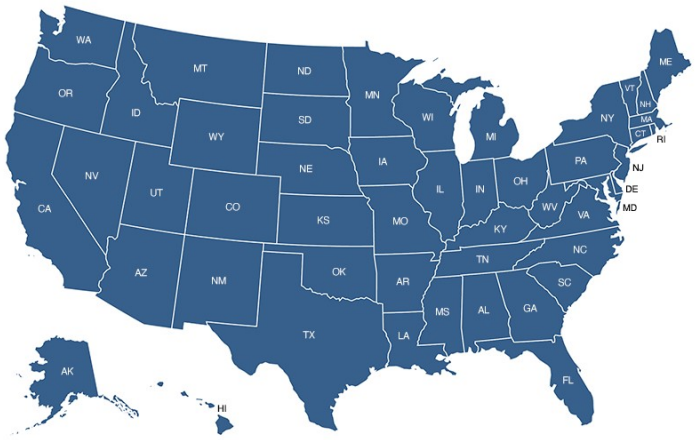
Good morning. My name is Kevin Bixby, executive director of Wildlife for All. I have been a wildlife advocate for more than 30 years in the nonprofit sector.

I'm going to start our panel by explaining how the current system of wildlife management works against authentic wildlife conservation, democracy and coexistence with wild animals, and offer some suggestions on how to change it.

Throughout this presentation when I refer to hunters I am including other consumptive users of wildlife, namely anglers and trappers. And I should say at the outset, that this is not an presentation about hunting per se, but about the politics of wildlife management in which hunting and hunters figure prominently.

The Landscape

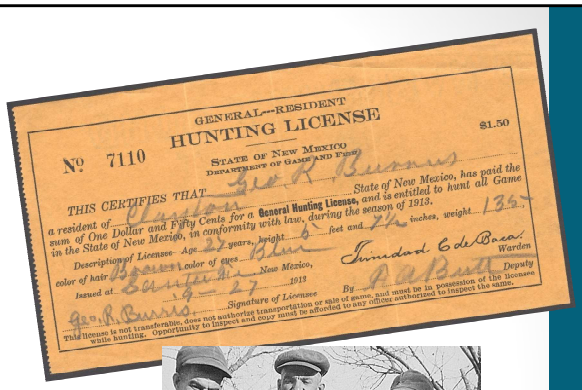


The topic is important because the states are critically important for protecting biodiversity in the U.S.:

- The U.S. is the only nation that does not have a national biodiversity strategy.
- States have primary jurisdiction over most wildlife.
- Each state has its own set of laws, policies and institutions related to wildlife.

The System

- Laws
- Institutions:
  - State agencies
  - State commissions
- Funding:
  - License fees
  - Federal grants (after 1937)


GENERAL—RESIDENT
HUNTING LICENSE
$1.50
No. 7110
STATE OF NEW MEXICO
DEPARTMENT OF GAME AND FISH
THIS CERTIFIES THAT Geo R Burris
a resident of Clayton State of New Mexico, has paid the sum of One Dollar and Fifty Cents for a General Hunting License, and is entitled to hunt all Game in the State of New Mexico, in conformity with law, during the season of 1913.
Description of Licensee Age 27 years, height 6 feet and 2½ inches, weight 135
color of hair Brown color of eyes Blue
Issued at Santa Fe New Mexico, 1913
Geo. R. Burris Signature of Licensee By P A Britt Deputy Warden
This license is not transferable, does not authorize transportation or sale of game, and must be in possession of the licensee while hunting. Opportunity to inspect and copy must be afforded to any officer authorized to inspect the same.

The system of wildlife management that developed is the same in most states:

- State laws were enacted in the late 1800s, early 1900s to protect game species from unregulated killing.
- State wildlife agencies were created in every state to administer the laws.
- Wildlife commissions were established to oversee or advise the agencies. 47 states now have some type of commission.
- Agency funding sources were established.

The problems with this system are the same in every state, more or less:

- A system by hunters, for hunters
- It is out of step with:
  - Current ecological understanding
  - norms of democratic governance
  - public trust principles
  - changing public values

Bottomline: Because the current system of state wildlife management is outdated, entrenched and has been captured by consumptive users, it is a barrier to the type of conservation urgently needed to protect biodiversity in the U.S. in the face of a mass extinction crisis and climate change.

Is the goal conservation?

"The protection, care, management and maintenance of ecosystems, habitats, wildlife species and populations, within or outside of their natural environments, in order to safeguard the natural conditions for their long-term permanence."

