

Committee on Resources

Full Committee

Witness Statement

Providing Funding for Wildlife

Testimony before the House Resources Committee

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address the issue of funding the future of wildlife. My name is George E. Hyde and I am here on behalf of Barnes Bullets, Incorporated a manufacturer of hunting bullets and shooting related products and supporter of many wildlife conservation organizations.

I want to applaud the congressional sponsors of H.R.701, the Conservation and Reinvestment Act of 1999, for their vision in seeing that there is funding for the future of wildlife and the conservation of resources, including habitat, to support it. This is a long awaited effort to make good on promises made in previous acts like the Land and Water Conservation Fund which have either gone without funding or have been woefully underfunded and have therefore fallen short of providing the necessary change in support of wildlife.

Barnes Bullets which is located in American Fork, Utah is the oldest manufacturer of custom bullets for hand loading. As such we have the opportunity to travel the world and are actively involved in many national and international wildlife conservation organizations. We are proponents of protecting wildlife habitat, educating the public and having law enforcement for the protection of wildlife. These are important facets of every nation's plan for the future of wildlife. Investing in these endeavors is essential and has a direct impact on our business which directly employs over 35 people in Utah County and indirectly contributes to the employment of thousands of men and women throughout the country. Outdoor recreation, including hunting and fishing, contributes billions of dollars to the U.S. economy annually through the creation of jobs, sales of sporting goods equipment and other community economic benefits. Sportsmen in this country have for years contributed billions of dollars to perpetuate wildlife so that they can pass their sporting heritage to future generations. Our company supports these efforts because we believe in the cause and we benefit as well.

CARA funds as proposed in H.R. 701 will be used to supplement and augment the existing conservation programs heretofore funded almost exclusively by sportsmen and sportswomen through wildlife organizations and excise taxes paid on equipment. We support H.R. 701, the Conservation and Reinvestment

Act of 1999 and hope that it will be passed in the 1999 Legislative Session.

Wildlife is a renewable resource and through habitat restoration and proper management it has been shown that populations can not only be perpetuated but improved for future generations. In fact the progress here in the state of Utah over the last century is an example of what investing in wildlife through hunting and fishing license fees, the Pittman-Robertson excise tax and wildlife organization efforts can do for wildlife. Here are a few examples:

Specie Populations in 1920 Populations in 1999

Elk Near Extinction in Utah 60,000

Mule Deer Rarely Sighted 300,000+

Big Horn Sheep Rarely Sighted 3,000

Wild Turkey Extinct in Utah 8,000

Cougar Less than 1,000 2,500

This type of resurgence is happening throughout the country but needs to be sufficiently funded to reach its potential. CARA would ensure that permanent, dedicated funding were in place. And it would allow for expansion of programs begun by sportsmen and wildlife organizations, programs necessary for the long term benefit of wildlife.

Some groups and individuals would focus CARA funds on non-game species and predatory species. They fail to recognize the fact that by restoring abundant game species populations and their accompanying habitat using billions of sportsmen's dollars predators and non-game species have been and will be mutually benefited. They are interdependent and the greater good for all is accomplished by providing game species habitat which supports the ecosystem for all species and provides economic benefits as well.

We support the legislation proposed by H.R. 701 (CARA) and would like to see the following incorporated into the final version:

Federal Ownership of Lands- We would like to see state and local control of management decisions regarding Federal Lands funded by CARA. The best government is that closest to home.

In most of the western states the majority of hunting, fishing, horseback riding, camping and other outdoor activities are done on lands held in a public trust. While there is a valid concern that in the future public lands will be closed to hunting and fishing, that has already happened on the majority of privately held land here in Utah and more so in other parts of the country. Most privately owned property is posted No Hunting, No Fishing or No Trespassing. Although there has been dramatic improvement in recent years here in the state of Utah it has been because of the changes in laws allowing landowners to profit from wildlife.

For those who erroneously claim that converting lands, grazing permits and water rights to the support of wildlife hurts the local economy they need to look at the economic benefits this shift in resources provides. Revenue is shifted from ranching to gun and bullet makers, taxidermists, sporting goods and grocery stores, gas stations, ATV manufacturers and dealers, guides and outfitters, etc.. PILT payments in many cases provide local counties with revenue in excess of what the Green belt taxes would yield.

In Utah deer herds have dramatically declined from populations in the 1970's primarily because of the decline in their winter range areas. They will continue to decline unless that critical habitat is protected. We certainly do not condone the condemnation of privately held property by the federal government (or anyone else) for protection of winter range. However, if there are willing sellers, it is in the best interest of the American people to protect winter habitat for wildlife and protect the public's access to public lands.

Securing easements or title to critical winter range for deer, elk, moose and many other species allows the public to enjoy on these species public lands in the spring, summer and fall. It makes no sense to secure only spring and summer range if wildlife cannot survive the winter. With the current value of real estate in the Utah Valley it may already be too late to protect the winter ranges for this area, but other areas can be saved. Local management of CARA funded wildlife projects would allow these issues to best be addressed. Therefore H.R. 701 needs to include a provision clearly stating that CARA funded lands be managed by local wildlife management with public input.

Another provision that needs to be included in the legislation is:

CARA funds should focus on game species and their related habitat needs.

For decades sportsmen have restored wildlife species enjoyed by all. They have funded the conservation and restoration of habitat for game and non-game species alike, wildlife that has been enjoyed by all by all citizens. There is an injustice in allowing those who would have non- game species dominate the use of CARA funds to prevail. Whenever turtles, prairie dogs or other species need help, the federal government pays the entire bill. CARA funds should supplement and augment, or even repay, the existing hunting and fishing programs that have carried the load for game species during the past century. These programs have and will continue to provide habitat for all wildlife.

A detailed review of Utah wildlife programs will reveal that for decades Mule deer license money has been used to fund programs and overhead that protect many, many species, including threatened and endangered species. Again, it's our belief that the greater good can be derived for all wildlife by focusing CARA funds on game species and combining these funds in support of already productive funds being contributed by sportsmen and wildlife conservation organizations.

In conclusion, I again applaud the sponsors of this legislation and support the effort of the Conservation and Reinvestment act of 1999 (CARA). With the incorporation of the items I've discussed we can ensure the future of wildlife through a permanent, dedicated funding program that cannot be diverted to other programs or debt reduction. A fulfillment of promises long in need of funding.

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