



## 2.1 YOU ARE THE EXPERT AS A WILDLIFE PROFESSIONAL

Engaging in policy advocacy can often be an intimidating concept. It is not unusual to feel a bit anxious or nervous about the idea of asserting your opinion to those individuals who make big decisions that impact our country every day. You might think, “Why should they listen to me?”

But you are exactly the person decision-makers want to hear from. You understand and can explain to them how their policies will directly or indirectly impact wildlife populations, ecosystem processes, or essential wildlife habitat. As a wildlife professional, **you are the only one capable of explaining the realities of how their policies and decisions impact everyday, on-the-ground situations in wildlife conservation.** You have the specialized knowledge and information regarding wildlife science that legislators and agency administrators want – *and need* - to hear.

You do not need an in-depth understanding of the legal concepts and frameworks in order to be an effective advocate. Don't be intimidated by the legal jargon and processes that are inherent in public policy situations. A basic understanding of the policy processes and legal frameworks ([Section 5](#)) will enable you to be an effective advocate for wildlife conservation and the wildlife profession. **Providing your real-world knowledge and experiences is all you need to do to educate policy makers** so they can make the best decisions possible for our wildlife resources.

You carry the single most powerful tool for policy advocacy with you – your personal story. Nothing is as effective as the person who can communicate their story and give a face to an issue for a policymaker – and you are the one with the effective story regarding the wildlife conservation and our profession. Once your issue gets the personal attention of an elected official or the press you have a much better chance of getting appropriate action.

Generally, policy makers are not going to know much about wildlife issues or what is important to you or the wildlife profession. If you aren't there to bring attention to the issue and grab their personal interest with your own story, who else will do it?

You might have some concerns about being an advocate for wildlife and the wildlife profession. *You might feel that you...*

- *Don't know enough about the issues.*  
Odds are that you know a lot more than you give yourself credit for – you are the one working daily with these wildlife issues and have a broad understanding of the wildlife profession. Plus, you can always develop your understanding of issues by:
  1. Reading TWS resources available at [wildlife.org](http://wildlife.org) that can help you learn more about current policy topics.
  2. Discussing the issues with other wildlife professionals to obtain a broader understanding of the issues

- *Don't know the ropes at the legislature or in agencies.*  
You need not be intimidated by people serving in the legislature or agencies; the people you will be meeting with and interacting with are just that – people. Do not be afraid to talk with them, even if you don't feel like you “know the ropes.” Plus, other sections in this toolkit provide you with a basic understanding that will help you get on your way.
- *Don't have the necessary contacts.*  
Finding out who to talk with about your issue is pretty simple. Much of the information about who serves on specific legislative committees or in administrative posts in agencies is available on the web. If you still aren't sure, ask! TWS Staff are here as a resource to help your policy efforts.
- *Are only one voice.*  
One voice can - and does - make a difference! You are the only one who can tell your story - your story and knowledge about wildlife conservation is what policy makers need to hear; you are potentially the only one who can or will bring wildlife science to them.
- *Don't have the needed skills.*  
Practice makes perfect! Get out there and do your part – you will learn what you need along the way, and this toolkit will help you with the basics.
- *Don't have the budget.*  
While money could help with just about everything, you can have a big impact without spending lots of dollars travelling or launching big campaigns. Simply making a phone call or sending a letter are less expensive ways of getting involved that can really make a difference in the outcomes.

Many organizations advocate for the general concept of wildlife conservation. But remember –

### **You are the Expert!**

As a professional in the wildlife field, you have a unique and valuable perspective that can truly advance the issues. You have the on-the-ground information legislators and agency administrators need to improve wildlife management policies.