

Hunting and Shooting Sports Fund Wildlife Conservation

By EARL HOWER,
Director of Chapter Relations

Hunting in America is more than a hobby or family pastime. It's a critical part of conservation efforts—in dollars and cents and the people working to conserve our country's natural resources.

Combating decades of decline

The bountiful wildlife that sustained generations of Americans was driven to near extinction by the early 1900s. The slaughter of bison across the West and the disappearance of the passenger pigeon are well known. But the problem was much broader.

Hunting at that time was largely unregulated. Bird populations were decimated to supply feathers for hats, and many species of wildlife, including white-tailed deer, were hunted nearly out of existence.

Habitat across much of the country was clear-cut, mined, or otherwise degraded in America's rush into the industrial age.

In response, hunters and anglers—including President Theodore Roosevelt and *Forest & Stream* editor George Bird Grinnell—led efforts to restore wildlife, manage game based on sound science and conserve lands and waters that provide essential



Generous funding for state fish and wildlife agencies stems from a tax on hunting gear, including guns, ammunition and archery equipment.

habitat for fish and wildlife. Hunters devised a “user pay” system through which taxes, licenses and other fees would fund conservation. Their investment over many decades revived wildlife populations across the country—including wild turkeys, wood ducks and white-tailed deer—and protected millions of acres of land that is open today for public recreation.

Hunters provide essential conservation funding

Up to 75 percent of fish and wildlife agencies' budgets are funded by hunters, anglers and shooting sports enthusiasts. These investments provide incredible benefits to all Americans.

The most significant sources of conservation funding include:

Excise taxes: Under the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937 (also called the Pittman-Robertson Act), the federal government assesses excise taxes on rifles, shotguns, handguns, ammunition, bows, arrows and certain archery equipment. This law was backed by the Izaak Walton League, hunters and other conservation groups. The tax revenue from Pittman-Robertson is used to reimburse states for a wide range of conservation activities, including acquiring and improving habitat, reintroducing wildlife into historic ranges, wildlife-related research and hunter education.

Today, funds may also be used to build and renovate public target shooting range facilities, as well as to help recruit, retain and reactivate new hunters and shooting sports enthusiasts.

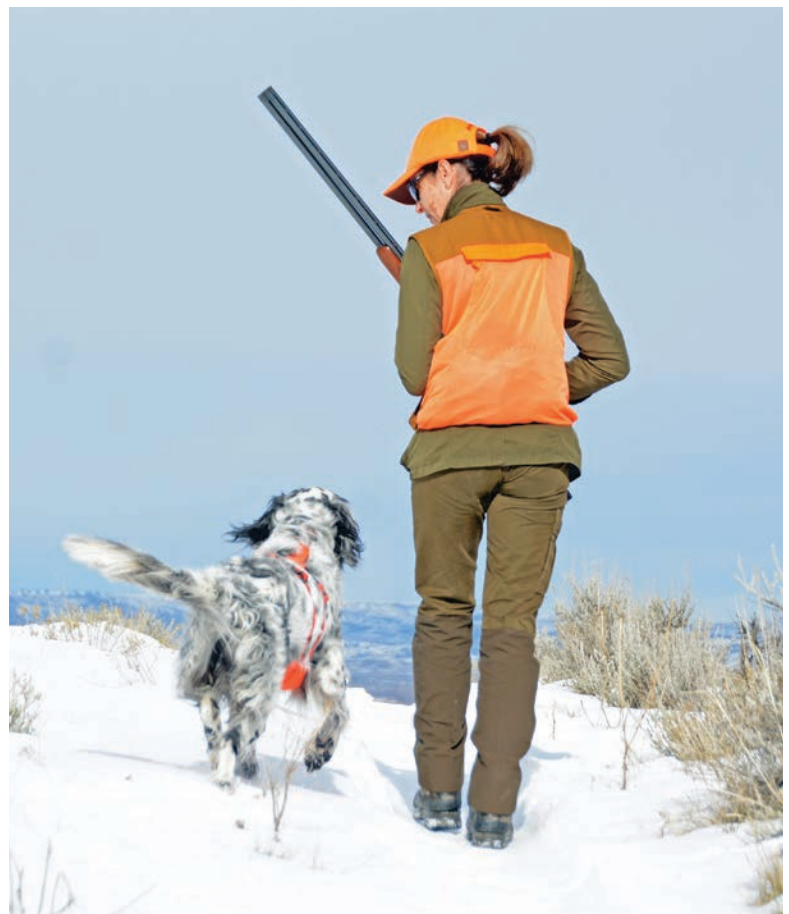
Between 1939 and 2023, excise taxes paid on firearms, ammunition and archery gear generated \$15 billion for wildlife restoration and habitat conservation.

