WILDLIFE for ALL

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

CHANGE POLICY. SAVE WILDLIFE.

Unleash your advocacy potential and discover how to reform wildlife management in your state with this comprehensive toolkit.

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN:

How to Identify Key Players • Budget and Policy Analysis
Effective Advocacy • Raising Public Awareness

FOR MORE TIPS AND TO JOIN THE MOVEMENT VISIT WWW.WILDLIFEFORALL.US

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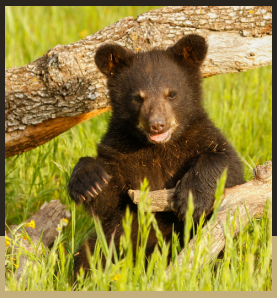


INTRODUCTION

Trapping. Killing contests. Trophy hunting.

All of these are controversial practices, opposed by a majority of the American public. And yet, they are legal in most states. How is that possible? Who, you might wonder, decides these things?

If you're not sure of the answer, you're not alone. Most people don't fully understand how wildlife policy is made in the US, even many experienced wildlife advocates.

Even fewer folks understand that most wildlife controversies are symptoms of an outdated and undemocratic system that itself is the greatest barrier to protecting wildlife and ecosystems.

This toolkit is intended for people like you who care about wild animals, as well as about fairness and democracy.

Maybe you don't think wolves should be hunted for sport. Maybe your heart breaks thinking about animals suffering in traps. Or maybe you can't stay quiet when a small minority of people who don't share your values make decisions for you, and don't seem to care what you think. You might be new to wildlife advocacy, or an old hand who is tired of fighting the same old battles over and over, but you share a desire to take meaningful action to protect wild animals in your state.

What is governance, you ask? We often define it as the formal expression, embodied in laws and regulations, of a society's relationship with the wild animals with whom we share the earth, and wild nature more broadly.

We hope this toolkit will serve individual activists, advocacy groups, coalitions, agency staff and communities as they advocate for a better wildlife management system in the US. We also hope that the information in this toolkit will support commissioners, legislators, and all decision-makers in thinking outside the box of traditional state wildlife management, and re-imagine what a wildlife management system can look like that truly values and benefits future and current generations of wild animals, humans, communities, and all life on earth.

Our goal is to empower you with the information and tools you need to understand how wildlife governance works in the US, and to inspire you to take action on behalf of wildlife and democracy.

CHAPTER ONE

Why It Matters

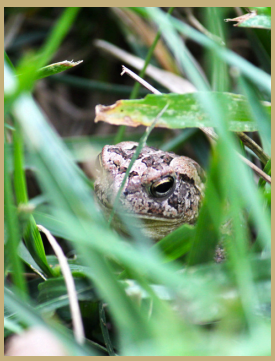
Simply put, wildlife in the US cannot be protected effectively, biodiversity cannot be preserved, and extinctions cannot be prevented until the system of wildlife management in every state is transformed.

As you probably already know, the world's wildlife faces a grim future. The fabric of life is unraveling. Habitats are being destroyed and species are being driven towards extinction:

- Vertebrate populations have declined worldwide by more than two-thirds on average since 1970.
- North America has lost nearly three billion birds over the same period.
- Nearly one-fifth of animal species in the US are currently threatened with extinction.

Bold action is needed to reverse these trends.

In the US, the first line of defense against this "biological annihilation" are state governments, not the federal government. With a few exceptions such as species protected under the federal Endangered Species Act, states have primary jurisdiction over the wildlife within their borders.



And yet...the states are missing in action. Why?

The short answer is because states prioritize the wrong thing. Instead of focusing on protecting all species and ecosystems in the face of a global extinction crisis, they emphasize providing hunting and fishing opportunities for the benefit of "consumptive users" who, in turn, buy the licenses that generate revenue for state wildlife agencies.*

It is an entrenched system that resists change. It is our job as wildlife advocates to change it.

**License sales provide 35% of state wildlife agency revenues, on average.*

CHAPTER TWO

The Problem with State Wildlife Management

In nearly every state, state wildlife policies and institutions reflect their origins from a century or more ago. **The hallmarks of this outdated system are:**

Lack of Legal Protection

State statutes often fail to protect many species, especially insects

Limited Focus

A focus on species and populations, with little regard for the interests and well-being of individual animals or their social groups

Agency $ Tied to Hunting and Fishing

Wildlife agency revenues are often perceived as linked to consumptive uses, even in cases where they're not.

