

# Securing a New Model for Non-game Wildlife Conservation Funding



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Division of Habitat and Species Conservation  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Version 1

This presentation gives an overview and update on a recent ongoing national effort to create a funding system for non-game wildlife conservation— *The Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish & Wildlife Resources*.

This item is being presented for informational purposes and any discussion or direction that the Commission may have.

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## A Success Story

- Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program (WSFR)
  - 1937 Wildlife Restoration Act (Pittman-Robertson)
  - 1950 Sport Fish Restoration Act (Dingell-Johnson)
- Secure, Predictable, and Dedicated Funding

*The Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program (WSFR) is one of this nation's most successful conservation programs*



PRESS RELEASE

**Service Distributes \$1.1 Billion to State Wildlife Agencies to Support Conservation, Outdoor Recreation, and Job Creation**

March 7, 2016

In late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many wildlife were in steep decline or on the brink of extinction. Elk, bison, bighorn sheep, black bears—even whitetail deer—had all but disappeared across the country. Amid the great depression, dust bowl, and uncontrolled harvest/hunting, sportsman and conservationists convened to address these challenges.

The resulting legislation in 1937, and subsequently in 1950, shifted the way our nation funded conservation and is a part of the North American Wildlife Conservation Model. The Wildlife Restoration Act puts an excise tax on firearms, ammunition and archery equipment, while the Sport Fish Restoration Act collects an excise tax on fishing and boating equipment. The money is collected nationally and redistributed to state fish and wildlife agencies through a formula. This is a very basic overview of these two acts, which are more complex than presented here, and have been amended and altered over time since their inception.

The user-pay systems for hunters and anglers that provide funding for natural resource management have been a tremendous conservation success story for North America. They provide the gold standard of secure, predictable and dedicated funding through a federal/ state partnership. In 2016 they will provide over \$1.1 billion across the nation.

## The System is Incomplete

- Species in the funding gap are commonly referred to as non-game
- These species are under state management jurisdiction but have no comparable funding mechanism
- Existing funding is still insufficient
- Many are on a fast track for endangered species listing at the federal level



While the user-pay system for wildlife conservation is a resounding success, it is incomplete. Visualize a simple funding spectrum where secure populations of hunted and fish species are on one end, and highly endangered animals are on the other. The space between those two ends is what we commonly refer to as the wildlife “funding gap”.

There are thousands of species under state management jurisdiction that are not hunted or fished (non-game) that have no comparable sustainable and predictable dedicated funding source in place to support their conservation. State Agencies across the nation are doing their best to keep these populations healthy and stable, thereby avoiding costly listing at the federal level.

While state funding for non-game animals does exist, it not sufficient to meet state agency needs, and funding mechanisms for nongame wildlife is inconsistent between states.

## An Unmet Challenge

- Traditional (hunter/ angler) user-pay systems are stressed beyond their intent
  - Other users are enjoying benefits
- The responsibilities of state Fish and Wildlife Agencies have evolved
- An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure
- Economic and social engines
- Wildlife for future generations and public trust



While the traditional user-pay system continues to do a tremendous job, they were never intended to support the full array of wildlife. With increasing threats and new challenges, state wildlife agencies are having to allocate resources way beyond traditional means envisioned from the early and mid 1900's.

There are many users who enjoy the benefits of the user-pay system, but do not participate in hunting and fishing activities. Wildlife viewing and recreational activities are gaining in popularity- think mountain biking, camping, paddle sports, bird watching, hiking and geocaching as a few examples. Our environment and natural resources are tightly linked to our economic and social well being, especially in Florida with our beautiful coastline and bountiful outdoor activities. Many of these non-traditional users want to be able to contribute!

Our current funding gap leaves state agencies with unmet needs. Closing the gap is a cost-effective use of taxpayer dollars and supports early, preventive wildlife conservation efforts. Waiting until a species ends up on the endangered species list requires costly recovery efforts- an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Perhaps the greatest need of all goes back to the North American Model which states natural resources and wildlife on public lands are managed by government agencies to ensure that current and future generations always have wildlife and wild places to enjoy.