--IUCN

An important question has to be asked: what is the main purpose of the current system? Is it biological conservation that probably most of us here think of, including the long-term preservation of native biodiversity, the prevention of extinctions and the recovery of species and ecosystems, along the lines of this definition by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature?

Is that the priority focus of state wildlife agencies which are on the frontline of wildlife conservation in the U.S.?

Or something else?

- enforcing hunting regulations
- administering license sales
- providing hunter safety & education programs
- recruiting more hunters and anglers
- securing access for hunting and fishing
- constructing and operating shooting ranges
- operating fish hatcheries and stocking programs
- reducing predators numbers
- acquiring and managing land
- improving habitat
- conducting research and public education
- protecting non-hunted species
- responding to complaints.

The evidence suggests otherwise.

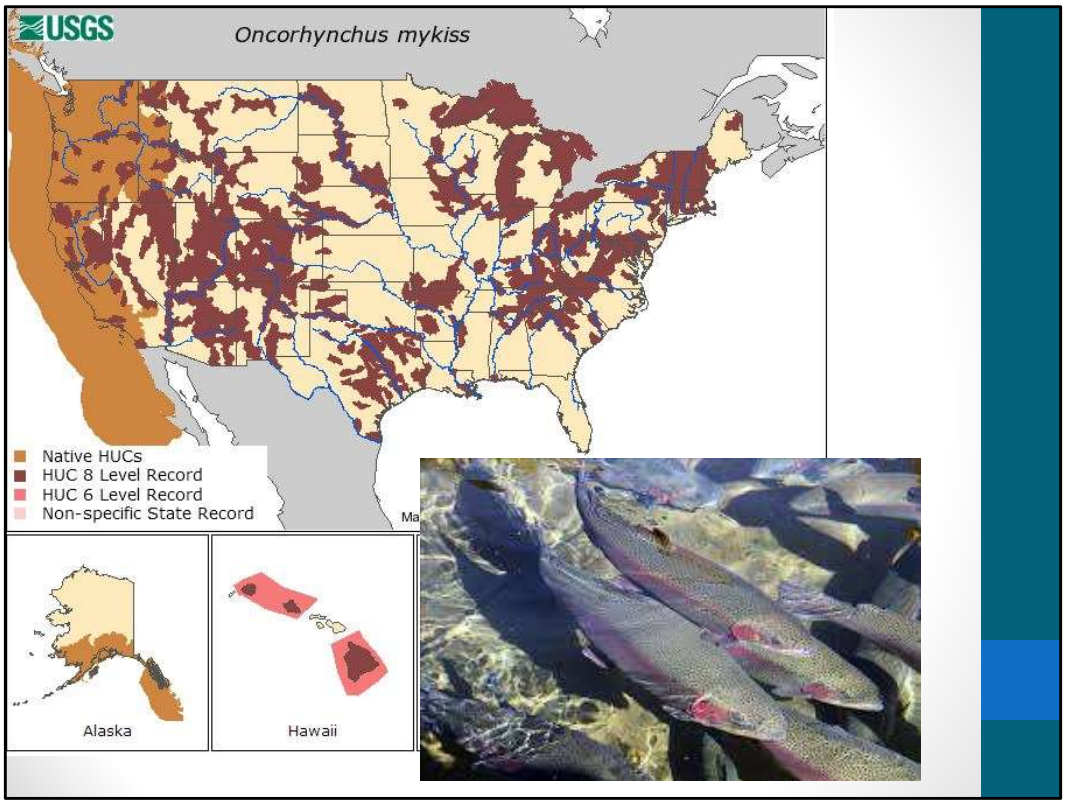
SWAs do a lot of things some of which are listed here.

In my opinion, the items in red could possibly be considered conservation. The others are debatable. Many of these things are cleaerly aimed at managing opportunities for hunting and fishing.

In fact, I would argue that in most states, the main focus of wildlife management is on producing a harvestable surplus of “game” animals under an agricultural model of game management as defined by Aldo Leopold in 1931, not the holistic protection of ecosystems and species that is needed today.

The are many examples of the difference between what SWAs do and authentic conservation but I’d like to highlight a few areas.

The first is that the states are in the business of protecting or raising and stocking non-native species, sometimes in prodigious quantities, even when those species cause harm to native species and ecosystems, simply to provide hunting and fishing opportunities. Here are just a few examples.