Hostility Towards Carnivores

Ecologically essential carnivores like wolves and coyotes are seen as competitors with hunters for game animals or as threats to livestock

Bias toward Hunters, Trappers, and Anglers

Preference is given to consumptive wildlife users over the broader public and diverse constituents

Politically Appointed Wildlife Commissions

Boards and commissions are stacked with consumptive users and agricultural representatives

Declining Agency Funding

Stagnant or declining agency funding (or at least the threat of it) as the number of hunters and anglers falls relative to the general population

Harvestable Surplus Model

A focus on producing a harvestable surplus of game animals (and sportfish) for consumption by humans under an agricultural model (i.e., animals are treated as "crops"), rather than conserving all species and ecosystems for their intrinsic and ecological values

The fundamental problem is that state wildlife management is stuck in the past, focused more on satisfying hunters and anglers and selling licenses than addressing the extinction crisis. It is rooted in a worldview in which wild animals are seen as soulless resources whose highest purpose is to serve human needs and whims. It is out of touch with changing public attitudes and modern ecological science.

CHAPTER THREE

Solutions

Wildlife for All advocates for a new paradigm in wildlife management that:

- Prioritizes conservation of all species – not just game animals – as part of natural ecosystems
- Is aligned with public trust principles, i.e., the government has a duty to protect wildlife as a public trust for the benefit of all life, including future generations
- Is responsive to the broad public interest in wildlife, not just hunters, anglers, and trappers
- Is considerate and respectful of the interests of individual animals, not just populations and species

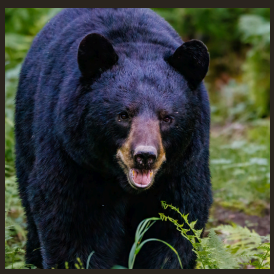
You can read more about our specific policy solutions on our website.

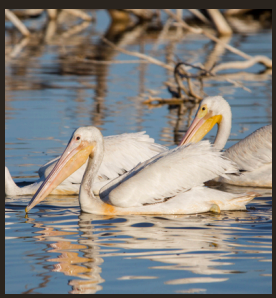
CHAPTER FOUR

The Basics of State Wildlife Management

The details of wildlife management vary by state but **share five common elements**:

1. **Wildlife Categories**
2. **Laws**
3. **Agency**
4. **Commission or Board**
5. **Funding**





Below we detail overviews and patterns among states regarding these elements. (Use the Find Your State feature on the Wildlife for All website to learn more about the specifics in your state.)

State Wildlife Categories

Game Species	These are the relatively small subset of species found in a state that are popular with hunters, such as deer, elk, turkey, and ducks. Subcategories include “big game,” “small game,” “trophy game,” “upland birds,” and “waterfowl.”
Sportfish	These are species like trout and bass that anglers like to catch. They are often raised in massive numbers in hatcheries operated by state wildlife agencies. They include many non-native species, such as rainbow trout (which are not native to most states) and brown trout (not native to North America).
Furbearers	This antiquated term refers to species sought by trappers for their fur, often for commercial sale despite declining demand and prices.
Predators or predatory animals	Animals in this category are defined not by their ecological role but by their perceived threat to human safety, livestock, and game species (e.g., jackrabbits in Wyoming and rodents in Oregon are listed as predators despite being mostly herbivores). Liberalized killing of these species is often allowed with little to no restrictions on where, when, or how they are hunted.
Nongame species	Although generally understood to mean species that are not hunted, in actuality some states (e.g., New Mexico) designate species like coyotes and prairie dogs as nongame, even though they are frequently targeted by hunters.
Threatened and endangered (T&E) species	These include species protected under the federal Endangered Species Act, as well as species included on a state’s T&E list.
Species of greatest conservation need (SGCN)	These are species identified in state wildlife action plans as needing attention for various reasons to prevent them from declining. Generally they are not species that are hunted or fished. You can find every state’s list of SGCN at this website.

It is important to note that the first three categories are named based on their consumptive use value. Species in these categories typically receive the lion's share of agency funding and attention, because they are the species of greatest interest to the people who buy hunting, fishing and trapping licenses. You can learn more abut this process by reading our SWAP Primer article.

State Laws

State laws provide the legal context for wildlife management in a state. They generally specify the types of wildlife to be protected, the entities with authority to manage wildlife, and the process for selecting members of the state wildlife commission/board (if there is one).

Note: a species may be included in more than one category. For example, foxes are considered furbearers and game animals in many states and T&E species are often included in a state’s list of SGCN.

State Laws Continued

Some (but not all) state statutes include a policy declaration that provides a purpose statement or "marching orders" for wildlife management. For example:

> "It is the purpose of this act and the policy of the state of New Mexico to provide an adequate and flexible system for the protection of the game and fish of New Mexico and for their use and development for public recreation and food supply, and to provide for their propagation, planting, protection, regulation and conservation to the extent necessary to provide and maintain an adequate supply of game and fish within the state of New Mexico."