## Previous Efforts to “Fund the Gap”

- 1975: The Wildlife Management Institute published a report highlighting the problem
- 1980: Congress passed the Fish & Wildlife Conservation Act
- 1990: The Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies launched the Wildlife Diversity Funding Initiative
  - Teaming with Wildlife Coalition formed



**TEAMING WITH WILDLIFE**  
*a natural investment*



There have been previous national legislative efforts to “fund the gap”:

**1975:** The Wildlife Management Institute published a report highlighting a gap in funding for the conservation of fish and wildlife that are not hunted or fished. These species represent the vast majority of species managed by state fish and wildlife agencies, over 95%. The report recommended that Congress authorize an excise tax on certain outdoor recreation equipment so that non-consumptive users (such as birders, hikers and campers) could join sportsmen and women in funding fish and wildlife conservation.

**1980:** Congress passed the Fish & Wildlife Conservation Act, which called for states to develop and implement comprehensive nongame fish and wildlife plans and required the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to study potential mechanisms for funding these activities. Despite passage of the Act, no funds were appropriated for its implementation.

**1990:** The Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies launched the Wildlife Diversity Funding Initiative. The Teaming with Wildlife coalition was organized to help lead the effort, attracting the support of most major conservation, hunting and fishing interests. The Wildlife Diversity Funding Initiative proposed placing a sliding scale, wholesale excise tax on outdoor recreation products such as binoculars, field guides, camping equipment, etc. to fund nongame fish and wildlife conservation, outdoor recreation and conservation education. It was estimated that the average outdoor recreationist would pay only an additional \$20 per year to help raise \$350 million annually. The proposal had the support of some key members of Congress, the Department of the Interior and several major retailers and manufacturers of outdoor equipment. It was, however, opposed by the Outdoor Recreation Coalition of America. In part due to a lack of support from members of Congress who pledged “no-new-taxes,” it was abandoned by the mid-late 1990s.

## Previous Efforts to “Fund the Gap”

- 2000: The Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA)
- 2001: Wildlife Conservation and Restoration (WCR) and the State Wildlife Grants (SWG) programs
- 2008: The Teaming With Wildlife Act
- 2009: American Clean Energy Security Act



**2000:** The Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) proposed to dedicate offshore drilling royalties on oil and gas development to wildlife conservation, historical preservation and other purposes. CARA passed by a 3:1 margin in the U.S. House of Representatives and had the support of 60 Senators, but failed to advance.

**2001:** Thanks to strong support for Title III of CARA, Congress appropriated funding for two new programs (referred to as “CARA-lite”)—the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration (WCR) and the State Wildlife Grants (SWG) programs—at \$50 million each. Appropriators vowed that funding would ultimately reach \$350 million annually; but WCR funding ended after the first year and SWG peaked at \$90 million in FY10 and has been cut by 35% in recent years.

**2008:** The Teaming With Wildlife Act (S2670) was introduced in the U.S. Senate to provide \$350 million annually in dedicated funding to states to implement State Wildlife Action Plans. The source of funding was split evenly between outer continental shelf drilling royalties and revenues collected under the Mineral Leasing Act. The bill gained some support and its sponsors planned to attach it to comprehensive energy legislation that failed to advance.

**2009:** The U.S. House of Representatives passed the American Clean Energy Security Act (HR2454), which would have provided as much as \$500 million annually in dedicated funds for states to plan and implement natural resources adaptation through State Wildlife Action Plans. The bill proposed to take a small portion of revenue from a cap and trade protocol to fund the WCR program. Similar legislation passed out of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee but failed to reach the Senate floor.

