NSSF FAST FACTS

NORTH AMERICAN MODEL OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

American hunters have the unique position of being the original conservationists. In the early 20th century, many wildlife species in the U.S. were facing an uncertain future due to unregulated over-harvesting of many species and habitat destruction. Sportsmen and women watching this unfold led the call for new approaches for the responsible management and use of these resources. Seasons, game limits and funds for wildlife conservation programs all originated with the hunting community. These efforts were able to turn the tide and save populations that were once disappearing of species including white-tailed deer, pronghorn antelope, elk, wild turkeys and wood ducks.

Part of this effort was a push for legislation to create a funding mechanism to implement the principles of what is known as the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. Hunters were successful and in 1937 the landmark Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act was signed into law.[i]

To date, hunters and recreational shooters have contributed nearly $11 billion to wildlife conservation through the excise tax paid by manufacturers of hunting and shooting arms and ammunition. The tax revenue is distributed to state fish and wildlife agencies, which combine the funds with those raised through the sale of hunting licenses to conserve and manage wildlife populations, including non-game species, and to help create opportunities for all Americans to enjoy wildlife recreation.

Due to the unparalleled success of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, every state today has thriving wildlife populations in natural habitats that sustain hunted as well as non-hunted species. While all Americans benefit from these conservation efforts, most are unaware of the sportsmen-funded mechanisms that sustain and provide public access to these resources.

PRINCIPLES OF MODEL

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation stands as the most successful system of laws and regulation to restore and safeguard fish and wildlife and their habitats through sound science and active management.

Seven principles, known as the "seven sisters for conservation," define this "user pays-public benefits" system. [ii]

1) Wildlife in the Public Trust: Government manages wildlife held in the public trust.[iii]
2) Prohibition on Commerce of Dead Wildlife: Commercial hunting and sale of wild game meat is illegal under federal law.[iv]
3) Democratic Rule of Law: Use and management of wildlife regulated by law and enforced by government.
4) Opportunity for All: All citizens have the freedom to hunt and fish.
5) Non-Frivolous Use: Strict guidelines ensure wild animals are only legally harvested for food and fur, self-defense and property protection.
6) International Resources: The U.S. and Canada coordinate management strategies as wildlife migrates across boundaries.
7) Scientific Management: Decision making in wildlife management is informed by best available sound science.

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[i] For more information about the Pittman-Robertson Act, see: "NSSF: Pittman-Robertson Excise Tax," nssf.org/factsheets/PDF/PittmanRobertsonFacts.pdf

[ii] See more information from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation: rmef.org/Conservation/HuntingIsConservation NorthAmericanWildlifeConservationModel.aspx or Boone and Crocket Club: boone-crockett.org/conservation/conservation_NAM.asp?area=conservation

[iii] The Public Trust Doctrine was recognized by the Supreme Court in Illinois Central Railroad v. Illinois, 146 U.S. 387 (1892)

[iv] For a description of the Lacey Act, see U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: fws.gov/international/laws-treaties-agreements/us-conservation-laws/lacey-act.html