Note that the New Mexican policy declaration, like those in many states, reflects a utilitarian view of wildlife (specifically "game") as a resource for human use, reflecting the time it was written (1921) more than a century ago. There is no reference to wildlife as a public trust. Nor is there mention of the ecological or intrinsic value of wildlife, or other public benefits besides "recreation" and "food supply."

Many state statutes specify the cost of hunting, fishing and trapping licenses. All states long ago enacted laws prohibiting the "diversion" of hunting and fishing license fees away from the state wildlife agency, as a prerequisite for obtaining federal grants under the Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937 and the Dingell-Johnson Act of 1950. (You can find more information about these Acts below, and on our website.)

State Wildlife Agencies (SWA)

Every state has a wildlife agency that is either a standalone entity (e.g., New Mexico Department of Game and Fish) or part of a larger natural resources or environment department (e.g., the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries within the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources). A few states combine management authority over wildlife and parks into a single agency (e.g., Colorado Department of Parks and Wildlife).

Most state wildlife agencies were established in the late 1800s or early 1900s and originally had the word "game" in their names. Over time, most of them replaced "game" with "wildlife" to reflect a broader mission that included species that are not hunted. However, 11 state wildlife agencies still use "game" in their names (Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Idaho, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Wyoming).

State Wildlife Commissions

In most (47) states, a wildlife commission or board (hereafter referred to as a "commission") oversees or advises the state wildlife agency. Commission duties vary by state but include setting wildlife policy, approving the budget for the agency, approving regulations (especially related to hunting and fishing), and hiring the agency's director. In eight states (Alabama, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, North Dakota, South Dakota, West Virginia, New York), the commissions are only advisory. Three states (Minnesota, Connecticut, Rhode Island) do not have wildlife commissions.

Commissions range in size from four to 19 seats, with most being in the 7-11 range. Members are usually appointed by the governor, often requiring confirmation by the state senate.

Required qualifications for committee members vary by state. Examples include: members must be knowledgeable about wildlife matters, reside in different regions or congressional districts, are not all affiliated with the same political party, and/or represent different stakeholders or expertises.

Many states require that at least some commission seats be reserved for license buyers (i.e., hunters, anglers, trappers) and/or agricultural representatives. Some states (e.g., North Dakota, Mississippi) actually prohibit non-consumptive users from serving on their commissions. Even where being a hunter is not required, an inventory of publicly available biographies reveals that at least 70% of all available seats on state wildlife commissions are occupied by consumptive users, reflecting the prevailing view among governors and other elected officials that hunters deserve a greater say than others in wildlife deliberations.

State Wildlife Agency Funding

Funding for state wildlife agencies comes from four main sources: 1) license fees, 2) federal grants, 3) general funds, and 4) other sources. The relative contribution of these sources varies considerably by state.

Traditionally, the sale of hunting and fishing licenses has been the most important source of revenues for state wildlife agencies, followed by federal grants under the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson Acts. These two 60% of state wildlife agency revenues on average.

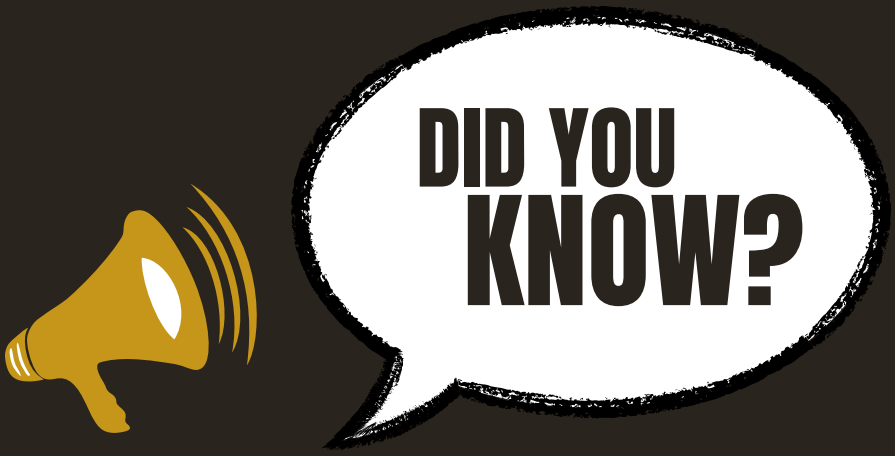
State Wildlife Agency Funding Continued

Many state wildlife agencies do not receive general funds from their legislature and are considered “enterprise” agencies because they rely on the sale of licenses for much of their revenue.

Less than half of state wildlife agencies receive general fund appropriations. Most state wildlife agencies receive at least a small amount of revenue from “other” sources, which vary by state.