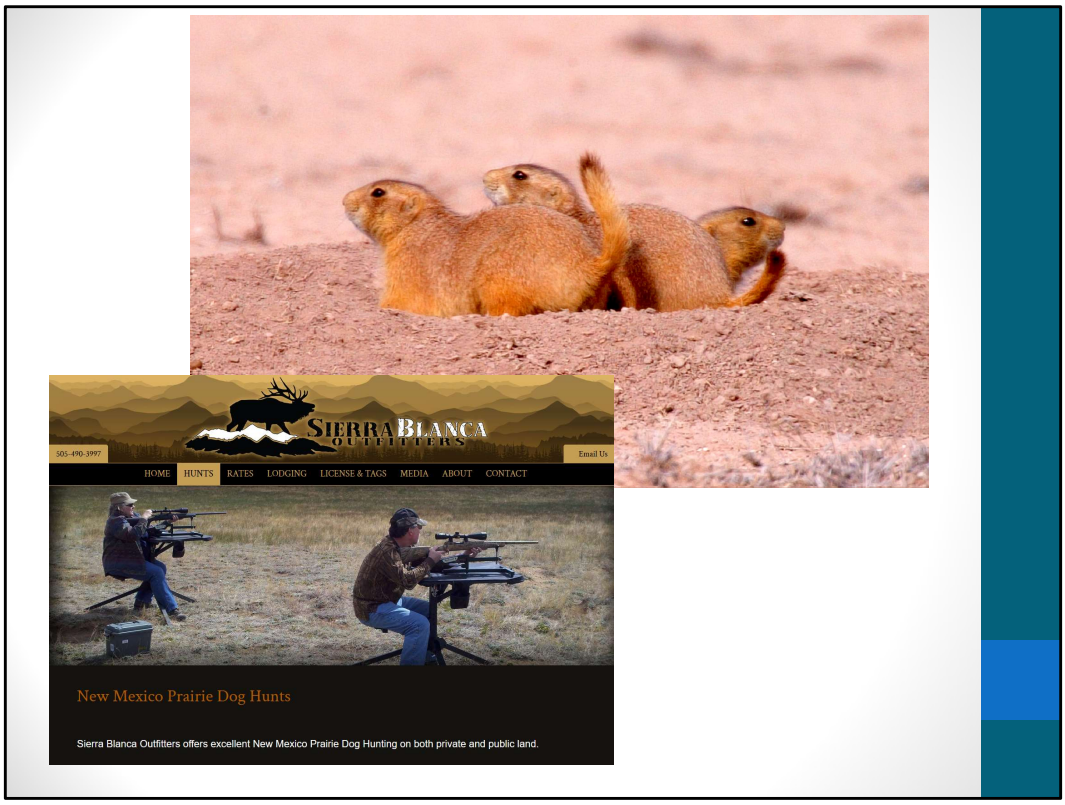


Rainbow trout:

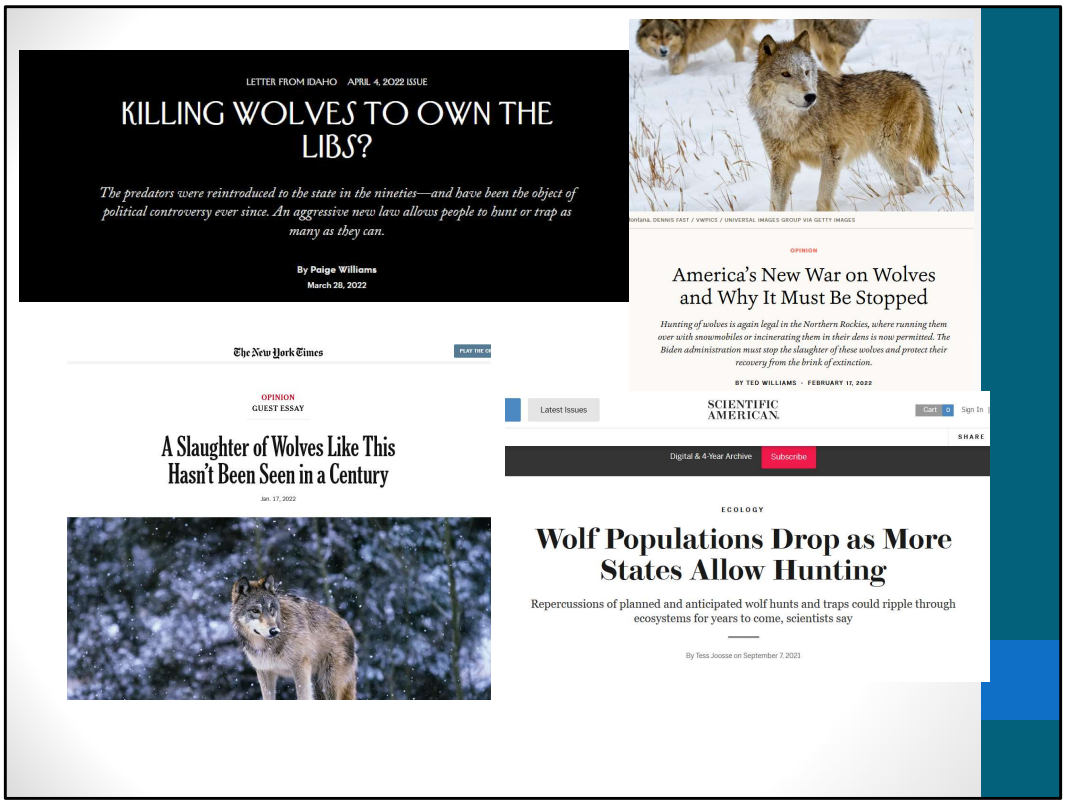
- Native to Pacific coldwater watersheds they've been widely introduced outside their native range.
- On IUCN's list of 100 most invasive species.
- They hybridize, compete or prey on native species.
- Rainbows are big business. Only a handful of states do not stock rainbow trout.
- They don't live long in the wild. One study found that stocked trout don't survive past one week.