## State Wildlife Grants 2001-Present

- The nation's core program for preventing wildlife from becoming endangered
- Annually appropriated
- Florida's share = ~\$2 million/yr
- Aimed at "Keeping Species Common"

FLORIDA'S  
*W*ildlife  
Legacy Initiative

*Working together to conserve  
Florida's wildlife and natural  
places for future generations.*



Among all of these efforts, the State Wildlife Grants program by far has been the most successful and continuous. It has persisted since 2001 with annual apportionments to the states, thanks in large part to the national Teaming with Wildlife Coalition and bipartisan support in Congress. State Wildlife Grants is the nation's core program for preventing wildlife from becoming endangered and has a track record of success.

The program reached its peak in 2010 at \$90 nationwide, however, it has been cut roughly 35% since that time and is currently around \$58 million. This leaves an average of about \$850,000 per state, territory and the District of Columbia for at-risk species management. Concurrently, the Teaming With Wildlife Coalition grew to more than 6,400 organizations representing millions of birders, hikers, hunters, anglers and other outdoor enthusiasts who support dedicated funding for fish and wildlife conservation.

## The Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources

- **NEED:** \$1.3 billion annually in new funding for states
- **CHARGE:** Recommend a mechanism to sustainably fund the conservation of ALL fish and wildlife



In 2014 a new effort was underway to once again tell the story of state fish and wildlife agencies and the challenge of the funding gap for non-game wildlife. 'The Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources' was formed and co-chaired by Bass Pro Shops founder Johnny Morris and former Wyoming Governor Dave Freudenthal.

The need nationwide was set at \$1.3 billion annually in new funding for states (this is based on a 2012 Southwick Associates Survey of the states and would allow states to reach about 75% implementation of their State Wildlife Action Plans).

Under the co-chairs' leadership, the bipartisan Blue Ribbon Panel was charged to recommend funding solutions and Congressional policy options for delivering sustained conservation funding to states and their partners that maintain a balance between natural resource diversity and natural resource-based enterprise

## The Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources

- Representation from:
  - Outdoor recreation and retail
  - Manufacturing sector
  - Energy industry
  - Conservation organizations
  - Sportsmen's groups



*Photo of Blue Ribbon Panel at Big Cedar Lodge in Missouri  
September 2015*



In addition to the co-chairs, 25 members of the panel intentionally represent diverse expertise. Backgrounds ranged from the outdoor industry, manufacturing, energy, conservation organizations, and sportsmen's groups.

## The Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources

- Developed Funding Criteria (*i.e. funding must be dedicated, sustained for at least 10 years, achievable within 5 years, expand contributor base, etc.*)
- Two Dozen Funding Options Examined
- Three Options Evaluated
  - *Excise tax on outdoor recreation products*
  - *Energy & mineral royalties*
  - *Corporate giving*



3 meetings and 2 listening sessions were held in 2015.

Before diving in, the Panel developed criteria for funding options to help evaluate, compare, and narrow down options. This criteria was:

- Supports conservation of at-risk fish and wildlife/habitats and execution of State Wildlife Action Plans
- Sustained and not reliant on annual appropriations
- Sufficient to achieve success (a state survey estimated the funding need to be \$1.3 billion annually)
- Long term (minimum of 10 years) and renewable
- Achievable within five years
- New and/or supplemental source of funding that completes the wildlife conservation funding model
- Expands contributor base beyond hunters, anglers, recreational shooters and motorized boaters who pay fees and licenses and the industry contributing through excise taxes
- Can be used to support conservation education and nature-based recreation as well as species and habitat conservation
- Can be administered efficiently to assure a high return on investment
- Distributed equitably to and directed by state fish and wildlife agencies
- National in scope and does not require legislative action by individual states

The Panel examined about two dozen potential funding options and screened them against 10 developed by the states. They decided to take a more in depth look at three options: Excise tax on outdoor recreation products, energy and mineral royalties, and corporate giving.



## Recommendations

### RECOMMENDATION 1

Congress dedicate up to \$1.3 billion annually in existing revenue from the development of energy and mineral resources on federal lands and waters to the Wildlife Conservation Restoration Program (16 U.S.C. 467b(a)).



The Final report from the Panel was released in March 2016. Two main recommendations emerged.

