



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation

DATE: 15 February 2018

TO: U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Federal Lands

RE: Legislative Hearing on H.R. 4647 – “Recovering America’s Wildlife Act” and H.R. 2591 – “Modernizing the Pittman-Robertson Fund for Tomorrow’s Needs Act of 2017”

FROM: The Wildlife Society
John E. McDonald, Jr., PhD
President

Dear Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Hanabusa, and members of the Subcommittee on Federal Lands:

The Wildlife Society submits this testimony regarding two bills affecting wildlife conservation funding that will be considered during your committee’s February 15, 2018 legislative hearing.

The Wildlife Society was founded in 1937 and is a non-profit professional society representing over 10,000 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 habitats through science-based management and conservation.

Both legislative proposals seek to amend portions of the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, known as the Pittman-Robertson Act (16 U.S.C. 669-669k), and affect funding for state fish and wildlife agencies. The issue of funding for wildlife management, conservation, and research is of primary importance to The Wildlife Society, many of our members work with state fish and wildlife agencies, and we offer these perspectives as you consider this legislation.

The Pittman-Robertson Act was enacted in 1937 and has **provided more than \$15 billion (inflation adjusted) for wildlife restoration and habitat management**. The fund allocates federal excise tax revenues from firearms, ammunition, bows, and arrows to states and territories, and has effectively funded the implementation of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

Through Pittman-Robertson Act funding, wildlife professionals have been successful in restoring suites of bird and mammal species as part of state public trust obligations. Hunters and recreational shooters contribute to this fund through their purchases and have helped recover species such as white-tailed deer, bighorn sheep, wild turkey, waterfowl, and many others through the work of state agencies and their partners. 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.

Concerns regarding H.R. 2591
“Modernizing the Pittman-Robertson Fund for Tomorrow’s Needs Act of 2017”

The Wildlife Society **recognizes and supports the important role hunting and hunters have played in wildlife conservation and management** and endorses the hunter and recreational shooter recruitment and retention effort that is supported by H.R. 2591. However, we urge you to consider removing the portion of the bill that would modify Section 4(b) of the Pittman-Robertson Act and likely hamper existing and future wildlife conservation efforts.

This bill would alter the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act in several ways, but primarily by 1) including the recruitment, retention, and reactivation of hunters and recreational shooters as a purpose of the Act, and 2) allowing funds to be used for the purposes of recruitment and shooting range development, as well as public relations.

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. H.R. 2591 would make great strides in ensuring the continuation of hunting and shooting sports by permitting state agencies to use funds allocated via Pittman-Robertson for the promotion and recruitment of hunters and recreational shooters. This bill will help sustain the hunting and shooting constituency as leaders for wildlife conservation funding in the future.

However, this legislation could also negatively affect the uniquely American conservation success it attempts to support. Specifically, this bill would redirect funds from essential wildlife restoration, management, and conservation efforts in two ways. First, the bill would allow up to 25% of the funds from the Wildlife Restoration Account (Section 4(b)) to be used for marketing, recruitment, and shooting range development. Second, the bill would direct an additional \$5 million to the multistate conservation grant program (Section 11) for the purposes of funding national-level hunter and recreational shooter recruitment efforts.

Redirecting Section 4(b) funds could lead to a broad reduction in science-based wildlife management and research capacity for state wildlife agencies and erode the underlying focus of those agencies—from maintaining their public trust responsibilities to the recruitment of a single constituency. 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.

A substantial amount of funding (>\$150 million FY2017) would be made available for state agency hunter and shooter recruitment efforts via this legislation without the Section 4(b) Wildlife Restoration Account clause through the other provisions that explicitly open up the hunter education accounts (Section 4(c) and Section 10) for these activities. Such levels would represent a substantial increase in the amount of funding available for states and NGO partners for recruitment and shooting range development. Indeed, states already are using Section 10

funds for these activities and extending the language to include Section 4(c) funds is a common-sense measure which would provide increased funding to help sustain hunting and the shooting sports while continuing to fund essential wildlife conservation activities at their current levels.

Support for H.R. 4647
“Recovering America’s Wildlife Act”

Aligned with our concerns regarding wildlife conservation and science funding, **The Wildlife Society strongly supports H.R. 4647**, as it will help ensure funds are available for the full suite of fish and wildlife. We thank Congressman Fortenberry and Congresswoman Dingell for championing this legislation, and as members of the Alliance for America’s Fish and Wildlife we urge the subcommittee to favorably consider this legislation.

Recovering America’s Wildlife Act would **dedicate \$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 more fully implement proactive, non-regulatory, strategic conservation efforts outlined in their State Wildlife Action Plans. States would be required to provide a 25% non-federal match, which would generate greater partnerships and community 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 identified as urgently needing conservation action to ensure they remain off of the federal Endangered Species List. Investing in conservation efforts now will ensure our public trust wildlife remain abundant and under the management of states, without the need of federal regulations and drastic efforts to restore their populations. Success stories of species prevented from listing already exist based directly on actions stemming from the State Wildlife Action Plans.

We strongly encourage the committee to favorably consider this legislation and provide wildlife professionals with a 21st century model of fish and wildlife conservation funding.

Sincerely,



Dr. John E. McDonald, Jr.
President