- As fun as it might be to catch trout, rearing and stocking millions of nonnative fish that cause ecological damage and live only a matter of days, solely for the benefit of people who buy fishing licenses, can hardly be called conservation.

According to the AFS, 1.75 billion fish are stocked annually in the U.S., many of them nonnative.



Keystone species such as prairie dogs play an exceptionally important role in ecosystems. PDs have been eliminated from much of their range. Instead of focusing on recovery of this important species, as might be a priority for conservation under the IUCN's definition, they are unprotected in many states and allowed to be used for target shooting.



Predators. Given the body of research showing how important top carnivores are to ecosystems, you'd think state wildlife managers would go out of there way to protect and restore them, but the opposite is true.

Where wolves have been delisted and management returned the states, they are allowed to be aggressively hunted and trapped with the goal of reducing their numbers to functional extinction without triggering relisting.

- Wolves: Idaho 90%, bounties; MT, WI
- Mountain lions: NV allows year round hunting.

Because they are unprotected in most states, coyotes are the frequent targets of killing contests like this one called Santa's Slay held around Christmas time in Arizona. Contestants compete for money and prizes to see who can kill the most animals over a given period of time, usually a weekend.

AZ has since banned these killing contests, but they remain legal in 42 states.

Why aren't state wildlife agencies focused on protecting biodiversity?

- Legal
- Cultural
- Political
- Financial

So, why aren't state wildlife agencies the champions of biodiversity we need them to be?

There are multiple reasons:

- Legally:
  - Their mandates in state statutes—their marching orders—are outdated and reflect a utilitarian view of wildlife as resources.
  - In many states, the SWA does not have legal authority to manage all wildlife. NM 60% vertebrates.
- Cultural: Agency staff share views and values with hunters and tend to view them as their primary "customers".
- Politically, hunters and, increasingly, the gun lobby, wield significant influence over wildlife decisions
- Financially, a large portion of SWA revenues have traditionally come from hunters

There is much more detailed information about all this on our website wildlifeforall.us.

Who's in charge?

- U.S. population (2016):
  - Hunters = 5%
  - Anglers = 9%
- 47 state wildlife commissions:
  - ~420 seats total
  - Hunters = >70% (mostly men)

