



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation

DATE: 15 November 2018

TO: U.S. Senate, Committee on Environment and Public Works

RE: Oversight Hearing on Examining Funding Needs for Wildlife Conservation, Recovery, and Management: Recovering America's Wildlife Act (S. 3223), Modernizing the Pittman-Robertson Fund for Tomorrow's Needs Act of 2017 (S. 1613)

FROM: The Wildlife Society
Darren A. Miller, PhD, CWB®
President

Dear Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Carper, and members of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee:

Thank you for holding a hearing today on funding needs for federal, state, and government partners working to implement wildlife conservation, recovery, and management efforts. The Wildlife Society (TWS; www.wildlife.org) appreciates the committee's focus on where and how funds can be most appropriately used to advance effective, on-the-ground conservation work.

The Wildlife Society was founded in 1937 and is a non-profit professional society representing over 15,000 wildlife biologists and managers, dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education. Our mission is to inspire, empower, and enable wildlife professionals to sustain wildlife populations and habitat through science-based management and conservation.

We understand this committee will be discussing elements of several pieces of legislation during today's oversight hearing on *Examining Funding Needs for Wildlife Conservation, Recovery, and Management*. We wish to speak generally on the issue of wildlife conservation and management funding, and specifically to two bills: Recovering America's Wildlife Act (S. 3223) and Modernizing the Pittman-Robertson Fund for Tomorrow's Needs Act of 2017 (S. 1613). Both S. 3223 and S. 1613 would amend portions of the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, known as the Pittman-Robertson Act (16 U.S.C. 669-669k), and would directly affect wildlife restoration funding for state fish and wildlife agencies, adjusting a model that has largely supported much of the wildlife conservation success in the U.S.

Wildlife Conservation, Recovery, and Management Funding

Wildlife conservation funding at the federal level, including grants provided through programs such as the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program, and the Migratory Bird Joint Ventures, provide private cooperators and landowners with needed tools to work in partnership with the federal government on the shared goal of

voluntary, non-regulatory conservation. The Wildlife Society strongly supports the continued reauthorization and adequate funding of these programs.

Funds targeted more directly to partnerships with states, including the ESA's Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund, the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program, and the USGS Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units program, allow states to use actionable science for conserving priority and at-risk species in partnership, and in consultation, with federal actions. The Wildlife Society encourages discussion today on the important work conducted by state agencies through these existing funding mechanisms.

State fish and wildlife agency work is completed in tandem with federal agency programs that manage and conserve fish and wildlife species on our nation's public lands. These programs, which include the BLM's Wildlife and Fisheries program and the USFWS National Wildlife Refuge System, are both chronically underfunded and deserve further exploration by the Committee on their efforts to balance conservation needs of common and at-risk species alongside multiple land-use needs of the American public.

S. 3223 **"Recovering America's Wildlife Act"**

The Wildlife Society strongly supports S. 3223, and requests a **dedicated funding mechanism** is added to the bill text to provide the certainty state fish and wildlife agencies need to confidently implement multi-year projects that will help avoid cost-intensive measures that can also limit conservation options, such as Endangered Species Act listings.

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act would **provide up to \$1.3 billion annually from existing energy and mineral revenues** on federal lands and waters to the front lines of conservation, enabling fish and wildlife professionals in state fish and wildlife agencies to build on their histories of conservation success. With this funding, wildlife professionals in state agencies would be able to implement the proactive, non-regulatory, strategic conservation efforts outlined in their respective State Wildlife Action Plans. States and state conservation partners would provide a 25% non-federal match, which would generate greater third-party engagement in voluntary wildlife conservation efforts. Funds would be apportioned annually to states based on their land area and population.

More than 12,000 Species of Greatest Conservation Need have been identified in the congressionally required State Wildlife Action Plans. These species have been recognized as urgently needing conservation and monitoring action to ensure federal Endangered Species listings are precluded. Investing in conservation efforts now will allow our public trust wildlife to remain abundant and under state jurisdiction, without the need of federal regulations and drastic, expensive efforts to restore their populations. Success stories of species prevented from listing already exist based directly on actions stemming from State Wildlife Action Plans.

