

# Secure Permanent and Dedicated Conservation Funding from Public and Private Sources

Since Theodore Roosevelt made conservation a national priority, it has been a core purpose of the federal government along with national defense, justice, property rights, and infrastructure for interstate commerce. However, federal funding for natural resources and the environment, known as Function 300 in the budget, has been cut in half since the 1970s and is now less than one percent of overall federal discretionary spending. In addition, pass-through funds from federal excise taxes paid by hunters, recreational shooters, and anglers no longer meet state fish and wildlife agencies' growing costs of conserving species in need. Ensuring robust and consistent funding for conservation is the top priority for sportsmen's organizations.

## Priority Programs for Funding

Throughout this report, programs and priorities are referenced that will require federal funding for implementation. The following is a compilation of the top funding priorities and reference to the recommendation where more details can be found.

- **Recommendation 2:** Fund development of modern access data tools for federal lands.
- **Recommendation 3:** Establish a permanent program based on DOI Secretarial Order 3362, with assigned staff and adequate funding for research and implementation by federal and state agencies.
- **Recommendation 4:** Direct a portion of federal revenue from energy development on federal lands and waters to federal and state agencies to mitigate the losses of fish, wildlife, and their habitat from energy development.
- **Recommendation 5:** Fully fund and implement conservation programs authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill and encourage landowner participation in CRP, ACEP, EQIP, and other programs.
- **Recommendation 6:** Increase the U.S. Forest Service budget subaccounts supporting active management programs sufficiently to address the 80 million acres of national forest in need of restoration.
- **Recommendation 7:** Increase funding to recover listed species and improve implementation of the ESA by state and federal agencies.
- **Recommendation 8:** Appropriate \$50 million annually to support state efforts to manage, monitor, and prevent CWD and studies of disease management actions, improved detection, impacts of CWD on hunters and wildlife enthusiasts, and pathways of CWD transmission.
- **Recommendation 9:** Accelerate the pace of forest conservation in the U.S. Forest Service budget and with tax incentives for reforestation of private lands and marketing of wood products.
- **Recommendation 10:** Enhance opportunities and access for hunting and recreational shooting on federal lands through budget requests and appropriations that support this objective.

## Protect Existing Dedicated Funding

- **Exempt the Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Funds from mandatory spending accounts that are subject to budget sequestration. Congress**

Erosion of discretionary spending is limiting federal land and state wildlife managers' ability to address threats of land conversion, climate change, and invasive species. As funding levels have decreased, these threats have increased. Even funds collected from hunters and anglers through

self-imposed excise taxes are being withheld by a 2 percent sequestration cut imposed on the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson/Wallop-Breaux funds. These shortfalls are leaving declining habitats and species populations to worsen, potentially beyond hope of restoration.



## Attract Private Investment in Conservation

- Issue a regulation under the *Endangered Species Act* (similar to the 2008 rule under the *Clean Water Act*) to formalize accountable, enforceable, and transparent standards and mechanisms for offsetting habitat losses with gains that result in recovery of wildlife species. Interior/FWS

The private sector is a growing source of conservation funding. Properly designed and enforced, mitigation banks, water banking, green bonds, and other innovative mitigation strategies are offsetting the quantity and functional quality of lost habitat. It works as investors complete conservation projects for which they are later reimbursed by developers. In exchange, developers seeking approvals under the *Clean Water Act* and portions of the *Endangered Species Act* get faster decisions. These policies need more predictable, accountable standards to increase participation. The resulting investment opportunities leverage federal and state dollars with private money.



## Enact New Conservation Funding Priorities

- Enact the *Great American Outdoors Act* and the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* to restore wildlife habitat, fix recreational infrastructure, and expand access to America's outdoor heritage. Congress

The *Great American Outdoors Act* (S.3422) is a bipartisan proposal to secure full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and solve the problem of maintenance backlogs on federal lands. The LWCF is an existing program that conserves important habitat for fish and wildlife while expanding public recreational access; it was permanently reauthorized in 2019 but funding was not made permanent in its reauthorization. At the same time, federal land management agencies have ever increasing “deferred maintenance” needs—the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has identified a backlog of over \$5 billion and the Department of the Interior's (DOI) agencies have a backlog of more than \$16 billion. The *Great American Outdoors Act* would dedicate \$9.5 billion over five years for the maintenance backlog on DOI

lands as well as on USFS lands and would permanently fund LWCF at its authorized level of \$900 million per year.

The *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* (RAWA, H.R.3742) is another bipartisan proposal that would dedicate \$1.4 billion every year for state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies. This would allow the agencies to proactively manage at-risk species before they decline to the point of being listed under the *Endangered Species Act*, when recovery efforts are lengthier and far more expensive. The proposed RAWA funding would complement the contributions made by hunters and anglers but would not affect or replace those programs.