Duck Stamps: Every year, migratory waterfowl hunters 16 years and older must purchase a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp—known as a “Duck Stamp.” Other wildlife enthusiasts can also purchase these stamps, which are both collectors' items and useful for the access they provide to national wildlife refuges.

Revenue from the sale of Duck Stamps is allocated to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to purchase or lease wetlands and other waterfowl



Revenue from the Duck Stamp has helped preserve six million acres of waterfowl habitat in the U.S. and spur competition among artists who want to see their art on a stamp.



Hunter-generated revenue promotes habitat for all wildlife, not just game species.

UFWS; JACK BALLARD



Shooting sports and target shooting contribute a large portion of the tax revenue that supports fish and wildlife agencies.

habitat for inclusion in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Since 1934, sales of these stamps have generated more than \$1.1 billion, which has been used to buy or lease more than six million acres of waterfowl habitat.

Hunting licenses: In general, hunters are required to purchase one or more licenses each year, depending on what animals they hunt. For example, some states require one license to hunt deer and another for upland game birds such as grouse. Nationwide, recent annual sales of hunting licenses and related tags, permits and stamps—both resident and non-resident combined—exceed slightly over \$1 billion. Along with excise taxes, hunting license revenue is a major source of funding for state fish and wildlife management agencies.

Conservation investments provide benefits for all Americans

People protect the things they value. For hunters, anglers and other people who enjoy the outdoors, that includes our natural resources. In addition to funding state fish and wildlife agencies, they contribute their own time, talent and hard-earned dollars to on-the-ground conservation. All of these conservation efforts benefit Americans across the country—whether or not they hunt or fish.

Open land for public recreation:

Land and waters purchased by state and federal governments are generally open to the public—and these purchases are made possible, in part, by taxes and fees paid by hunters and anglers. Americans who enjoy bird watching have incredible opportunities



Since 1934, sales of Duck Stamps have generated more than \$1.1 billion that has been used to buy or lease more than six million acres of waterfowl habitat.

to pursue their passion across millions of acres of National Wildlife Refuges. Hikers, campers and cross-country skiers share state lands with hunters.

Habitat improvements that support all wildlife:

Habitat that is conserved through funding generated by hunters and recreational shooters directly supports and benefits all wildlife—not just species that are hunted. Imperiled songbirds benefit from intact forests, amphibians and turtles thrive in wetlands and public land provides migratory corridors for a variety of wildlife.

Clean water, flood control and other public benefits:

Public lands also provide benefits to citizens in nearby communities and across the country.

Between 1939 and 2023, excise taxes paid on firearms, ammunition and archery gear generated \$15 billion for wildlife restoration and habitat conservation.

Undeveloped forests are critical sources of clean water that flows into our streams and reservoirs and ultimately our homes. Wetlands absorb flood waters and help recharge groundwater supplies that feed drinking wells of millions of Americans.

Get involved

Americans who enjoy hunting and shooting sports fund critical conservation efforts that simply could not be accomplished without the taxes and fees paid at the local, state and national levels.

The Izaak Walton League and our members proudly support these conservation efforts and encourage all Americans to enjoy our great outdoors and get involved in conserving natural resources for future generations.