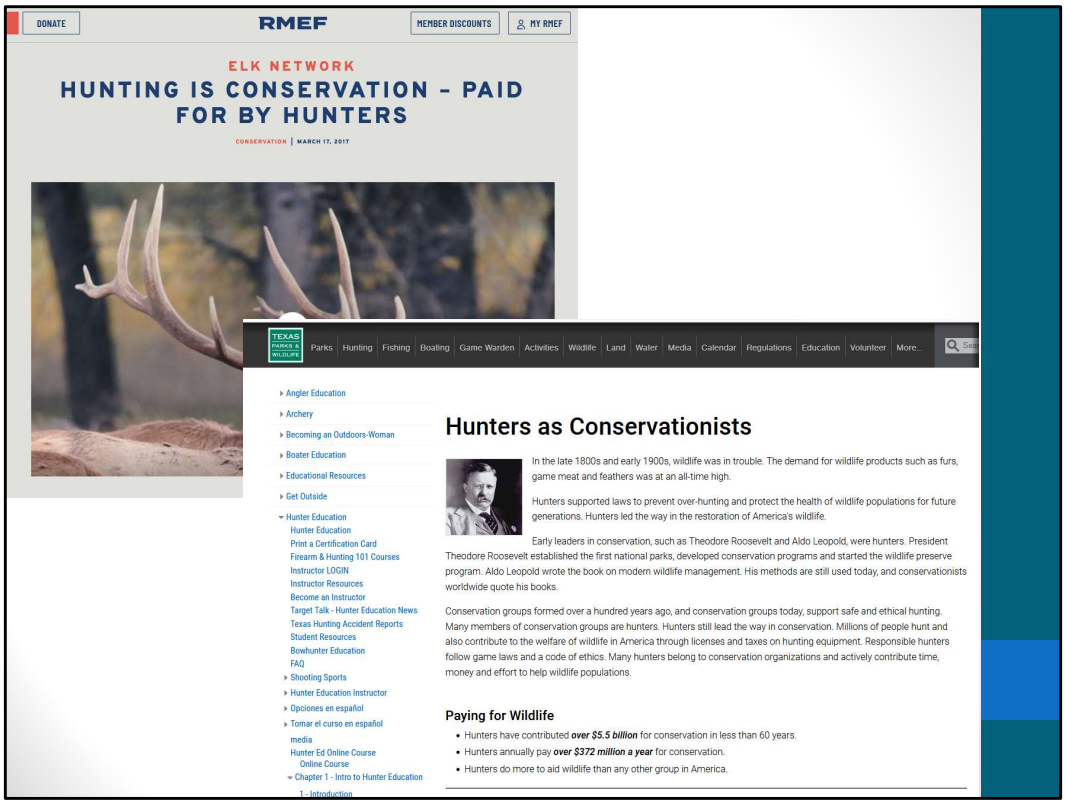
It comes down to power. Who gets to make the decisions, whose interests are represented?

Wildlife decision-making is a bastion of anti-democracy in our society.

Most Americans do not hunt or fish yet are largely excluded from making decisions about wildlife.

47 states have commissions that set policy or advise their SWA. Most wildlife commissioners are volunteers appointed by governors. More than 70% of them self-identify as hunters or anglers. Required qualifications vary by state, but in most states no particular expertise is required. In some cases, you have to be a consumptive user to serve on a commission.

Demographically commissioners like hunters tend to be older white men. Anytime you hear that important policy decisions are being made by older, white men today in America, that should probably raise a red flag.



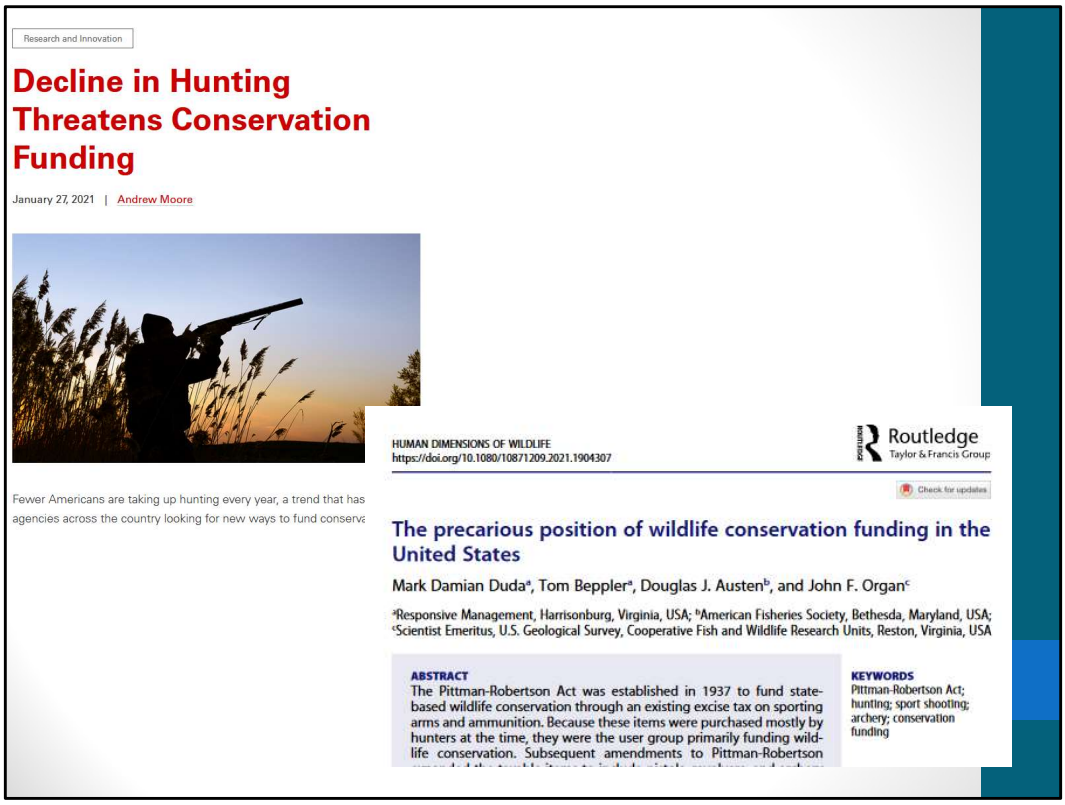
The reason often given about why hunters deserve a privileged position in wildlife matters is that they "pay" for conservation. Sometimes it is even said that hunting IS conservation.

