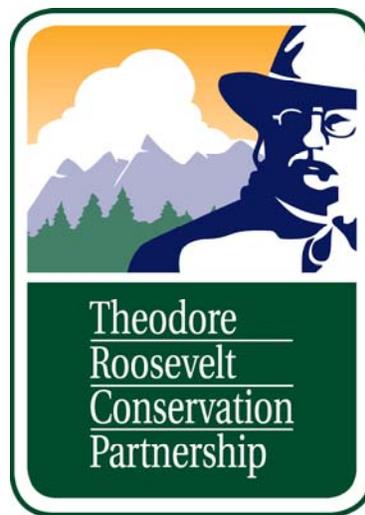


2011 Conservation Policy Agenda



Theodore Roosevelt
Conservation Partnership

www.trcp.org

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Introduction

“It is not what we have that will make us a great nation; it is the way in which we use it.”

— Theodore Roosevelt

Inspired by the legacy of Theodore Roosevelt, the TRCP is a coalition of organizations and grassroots partners working together to preserve the traditions of hunting and fishing. In order to guarantee all Americans quality places to hunt and fish, we strengthen laws, policies and practices affecting fish and wildlife conservation by leading partnerships that influence decision makers.

Please visit www.trcp.org to learn more about the TRCP’s mission, partners and staff.

The following document contains short- and long-term suggestions for each of the TRCP’s major policy initiatives. We look forward to our continued work with the Obama administration to expeditiously address problems of great concern to the nation’s sportsmen-conservationists.

While resolving and transcending immediate concerns to our natural resources and outdoor heritage remains a top priority, the TRCP also is ready to seize opportunities and explore new ideas that can benefit fish, wildlife and their habitat and ensure a brighter future for the American outdoor way of life.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Farm Service Agency Programs

Conservation Reserve Program

The Conservation Reserve Program remains our nation's largest and most successful private lands conservation program. Farmers and ranchers are making a major difference in restoring and enhancing their lands through the CRP, which has resulted in the conservation of millions of acres of wetland, grassland, and forest habitats – benefiting both fish and wildlife species and sportsmen. Due to economic factors, however, enrollment in the CRP has declined in recent years as millions of acres have been withdrawn from the program due to contract expirations, limited opportunities to enroll new lands, and competition from other land uses.

Short-term Action

- A robust and economically competitive CRP must remain a top priority for the administration. Regularly scheduled (at least once per year) general sign-up periods, continuous sign-up opportunities and additional sign-ups for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program are crucial. While numerous conservation benefits could be gained by raising the cap and enrolling more acreage, the current acreage cap of 32 million acres must not be lowered.

Long-term Actions

- Modernize the payment structure for the CRP to compete with the many land-use challenges faced by landowners. We support establishment of an annual CRP rental-rate review and adjustment process to ensure these rates are competitive and accurately reflect local rates.
- Promote the addition of carbon offset payments to conventional CRP contract payments to make the CRP a more financially attractive option for farmers.

Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program: Reauthorization and Funding

The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program, or “Open Fields,” was authorized by Congress for the first time in the 2008 Farm Bill. This program provides states \$50 million in federal money to enhance or create voluntary hunter-access programs on private lands. Agricultural producers can enroll their lands in one of these state- or tribal-access programs and receive a financial incentive in exchange for opening it to the public for hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation. The first round of grants was awarded to states in October 2010, with 17 states receiving \$12 million.

Short-term Action

- Urge the Obama administration to hold additional grant opportunities so that the full \$50 million can be awarded to states and tribes to implement access programs.

Long-term Action

- Reauthorize and fully fund the VPA-HIP in the 2012 Farm Bill to allow states to establish or build upon sportsmen's access programs.

Farmed Wetlands Enhancements

The Farmable Wetlands Program allows landowners and operators to enroll small wetlands and adjacent buffers in the continuous signup of the CRP. This program provides financial incentives to landowners and agricultural producers for up to 15 years, while helping to improve water quality, sustain and enhance wetland functions and values, and enhance wildlife habitat. We are concerned, however, that demands for alternative land uses will force agricultural producers to begin farming these important wetlands once again and that many of the values they have provided will be lost.

Short-term Action

- Urge the administration to expand the use of this program to protect important wetlands and adjacent buffers throughout the United States, particularly in the Prairie Pothole Region, Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley and the Playa Lakes Region of the Southwest.

Long-term Action

- Recommend that the administration provide willing landowners with the option to conserve and enhance these important wetlands and adjacent buffers through a program with permanent (perpetual) or at least long-term (30-year contracts or easements) safeguards.