These include a smorgasbord of sources, including: wildlife license plate sales, lottery proceeds, speeding ticket fines, income tax checkoffs, real estate transfer taxes, vehicle registration fees, a portion of sales taxes on outdoor equipment, and a portion of general sales taxes. Some refer to this as a “bake sale” approach to funding wildlife conservation.

As the number of hunters and anglers declines relative to the general population, states are looking for new ways to fund their wildlife agencies. The search for new funding sources is also driven by anticipation that Congress might pass the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act, which will flood states with new money for wildlife while requiring a 25 percent match from each state.



Securing a dedicated portion of general sales taxes is the holy grail of wildlife funding because of the large amount of revenues it can generate and the difficulty of diverting the money or rescinding the taxes.

A few states currently have such a “conservation” tax, including Missouri, Arkansas, and Minnesota.

STEP ONE

Get Informed

Now that you know the basics of state wildlife management, the first step towards changing the system in your state is to understand how wildlife decisions are made in your state. Here are some questions to get you started.

(Don't forget: the Find Your State feature on the Wildlife for All website is a good place to start looking for the answers.)

State Wildlife Agency

- What is the name of your SWA?
- Who has power to hire and fire the head of the SWA (e.g., commission, governor)?
  - *This will help you understand to whom the agency director ultimately answers.*

State Wildlife Commission

- Does your state have a wildlife commission or board?
  - *Trick question! The answer is yes, unless you live in Minnesota, Connecticut, or Rhode Island.*
- Does the commission have authority to make regulations (e.g., related to hunting, fishing, trapping, permitting) or is it strictly advisory?
- How many members does the commission have?
- How are they selected?
- What are the requirements to serve on the commission?
- Are commission members protected from removal without cause, or can they be dismissed at any time by the governor?
  - *If the latter, they are unlikely to make any decisions that might be controversial without seeking prior approval from the governor, or else they risk losing their seat. Most governors do not want their appointed wildlife commissioners to cause political problems for them.*
- How often does the commission meet?
- Are meetings streamed online? Are they recorded and available to watch online later? How is public input taken? Is there an option for virtual public comment?
- Who are the current members of the commission? Do any of them stand out as likely to be more receptive to new ideas and input from non-hunters?

TIP:

Only 11 SWAs have not yet replaced the word "game" in their title with the more ecologically-appropriate "wildlife." If yours is one of those holdouts, it's a good sign that your state's wildlife laws and policies need updating too.

NOTE:

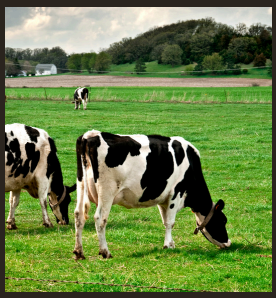
In some states, this entity is known as a "commission" and in other states it is a "board." To make matters more confusing, in some states the SWA itself is called a commission, and the SWA director is called the "commissioner."

HEADS UP:

You can usually read their basic biographies on the commission's website. A Google or Facebook search often turns up additional information that can give you insight into their views. You can also read minutes or watch archives of previous commission meetings to learn how they have voted on wildlife matters in the past.

Local Wildlife Boards:

- Some states have local wildlife boards that play a role in making wildlife policy. Examples include:
  - *In Nevada, every county has a 3-7 member wildlife advisory board appointed by county commissioners. These boards provide recommendations to the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners, including recommended candidates to fill vacancies on the wildlife commission. By statute, members must be hunters, trappers, anglers, or engaged in ranching or farming, except that one seat is saved for a county resident to represent the general public.*
  - *In Wisconsin, voters elect five representatives from each county to the Wisconsin Conservation Congress to advise the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources on wildlife and other matters.*
  - *In New York, elected officials in each county appoint three people to represent sportsmen, landowners, and local government on regional fish and wildlife management advisory boards. The regional boards, in turn, elect three representatives each to the state fish and wildlife management board, which advises the State Department of Environmental Conservation on wildlife matters.*



Statutory mandate and authority:

- Does your state have a policy declaration or mandate regarding wildlife in its statutes (see “State Laws” section above)?
- Does the authority laid out in statute to manage wildlife cover all wildlife species, or just certain taxa listed in statute? Does it include invertebrates? Plants?
  - *Some states lack authority to manage certain types of wildlife. In New Mexico, for example, the legislature has only delegated authority to the Game Commission to manage about 60% of the state’s vertebrates, and virtually none of its invertebrates.*
  - *Answering this question about the scope of authority might entail a deep dive into your state’s statutes. An easier path might be to call up the agency and ask around, but it might take time to find someone who actually knows the correct answer. You can also check this website to see if your SWA is included.*

Agency budget:

It is critically important to understand how your SWA is funded. The more diversified the funding sources, the less dependent the agency will be on the sale of hunting and fishing licenses for its revenues, and the more responsive your commission and agency will probably be to the general public (i.e., non-license buyers) and the legislature, at least in theory.

- What is your SWA's overall annual operating budget?
  - *Agencies also have capital budgets, used to purchase assets such as land and buildings. These are of less interest for our purposes.*
- What are the sources of its revenues by percentages of the following categories?
  - *License sales, permits and fees (all SWAs have this source of funding)*
  - *Federal grants under three main programs administered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, listed in order of importance for most states (all SWAs utilize these funding sources too):*
    - *Wildlife Restoration Program (also known as Pittman-Robertson) grants for mammals and birds*
    - *Sportfish Restoration Program (also known as Dingell-Johnson) grants related to fish that people like to catch*
    - *State Wildlife Grants for species that are generally not hunted or fished*
  - *General fund appropriations (i.e., money appropriated from your state's general fund by the legislature, usually on an annual basis)*
  - *Other sources (e.g., license plate sales, lottery proceeds)*

State Legislature:

Since wildlife management reform usually means getting legislation passed, it is important to become familiar with how your state legislature operates, which committees consider wildlife bills, and who the wildlife champions are. Here are some questions to ask:

- When does it meet? (Click here to see a legislative session calendar for every state.)
- Familiarize yourself with your legislature's website. Learn how to find and track bills. You can often sign up for notifications regarding bill updates. Ballotpedia and LegiScan are also good resources.
  - *Tip: your legislature's website is usually a good place to find your state's laws and regulations also.*
- Which committees usually hear wildlife related bills?
- Are committee hearings and floor sessions streamed online? Is there an option to provide public comments virtually? Are hearings and floor sessions recorded and available for watching later?
- Who are the wildlife champions in the legislature? Many states have an affiliate of the League of Conservation Voters that grades legislators on their environmental voting record. You can find the list of LCV state affiliates here and the voting records and interest group rankings of every state legislator at sites like VoteSmart. Finally, if a legislator belongs to the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators, there's a good chance that they are friends of wildlife.

STEP TWO

Get Organized

The next step towards becoming an effective wildlife advocate is to join forces with individuals and groups who share your concern for wildlife. Whatever policy reform you want to make, your chances of success are better if you're acting as part of a group. There is power in numbers!

Team Up With Others

- The best approach, so you don't have to start from scratch, is to join a group that is already working on wildlife issues in your state.
- If you can't find a group, consider starting one yourself. This can be as simple as gathering a few like-minded people together and giving yourselves a name (e.g., "Iowans for Wildlife Management Reform"). There are additional steps involved if you want to incorporate as a nonprofit organization in your state, and even more steps to obtain tax-exempt status from the IRS. Check the National Council on Nonprofits website for helpful information. Whatever route you choose, the important thing is to demonstrate that there is more than just one of you who cares about wildlife, justice, and democratic decision-making.
- Once you have joined an organization or formed your own, consider creating an alliance with other groups interested in wildlife issues. This could take the form of informally coordinating with other groups on one or more governance reform issues (e.g., a bill to change the composition of your state's wildlife commission), or it could be a more permanent coalition with a formal structure and shared mission. There are advantages and disadvantages of both models. One of the most important benefits of any type of coalition is the opportunity to share information and ideas with each other.

Ideally it would be a group working on governance reform issues (e.g., commission reform, new sources of agency funding) as well as more general wildlife issues.

A good place to start is to ask us at info@wildlifeforall.us. We can tell you if we have coalition partners working in your state.

If you can't find a group, try the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club is a mostly volunteer national organization with some paid staff and chapters in every state that work on environmental issues. The state chapters are divided into local groups, so there's a good chance there's a group near you. You can learn more about Sierra Club chapters and find local groups here.

Set Goals

Now that you are part of a group, it's time to set goals. Systemic reform is by definition huge and long-term, so start with discrete, realistic targets. You probably already have some ideas about what you want to accomplish, but if not, here are the type of wildlife governance reform goals that Wildlife for All supports in every state:

- Democratize decision-making by broadening representation on state wildlife commissions. There are at least two ways to do this:
  - *Influence who the governor appoints to the commission*
  - *Pass legislation to require broader representation on the commission*
- Pass legislation to establish new sources of dedicated funding for your state wildlife agency that are not tied to the sale of hunting and fishing licenses.
- Revise state statutes to explicitly align with public trust principles.

The goals you choose will depend on the unique circumstances in your state. Your chances of passing reform legislation are better, for example, in a state with a blue trifecta (Democratic party control of both legislative chambers and the governor's seat) than they are in a red trifecta state. Regardless, there is usually something that can be accomplished no matter the circumstances.