The reason this is said is that hunters have traditionally provided much of the revenue to state wildlife agencies through their purchase of hunting and fishing licenses, and the taxes they pay on certain items under two acts of Congress: Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson.

There are many holes in this argument.

- Ignores non-state conservation programs, e.g. federal public lands 600+ million acres)
- Conflates state agency programs with conservation as I've discussed
- Overstates contribution of hunters and anglers to federal taxes
- Also, why does it matter, if wildlife is a public trust from which we all benefit and should all have a say in? We don't say that only rich people get to send their kids to public schools because they pay more in taxes.

But still, there is a perception that hunters and anglers "pay" more than others for conservation.



Research and Innovation

Decline in Hunting Threatens Conservation Funding

January 27, 2021 | Andrew Moore

Fewer Americans are taking up hunting every year, a trend that has agencies across the country looking for new ways to fund conserva

HUMAN DIMENSIONS OF WILDLIFE
https://doi.org/10.1080/10871209.2021.1904307

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

The precarious position of wildlife conservation funding in the United States

Mark Damian Duda[a], Tom Beppler[a], Douglas J. Austen[b], and John F. Organ[c]

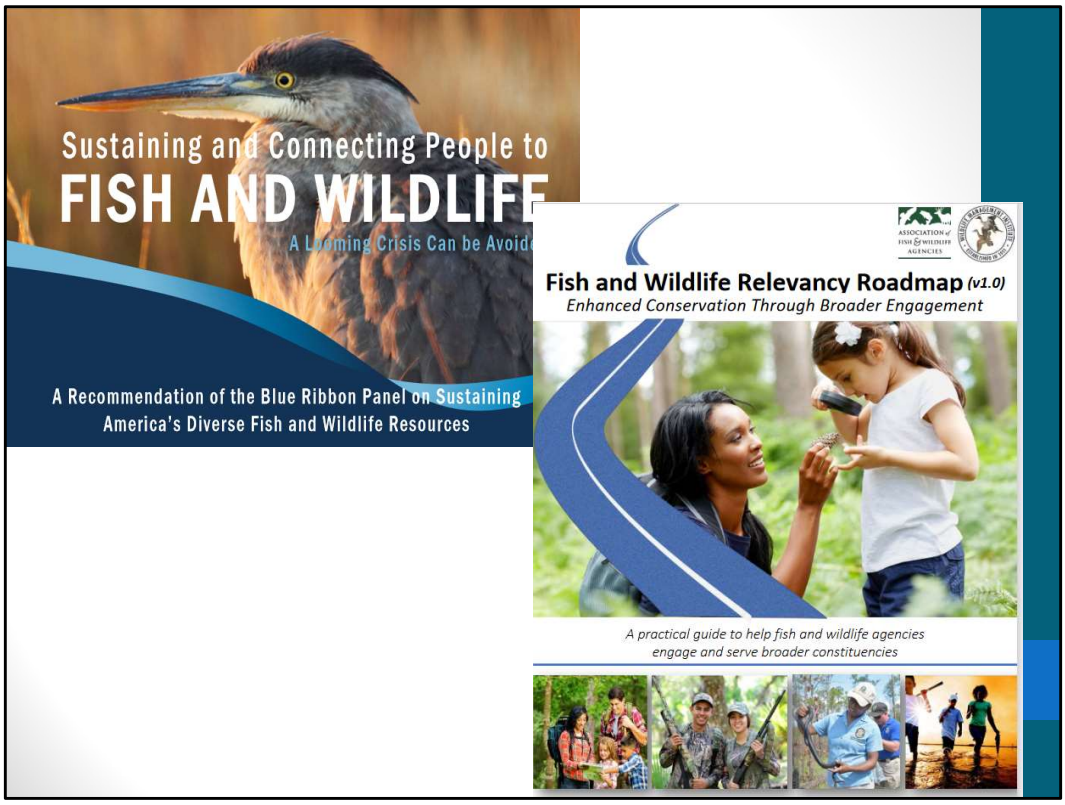
[a]Responsive Management, Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA; [b]American Fisheries Society, Bethesda, Maryland, USA; [c]Scientist Emeritus, U.S. Geological Survey, Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units, Reston, Virginia, USA

