

February 13, 2012

Senator Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member, Energy and Natural Resources Committee
709 Hart Building
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Joe Manchin
Member, Energy and Natural Resources Committee
303 Hart Building
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Ranking Member Murkowski and Member Joe Manchin:

The undersigned organizations from the recreational fishing, hunting, shooting, and wildlife conservation community would like to bring to your attention our support for S. 2066, the Recreational Fishing and Hunting Heritage Opportunities Act, and our support of your decision to introduce this bill into the Senate.

Legislation such as S. 2066 is essential to recognizing the importance of and facilitating the expansion and enhancement of recreational hunting, fishing, and shooting on Federal lands. If enacted, the Recreational Fishing and Hunting Heritage Opportunities Act will help protect these American traditions by establishing them as important public recreational activities on our national forests and public lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. This legislation will also ensure sound scientific management practices for wildlife and their respective habitats.

The Recreational Fishing and Hunting Heritage Opportunities Act would establish an “open unless closed” policy for hunting, fishing and shooting with certain exceptions such as for national security, public safety, or resource conservation. Otherwise, if closures or restrictions are appropriate or necessary, the public must receive advanced notification and the decision must be based on sound science. This legislation requires that these traditional recreational activities be addressed in land management plans in order to protect public access and to encourage proactive management.

The recreational hunting, fishing, and shooting communities are the foremost financial supporters of sound fish and wildlife management and conservation in the United States. The American System of Conservation Funding relies on the user-pay-public-benefit system and consequently on participation in these activities to generate funding for state conservation agencies across the country. Lack of access to recreational hunting, fishing, and shooting areas is cited as one of the top reasons that people choose not to participate in their sport. It is imperative to conservation efforts that this funding source be continued, so as to promote recreational hunting, fishing, and shooting on Federal public lands.

The Recreational Fishing and Hunting Heritage Opportunities Act resolves similar problems today as Congress did with passage of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, which was enacted by Congress in order to recognize the importance of wildlife-dependent recreation, such as hunting and fishing, on refuge lands. The bill also eliminates duplicative and costly environmental analyses of hunt programs on refuge lands. This legislation ensures that lands with designations such as “wilderness” and “primitive” are considered open to all legal forms of recreational hunting, fishing, and shooting unless there are legitimate reasons to close these lands. In addition, the Recreational Fishing and Hunting Heritage Opportunities Act affirms the original purpose of the Wilderness Act of 1964 which states that the Act is to be “supplemental” to and not a hindrance in facilitating the original or primary purpose(s) for which the Federal land was established.

The enactment of the Recreational Fishing and Hunting Heritage Opportunities Act is essential to the future of recreational hunting, fishing, and shooting on Federal lands and waters. With your support, we can help overcome the obstacles facing sportsmen and women today and further the sportsmen tradition so that it can be handed down for generations to come.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working with you to move this bill out of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee and, ultimately, enact the Recreational Fishing and Hunting Heritage Opportunities Act.

Sincerely,

American Fisheries Society
American Sportfishing Association
Archery Trade Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Boone and Crockett Club
Catch-A-Dream Foundation
Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation
Conservation Force
Delta Waterfowl Foundation
Ducks Unlimited
Masters of Foxhounds Association
National Rifle Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
National Trappers Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
North American Grouse Partnership
Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association

Orion – The Hunter’s Institute
Pope and Young Club
Public Lands Foundation
Pure Fishing
Quality Deer Management Association
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Ruffed Grouse Society
Safari Club International
Texas Wildlife Association
The Wildlife Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation
Partnership
Tread Lightly!
U.S. Sportsmen’s Alliance
Whitetails Unlimited
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute