



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation

Final Position Statement

Firearms

Citizens have owned and used firearms in recreational pursuits such as hunting and target and competitive shooting for many generations. Legal, responsible ownership and use of firearms for hunting and recreational target shooting is thus an enduring tradition, and maintaining this tradition is key to connecting future generations to that heritage. The deep personal interest in wildlife resources by hunters provided the keystone for the development of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

Firearms are essential to hunting, an activity that stimulates the economy of many communities and provides the major source of funding and public support for management of wildlife and their habitat. Hunters and shooters have directly and indirectly financed many major programs in wildlife conservation, benefitting both game and non-game species. The sales of hunting and fishing licenses, stamps, permits, and the U.S. federal excise tax or other taxes on firearms and ammunition paid by the hunting and shooting public has provided the most important continuing funding source for wildlife research and for acquisition and management of public lands for wildlife.

Common sense and equity demand that legal means be used to reduce criminal use of firearms while not reducing ownership and legitimate use of firearms by responsible citizens. Restrictive gun-control measures that discourage ownership of guns by law-abiding citizens for the purposes of hunting and shooting would be counter-productive for wildlife conservation. Such measures would not only curtail significant funding for essential conservation programs, but also reduce lawful and legitimate opportunities for recreational hunting and target shooting.

Firearms are also a necessary tool for wildlife managers, used in controlling some wildlife populations through public hunts, culling operations, and other methods, and in wildlife damage management programs.

The policy of The Wildlife Society in regard to firearms for hunting and recreational target shooting is to:

1. Recognize that the federal excise tax on firearms and ammunition provides important funding for wildlife management and conservation, as do sales of hunting and fishing licenses, stamps, and permits or other taxes.
2. Oppose legislative programs that prohibit or unnecessarily discourage ownership and use of firearms by responsible citizens for purposes related to hunting and target shooting.
3. Encourage development and continuation of educational programs involving firearms safety and legitimate uses of firearms related to hunting and target shooting.

Approved by Council November 2017. Expires October 2022.