Natural Resources Conservation Service Programs

Native Prairie Protections

One of the serious threats to wildlife that is unfolding is a massive biofuels program and expanded dry-land agricultural development that could engulf the Great Plains, jeopardizing what little remains of North America's most endangered ecosystem: our native prairies. Once covering about 1 billion acres, the last few million acres of native prairie are being plowed to produce corn, soybeans, wheat and other crops. As a result, native grassland birds and other wildlife that depend on these prairie habitats are declining faster than any other wildlife communities in North America. Sportsmen are concerned that little is being done by the federal government to conserve these remaining native prairies and the wildlife populations they support.

Short-term Actions

- The Obama administration must establish financial incentives and enhancement payments within the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Conservation Stewardship Program and the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program to encourage farmers, ranchers and other agricultural producers to conserve and enhance native prairies.
- Ensure authorization and implementation of the Sodsaver program to reduce federal incentives for breaking natural habitat for new cropland.

Long-term Actions

- The administration must work with Congress to modify and expand the Grassland Reserve Program with a primary focus of encouraging private landowners to conserve native prairies.
- Ensure that agricultural conservation programs like the Grassland Reserve Program and Wetlands Reserve Program receive sufficient baseline funding in the next Farm Bill.

Biofuels

While biofuels will play an increasingly important role in meeting the country's energy needs, we must ensure that a push to expand energy production on agricultural and forest lands does not compromise other important values of these lands.

Short-term Action

- Ensure that fish and wildlife habitat values are not degraded by inappropriate biofuels production.

U.S. Forest Service Programs

Aspen Management

Aspen forests are considered second only to riparian and wetland areas in their contribution to biological diversity. The habitats provided by aspen are important to many species of game and non-game forest wildlife. Aspen forests help sustain sport hunting traditions by providing critical habitats for game wildlife in the eastern and western United States. Sportsmen-conservationists are concerned that aspen stands in our national forests are unhealthy due to a lack of active management.

Short-term Actions

- Recommend that the Obama administration direct the U.S. Forest Service to develop aspen management plans for each national forest that would provide active management.
- Urge the administration to establish a task force of public and private partners that would identify and prioritize aspen forests located on lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service that require immediate treatment based on their value as important habitats for wildlife and sport hunting.

Long-term Action

- Advise the administration to request adequate funding in the annual budget recommendation to Congress that would provide for implementation of the aspen management plans completed by each national forest.

National Forest Roadless Area Management

Our nation's public lands encompass almost 193 million acres of national forests, including approximately 58.5 million acres of "inventoried roadless areas" in 38 states. Defined as areas within national forests and grasslands that encompass more than 5,000 contiguous acres without roads, roadless areas provide important range for elk, bighorn sheep and mule deer, plus clean water for wild trout, salmon and other desirable fish species.

Our national forests contain more than 386,000 miles of classified roads. While ensuring access to existing roads is important, building new roads could impair vital habitat for fish and wildlife. Roads can result in reduced cover for big game, often leading to shorter hunting seasons and decreased hunter opportunity. Too many roads also can diminish the quality of fish spawning habitat, curtailing opportunities for anglers.

Sportsmen, fish and wildlife have benefited from the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, a federal public lands management policy that provides multiple-use guidelines for roadless area management with an eye toward conserving the valuable qualities of these areas. This "roadless rule" was adopted following more than 600 public meetings and 1.7 million citizen comments nationally, with more than 95 percent of comments advocating roadless area conservation. Yet despite strong support from wide-ranging interests, including sportsmen, the future of the national roadless rule remains unsettled, largely due to ongoing litigation that is likely to conclude in early 2011.

Overall, the roadless rule has been a balanced and successful conservation policy, with only 33 miles of roads built since its implementation a decade ago. The administration can assure that the public will continue to enjoy the backcountry characteristics of these irreplaceable roadless forests for generations to come.

Short-term Actions

- Encourage the administration to uphold and defend the Roadless Area Conservation Rule to assure its long-term authority as the law of the land for roadless area management.
- Ensure that Colorado's 4.4 million acres of roadless areas are administered at a level that is equivalent with the management strength afforded by the national roadless rule.

Long-term Action

- Support and actively promote congressional legislation that codifies the conservation of national forest roadless areas. Such legislation should specify restrictions on, prohibitions of and allowances for road building, timber cutting and other commercial development within roadless area boundaries.

Forest Service Planning Regulations

The U.S. Forest Service is developing new regulations to govern the revision, amendment and development of national forest and grassland management plans under the National Forest Management Act of 1976. These regulations will significantly influence fish and wildlife populations, habitat restoration and management, watershed management, road building and timber management – and affect fish and wildlife population sustainability and future opportunities for sportsmen to enjoy hunting and angling in and around public lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service.