You can read more about suggested policy reforms on the solutions page of our website.

STEP THREE

Get Active

State Wildlife Commissions

Some states have local wildlife boards that play a role in making wildlife policy. The goal is to actively engage with and influence commission decision-making.

Listed below are some suggested actions to take. Check out the sticky notes to the side as well for some additional suggestions:

- If you can, coordinate with like-minded wildlife advocates and concerned citizens to attend each commission meeting, regardless of the specific issues on the agenda.
- Find out who the commissioners are, what they care about, and if they represent a particular interest group (e.g., agriculture, hunters). Try to figure out if any of them might be allies and ask to meet with them between commission meetings to express your opinions and ask for their guidance.
- If the commission asks audience members to identify themselves, be sure to say you're a state resident and are attending to be a voice for your state's wildlife.
- Take part in the public comment portion of commission meetings. Many state wildlife commissions allow 3-5 minutes for members of the public to speak about non-agenda issues that are important to them, so take this opportunity to be a positive voice for wildlife. Some ideas:
  - *Discuss the rapidly increasing numbers of wildlife watchers and other non-consumptive wildlife users across the US, and how much revenue they bring into your state. The National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation conducted every five years by the US Fish and Wildlife Service is a great source for this type of information.*
  - *Deliver a brief statement on the ecological and personal (to you) importance of wild carnivores in your state, including the most persecuted and underappreciated species like coyotes, foxes, and bobcats. Check out our "Myth Busters: Do Carnivores Need Management?" section for some handy talking points.*
- Don't be afraid to express your values (e.g., "I believe that wildlife killing contests are wrong") because values are fundamental to every wildlife decision although they are not usually acknowledged. And, don't forget, your values are more likely to be aligned with the general public than those of commissioners and agency staff.
- Consider submitting your name to the governor as a candidate for appointment to the commission, if you meet the qualifications in your state. Don't wait for a vacancy to open on the commission. It can't hurt to put your name on the list of potential candidates as early as possible.
- Similarly, consider putting yourself forward for appointment or election to your local wildlife board, if they exist in your state.

Governors

The goals are:

1. to get good candidates appointed to your state wildlife commission (in most states by the governor)
2. to obtain the governor's support for reform legislation

More ideas for what to talk about with commissions and their Commissioners!

Remind commissioners of what the public trust doctrine is, and of their responsibilities as trustees to protect ALL species of wildlife for ALL state residents and visitors, now and in the future.

Discuss the local impacts of climate change and the extinction crisis and ask your commission how they plan to address these challenges.

Ask how the commission and agency are preparing for passage of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, how much matching funds the state will need to provide, where that money will come from, and how many non-game biologists the agency will need to hire.

Ask the commission to commit to more actions to protect species that are endangered, threatened, or imperiled in your state, including species listed as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in your state's wildlife action plan.

MIND map

Ways to Advocate Towards Your Governor

1

Start to gather names of qualified commission candidates who support a reform agenda and are willing to serve. (See our recommended qualifications for the ideal commission candidate here.) Don't wait to start this step. You want to be ready to submit your list of recommended candidates as soon as a vacancy on the commission opens up.

2

Submit those names to the governor for appointment to vacancies on the commission. (This can have more impact if done as a sign-on letter from a number of groups.) Follow up to let the governor know that the issue is important to you, and that the wildlife advocacy community is watching.

3

If you have the opportunity at public events, remind your governor how important it is to you as a voter that qualified people with diverse viewpoints, including non-consumptive users, be appointed to the commission.

4

Most states require that the senate confirms the governor's appointments to the commission. While these are often rubber stamp exercises, if they take place at all, these hearings can provide an opportunity for legislators and the public to raise issues and ask questions related to wildlife governance. If that is the case in your state, ask the wildlife champions in the state senate if they could raise issues and ask questions on your behalf. If they are amenable, provide them with a list of suggested questions. If the appointee is especially bad, urge senators to vote against confirmation.

5

Alert any media contacts you may have in advance about the confirmation hearing if you think there is value in calling public attention either to the discussion, because of the issues raised, or to the appointee's positions.

STEP THREE

Get Active

Legislature

The goal is to enact legislation to establish an ideal wildlife management framework in your state. Here are some suggested actions to take:

- Identify the wildlife champions and allies in your state legislature. Work with them to draft and pass legislation.
- Don't get discouraged if your efforts are not immediately successful. It often takes years to get bills through state legislatures.

