the goal of finally acknowledging the role that hunters have played and continue to play in conserving our country's public lands and native species.

The bill also directs federal agencies to support, promote, and enhance recreational hunting opportunities on appropriate public lands. This support is the least the federal government can do in return for all of the work that hunters have done to protect the lands they use. Having Congress establish policies of "open until closed" and "no net loss" regarding hunting is extremely beneficial to wildlife conservation. Assured access means our hunting heritage can continue and hunters can continue to provide crucial support to conservation efforts.

Further, the Foundation is persuaded that it is important that the bill establishes federal recognition of the intrinsic value of hunting as a wildlife management tool. Hunting is not only a "sport", but is also an important tool used to control predator species and to keep balance in other game species. Using hunting as a wildlife management tool is invaluable in maintaining balance and protecting habitat for all species, game and non-game.

We will continue to work with hunters to conserve and protect North American wild sheep and their habitat, and, in turn, will do our part to support hunters and to recognize the continuing importance of the hunting heritage in this country.

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