ABSTRACT
The Pittman-Robertson Act was established in 1937 to fund state-based wildlife conservation through an existing excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition. Because these items were purchased mostly by hunters at the time, they were the user group primarily funding wild-life conservation. Subsequent amendments to Pittman-Robertson

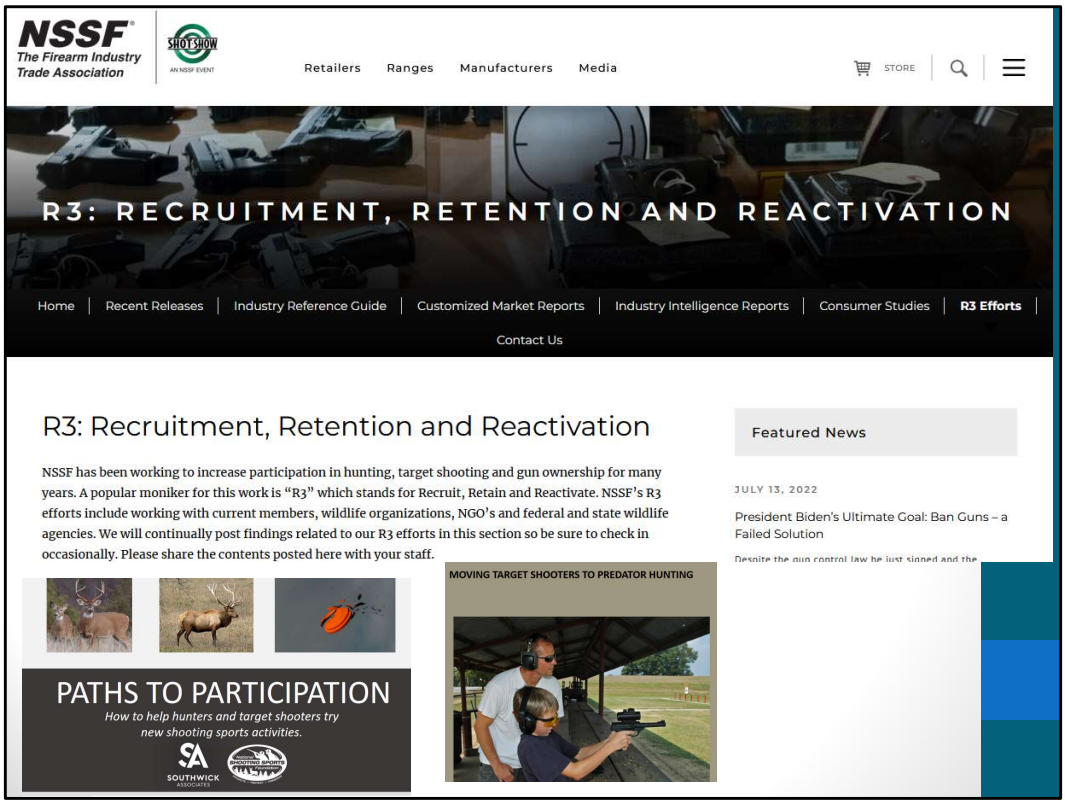
KEYWORDS
Pittman-Robertson Act; hunting; sport shooting; archery; conservation funding

This is the reason that the decline in hunting that has been happening for decades is seen as an existential threat to the status quo.

State wildlife agencies and their allies have responded to this perceived threat in one of two ways.