We strongly encourage the committee to work towards a markup on this legislation. We further urge the committee to include a dedicated funding mechanism during markup, as exists in the House version of the legislation (H.R. 4647), to provide wildlife professionals with a

stable and predictable funding source to proactively and cost effectively keep common species common for the enjoyment of all Americans.

S. 1613

“Modernizing the Pittman-Robertson Fund for Tomorrow’s Needs Act of 2017”

Aligned with our support for increasing proactive wildlife conservation funding to states, The Wildlife Society **urges the Committee to advance S. 1613 with changes that will retain the focus of Section 4(b) funds for use in science-based wildlife restoration, management and conservation.**

The Wildlife Society endorses the hunter and recreational shooter recruitment and retention efforts supported by S. 1613, including the explicit opening of Section 4(c) and Section 10 Hunter Education accounts for hunter and shooter marketing and recruitment and shooting range development. These provisions would allow substantial amounts of money to states (>\$150 million FY2017) looking to carry out the intended goals of this legislation. States are already using Section 10 funds for some of these activities, and extending the language to include Section 4(c) funds is a commonsense measure that would provide increased funding to help sustain hunting and shooting sports, which generate large amounts of funding for wildlife conservation and restoration activities.

However, during this hearing and during any potential markup of this legislation, we urge the Committee to consider changes that would further empower state fish and wildlife agency directors and their staff to continue implementing science-based management and conservation:

- **Removing language in Sec. 4(a) of this bill that would permit up to 25% of Pittman-Robertson Section 4(b) Wildlife Restoration funds annually to be used for hunter and shooter marketing, recruitment, and shooting range development activities.**
- **Adding language to Sec. 5 of this bill that clarifies the “public relations” activities that would now be permitted as a result of this legislation should be limited to only such efforts specific to the state fish and wildlife agency.**
- Voting the amended bill out of Committee favorably.

Since the passage of the Pittman-Robertson Act in 1937, more than \$17 billion (inflation adjusted) in funds have been allocated to states through this bill, primarily for the conservation and management of all bird and mammal species, regardless of whether or not they are hunted. These funds come from federal excise taxes on firearms, ammunition, bows, and arrows, and are also used for funding state hunter education programs, shooting range enhancement, and multistate conservation grants. Through Section 4(b) and associated state conservation dollars, wildlife professionals have been successful in restoring suites of bird and mammal species, including such iconic species as white-tailed deer, bighorn sheep, and wild turkey as part of state public trust obligations.

Despite this success, all states list numerous bird and mammal species on their lists of Species of Greatest Conservation Need and thus recognize the need to continue efforts to restore and sustain populations of wild birds and mammals for the benefit of the American public. Pressure on state

agencies to use Section 4(b) funds on activities other than on-the-ground wildlife conservation and management could lead to a reduction in science-based wildlife management and research capacity for state wildlife agencies. Based on FY2017 apportionments, this bill could result in more than \$160 million in funding from Section 4(b), funds that are currently used by all state agencies for essential wildlife restoration and management efforts, being made available for hunter and shooter recruitment activities. While state agencies are not likely to direct all of those funds to non-conservation activities, **the changes in this legislation provide an opportunity for external pressures to influence the use of these funds in a manner that does not prioritize wildlife conservation and management needs.**

We share the concerns held among the bill's supporters regarding the decline in the numbers of hunters, and recognize the need to stem that decline and reverse the trend. S. 1613 would make great strides in ensuring continuation of hunting and shooting sports, along with advancing public relation activities that benefit wildlife conservation. The Wildlife Society urges advancement of S. 1613 and the removal of language modifying Section 4(b) Pittman-Roberson funding to continue to provide state wildlife professionals with the only secure funding mechanism for wildlife conservation in the U.S., arguably the most successful system in the world.

The issue of adequate and targeted wildlife conservation funding is of great importance to The Wildlife Society, and we appreciate the Committee dedicating this time to an issue of such priority to our members. Please contact Caroline Murphy, AWB® (cmurphy@wildlife.org; 301-897-9770 x 308), government relations program coordinator at The Wildlife Society, with any questions or comments regarding this testimony.

Sincerely,



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