Tips for meeting with your legislator or commissioner

- **Scheduling an appointment:**
  - *If you're meeting as a group (recommended), determine available times for all parties before scheduling your meeting.*
  - *Call or email your legislator or commissioner to schedule an appointment.*
  - *If you need to leave a voice message, clearly state your name, phone number or email address, and general availability for when you would like to meet. Be sure to also state that you are a constituent.*
- **During the meeting:**
  - *Be courteous and professional.*
  - *Begin by thanking them for their time or acknowledging something they've done well.*
  - *Be prepared to cover the following in a 1-2 minute speech (see sample script on the next page).*
- **Bring a fact sheet or other resource for the official to review** during and after the meeting.
  - *It is also helpful to send a digital copy in advance of the meeting and in your follow-up thank you email.*
- **Don't be surprised if your legislator doesn't know a lot about your issue** – that's why you are there, to educate them.
  - *If you don't know the answer to a question say, "I don't know the answer to that, but I will find out and get back to you" – and then DO that. Email or call with follow-up information.*
- **Before leaving, ask if you can count on them to take bold action to address our failing wildlife management system.**
  - *See if they will commit to action on the policy on which you are asking for support. If they say they have to leave early, make sure you make this ask of them before they leave.*
  - *Then ask how you can be of help to them (follow up with more information if requested).*
- **Be prepared:**
  - *Practice your statements and questions before the meeting. It's perfectly okay to read from your notes but it is even better to have it memorized and coming from the heart.*
  - *Research your legislator before the meeting. Try to identify their position on the particular policy you will be discussing ahead of time. It is also helpful to learn about their top policy priorities (even outside of the environmental realm) and weave that information into your statements and questions.*
  - *If you are meeting as a group, prepare in advance which talking points each person will be sharing and who will be making the final ask. All attendees should quickly introduce themselves.*
  - *Decide who will be taking notes, leading the meeting, and keeping everyone on time.*
  - *Decide who will schedule the appointment, create and share calendar and/or zoom link, send fact sheets and a meeting confirmation email prior to the meeting, and send fact sheets and a thank you email following the meeting.*

Sample Script

How to Talk to Your Elected Officials at Public Meetings

THEM

Hi, you may present your comment.

My name is _____, and I'm your constituent.

YOU

Give a short 30 second story on how these issues affect you and others in your district

YOU

Go over the talking points you are advocating

YOU

Make a strong ask (ideally a yes or no question)

YOU

CHAPTER FIVE

Raising Public Awareness

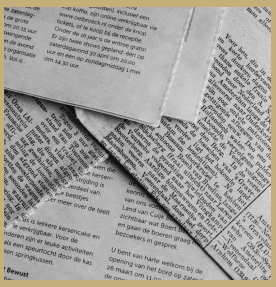
Whatever your wildlife governance reform goals are, raising public awareness will be a vital part of it. Most people, including many wildlife advocates, don't have a clue about how wildlife decisions are made at the state level. That lack of understanding helps to preserve the status quo. Educating the public and policymakers about the need to change the system of wildlife management is essential. Here are some suggestions for doing so.

Write a letter to the editor:

Letters to the editor (LTEs) are an important tool for influencing public opinion; the letters section is typically the most widely read section of the newspaper. Lawmakers frequently read the opinion section to gauge the interest of their constituents on a variety of matters. The more letters submitted to the same publication that express similar viewpoints, the greater the likelihood that one or more letters will be published, so encourage others to write as well. It can also help shape news coverage if editors recognize an issue is important to readers.

Here are some tips for writing an LTE:

- Keep it short and direct. The average letter to the editor is only about five or six sentences (250 words or less).
- Clearly state your main point (e.g., wildlife is a public trust, all species are important not just game animals) in the beginning of the letter.
- Make it personal. Editors prefer letters that are authentic and personalized.
- If you're responding to a published piece in the newspaper, make that clear with a reference to that article in your first sentence.
- Be authoritative and stick to facts and personal experiences. Mention your expertise where applicable. You'll find plenty of supporting information for your argument on the Wildlife for All website, particularly in the Mythbusters section.
- End with a call to action. Let readers know how to get involved or learn more, and then conclude with a bold, final statement of your case.
- Follow the word limits and instructions found on a newspaper's website. It's best not to submit the same piece to multiple papers. If your first choice doesn't run it, send it to the next paper on your list.



Submit an opinion piece:

Opinion editorial pieces (commonly known as "op-eds") are similar to letters, but are longer and provide more context regarding a particular issue. While letters to the editor may be around 250 words or fewer, op-eds may be 500 to 800 words. Media outlets are more likely to publish op-eds written by individuals who have authority on a particular issue or are seen as a leader in their community.