The first is congress dedicate up to \$1.3 billion annually in existing revenue from the development of energy and mineral resources on federal lands and waters to the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program

## Recommendations

### RECOMMENDATION 2

The Blue Ribbon Panel will examine the impact of societal changes on the relevancy of fish and wildlife conservation and make recommendations on how programs and agencies can transform to engage and serve broader constituencies.

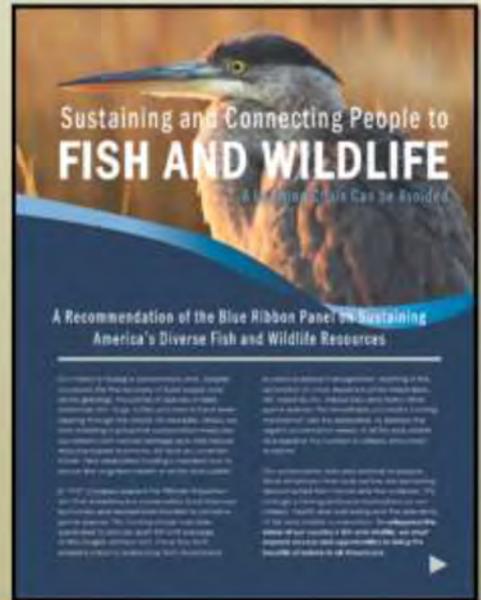


The second recommendation is to examine the impact of societal changes on the relevancy of fish and wildlife conservation, and to further recommend how programs and agencies can transform to engage and serve broader constituencies. In other words, how is fish and wildlife conservation relevant to society now as opposed to 100 years ago, and are current programs and agencies meeting these needs?

Hunters and anglers have been the core of support for many state fish and wildlife agencies. As their proportion of population changes, and as we become more urban and more connected to electronics and less to nature, agencies need to find new ways to be relevant to a larger segment of society.

## Next Steps

- Introduce legislation (April 2016)
- Launch national campaign (June 2016)
- Begin business outreach
- Establish Agency relevancy/ transformation working group



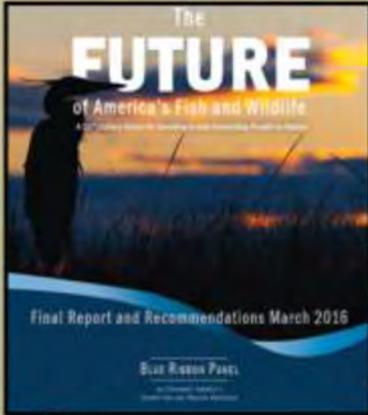
Planned next steps are to vet the recommendations and to introduce national legislation in April 2016. This depends on building and maintaining congressional support. A national campaign will be launched in June 2016. AFWA is dedicating resources to hire a campaign manager and strategist.

More outreach needs to be done with the business community and an Agency relevancy & transformation working group will be established.

All of this will need to be coordinated closely with the states and AFWA plans to continue working with the State Directors. In addition, it will be essential to keep members of the Panel engaged throughout the process.

# BLUE RIBBON PANEL

ON SUSTAINING AMERICA'S DIVERSE FISH & WILDLIFE RESOURCES



## THE SOLUTION

The Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources (the Panel) was established by the President in 2012 to study and report on the status of America's fish and wildlife resources and to recommend ways to sustain them for the future.

Congress dedicate up to \$1.3 billion annually in existing revenue from the development of energy and mineral resources on federal lands and waters to the Wildlife Conservation Restoration Program (WCRP).

Wildlife needs protection, restoration, and the ability to recover from natural and human-caused threats. The WCRP will provide a new source of funding for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to carry out its mission to protect, restore, and manage the Nation's fish and wildlife resources and their habitats.

The WCRP will be used to carry out the following activities: (1) protect and restore fish and wildlife populations and their habitats; (2) carry out research and monitoring to assess the status of fish and wildlife resources and their habitats; (3) carry out education and outreach to increase public understanding of the importance of fish and wildlife resources and their habitats; and (4) carry out other activities that are necessary to carry out the mission of the USFWS.