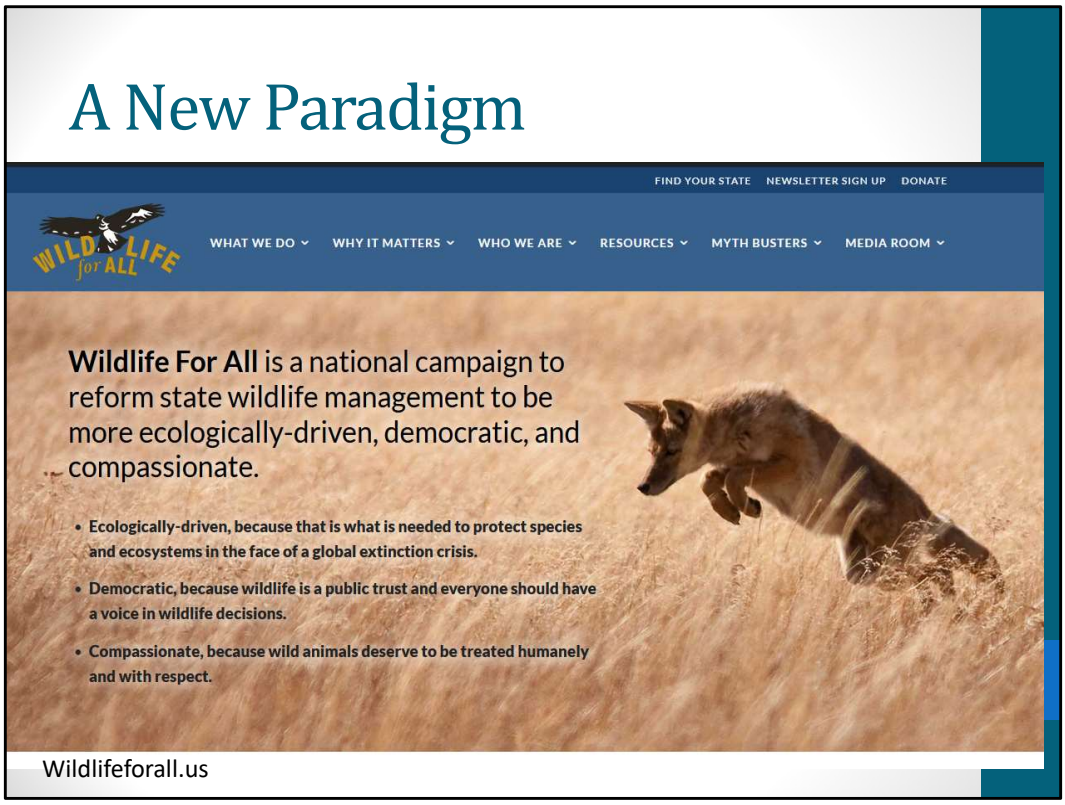
- The first is to Embrace new constituencies and new funding sources. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act currently in Congress would establish significant new funding for the conservation of species that are not hunted, but the money would go to the same state agencies and commissions without any real accountability or requirement to provide for greater public involvement.



The second is to double down on the status quo and recruit more hunters and anglers through so-called R3 efforts: Recruit, retain, reactivate.

In these programs, they have found a solid ally in the gun industry whose influence over wildlife policy has grown steadily with the surge in gun sales over the past 20 years. The National Shooting Sports Foundation has spent millions on R3 efforts like figuring out how to get children who like to target shoot to switch to live targets.

It is unclear which of these directions will prevail, but R3 efforts received a serious boost when Congress amended PR in 2019 to allow for PR funds to be used by states and nonprofits for R3 efforts, which are now defined to include encouraging people to buy guns and take up target shooting.



A growing awareness within the wildlife advocacy community of the entrenched problems with state wildilfe management led to the launcing in 2021of a national campaign to reform state wildlife to be more ecologically-focused, democratic and just. The Wildlife for All coalition now includes 65 orgs in 30 states.

Our policy goals include:

Revising state laws—wildlife mandates and authority-- to align wildlife management with public trust principles, essentially to protect all species for all people.

- Government has duty as trustee to protect the trust for beneficiaries, present and future
- All people, not just hunters = beneficiaries
- All species, not just game spp = trust (and beneficiaries)

Abolish or Reform commissions:

- Abolish commissions
- Or, change state laws that restrict who can serve on commissions
- Establish minimum standards for commissioners
- Ensure that nonhunters are broadly repesented
- Change mindset of governors in making appointments

Establish new funding sources not tied to license or gun sales

- Broad public support
- Refocus agencies on protecting biodiversity
- Redirect Pittman-Robertson $1+ billion annual taxes on guns/ammo to reducing gun violence in the U.S.

Our overarching goal is to change the paradigm of wildlife management in the U.S. before its too late.

Thank you

Kevin Bixby, Executive Director
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