Here are some tips for writing effective op-eds:

- Outline your stake in the issue—are you a wildlife watcher, veterinarian, wildlife rehabilitator, photographer, hunter, concerned about the loss of biodiversity, a big fan of democracy? Say so!
- State your main point clearly in the beginning of the piece. As they say in journalism: "don't bury the lede."
- Don't forget to include a call to action, i.e., what you want readers to do after reading your op-ed.
- Use plain language. Speak to your reader in straight talk.
- Respect your reader. Never underestimate your reader's intelligence, or overestimate their level of information.

You can find more guidance on writing op-eds at the Op-Ed Project's website.

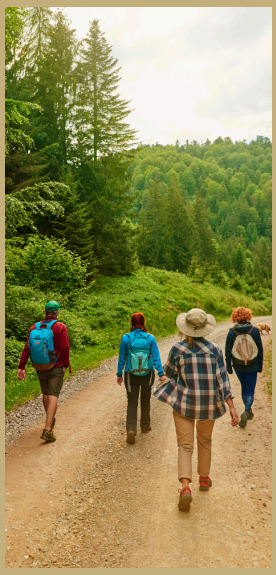
Spread the word on social media:

Social media is a great way to raise awareness. Chances are you already have a personal account on at least one social media platform. Wildlife for All constantly shares informative posts on a daily basis on several platforms. Reshare those posts with your networks. We are also in the process of creating shareable social media graphics that will be available on our website. In the meantime, check out this website for more information about how to use social media effectively for advocacy.

CHAPTER SIX

Messaging and Talking Points

We've included below some messaging and talking points that you can use when communicating about wildlife governance issues. Check out the myth busters section of our website for more messaging tips, including a guide to wildlife management jargon and euphemisms.



- Wildlife is a public trust. All species matter. Everyone deserves a voice in wildlife matters.
- State wildlife management is an outdated system that is out of step with modern science, public trust principles, norms of democratic governance, and changing public values.
- While there is some overlap, state wildlife management is not the same as wildlife conservation. The former currently prioritizes serving license buyers, while the latter focuses on protecting all species as part of ecosystems.
- Wild animals don't always need to be managed. In fact, carnivores like wolves, coyotes, and cougars regulate their own numbers. Hunting can increase conflict and disrupt the social behaviors that allow them to self-regulate.
- Wildlife decisions should be informed by science, but values are important too.
- Wildlife decisions should be made democratically.
- The well-being of individual animals should be considered, not just populations and species.
- There is a growing body of research revealing the intelligence, emotions, and rich social lives of wild animals.

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation has been a success in bringing back some species from near extinction, but these are mostly game animals that hunters are interested in, such as deer and turkey. At the same time, many more species have declined, which is why there are currently more than 1300 federal T&E species, and more than 15,000 species of greatest conservation need.

Talking to People with Entrenched Mindsets

It's not easy to break through when someone holds tightly to a fixed way of thinking. But the goal isn't always to change minds. Sometimes, it's just to open them. Here's how to communicate effectively with those who see the world differently.

Here are some tips on how to be heard—even when you can't change someone's worldview:

Lead with storytelling: Start with relatable stories instead of stats or data. Stories are less confrontational and make complex topics easier to connect with emotionally.

Highlight shared values: Reinforce common goals or concerns, framing your message around what everyone cares about, like fair processes or having wildlife around for future generations.

Pose open-ended questions: Encourage reflection without pressing for agreement. Ask value-based questions that gently guide them to consider alternative perspectives.

Use a calm tone: Maybe the hardest one, but maintain composure and don't get defensive, even if challenged. This sets a respectful tone that people respond better to and keeps listeners engaged – and prevents them from dismissing us as "emotional," which the opposition loves to do.

Challenge underlying assumptions: In your comment, try to "flip the script" and upend the existing thinking. Offer an alternative way to view the issue. (A good example of this is our post here: __ Examine the values and assumptions underlying these narratives and identify gaps or contradictions that help make your case.

Don’t Give Up!

State wildlife management is an entrenched system that has been around for more than a century. Under the status quo, some interests–consumptive users, the hunting and gun industries– enjoy privilege and power, and they don’t want to share it. As Frederick Douglass said, “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”

State wildlife management is in many ways a good old boy club, rife with machismo and sexism. Hunters, commissioners and agency staff all tend to be older, while men, with a traditionalist view of wildlife. Commission meetings, especially, can be intimidating. As an advocate for change, you will inevitably be labeled (especially if you are female) as “emotional,” “anti-hunting” (regardless of your actual views on hunting), and “anti-science.”

Don’t be deterred. Don’t forget that your voice counts as much as anyone’s.

You speak for the growing number of Americans who share the view that ALL wild animals have intrinsic and ecological worth, and deserve to be treated with respect and compassion. And most importantly, you speak for the animals.