These planning regulations must be developed in a way that assures productive fish and wildlife habitat and high-quality outdoor experiences for hunters and anglers.

Short-term Action

- Ensure development of a Forest Service planning rule that sustains significant hunting and fishing opportunity, fish and wildlife populations, conservation and restoration of key fish and wildlife habitat, species adaptation to the effects of climate change, and retention of roadless area values.

Chesapeake Bay

The Chesapeake Bay is home to 70 to 80 percent of spawning Atlantic striped bass and is a critical migratory stopover for more than 1 million waterfowl, one third of the wintering waterfowl in the Atlantic flyway. Home to 4.5 million hunters and anglers, the Bay region is rich in opportunities for sportsmen, but a variety of challenges threaten to degrade the Chesapeake's bounty of fish and wildlife. Development, habitat loss, invasive species and water pollution have led to reductions in some fish and wildlife numbers, such as brook trout in the Chesapeake's tributaries, and could cause further declines in the future.

Short-term Actions

- Ensure the reduction of pollution from urban and agricultural development and restoration of fish and wildlife habitat in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
- Pursue legislation that will improve recreational access and focus restoration efforts on habitat for fish and wildlife.

Marine Recreational Fisheries Conservation

Recreational fishing is deeply engrained in America's traditions and cultural heritage. It is a pastime passed down through generations. Not only one of the most popular outdoor recreational activities in the country, it is also a significant contributor to local economies and conservation efforts nationwide. Recreational saltwater fishing drives an enormous economic engine, and contributions of the more than 14 million saltwater anglers to the national, regional and local economies cannot be denied. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, anglers' annual contributions include the following:

- More than \$16 billion in total angler expenditures
- More than \$34 billion in total economic activity
- Nearly 360,000 full- or part-time jobs
- More than \$13.5 billion in income
- More than \$3.4 billion and \$5.4 billion in federal and state tax revenues, respectively

Today, a smarter approach to marine fisheries management is critical – one that accurately and appropriately factors in impacts of recreational fishing. Recreational fishermen have embraced the necessary measures to sustain diverse and abundant fish populations. We stand ready to work with the Department of Commerce to find and implement those measures that solve the various problems confronting our marine fisheries management system.

Short-term Actions

- Enhance the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). The purpose of the registry is to obtain better data about who is fishing and what is being caught so that policymakers can increase their understanding of saltwater fishing's relationship to fisheries conservation.
- The MRIP must address the timeliness of data collection and analysis for managing marine recreational fishing. The analysis of recreational fishing data often takes place after the fishing season has ended. Fishery managers need the tools and opportunity to make in-season adjustments necessary to helping recreational anglers stay within their annual catch limits.
- Accelerate restoration efforts in the Gulf of Mexico following the oil spill. Implement policies and direct funding to target conservation of marine fisheries affected by the spill and incorporate the needs and input from recreational anglers when doing so.

Long-term Actions

- Maintain abundant fisheries populations and recreational use opportunities with a strong and effective Magnuson-Stevens Act.
- Support recreational angling access to America's waters. A long-standing policy of the federal government allows public access to public lands and waters for recreational purposes consistent with sound conservation. This policy is reflected in the principles of our wildlife refuges, national forests, national parks and wilderness areas and should be

promoted throughout the country. Traditional fisheries management practices align with these principles in that recreational anglers are subject to the regulation of season, number and size limits to ensure conservation of fish populations.

- Support funding for fish and wildlife adaptation to climate change. America's anglers are likely to be among the first to experience the impacts of climate change. Their fishing opportunities in those places where they have enjoyed past successes and great memories are likely to be altered. How we address the challenges of climate change now will dictate the angling opportunities for future generations. Securing funding for fisheries managers to help fish adapt to climate change will be critical. The proper tools and resources will enable fish and wildlife management agencies to take steps to monitor fish and wildlife resources and mitigate the effects of climate change.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

Wetlands and Clean Water Protections

The United States loses roughly 80,000 acres of natural wetlands every year. To make matters worse, recent Supreme Court decisions (*SWANCC*, 2001; *Rapanos*, 2006) have weakened the federal protections for our nation's wetlands and waters as provided by the Clean Water Act. These decisions removed protections for isolated wetlands and intermittent and ephemeral streams, respectively. In fact, the EPA estimates that approximately 20 million acres of wetlands and streams are no longer protected as a result. Moreover, joint guidance issued by the EPA and Corps of Engineers in 2007 did little to resolve confusion over which waters are protected and which are not.

These wetlands and streams have a tremendous impact on the lives of all Americans and offer numerous societal benefits. In addition to providing essential habitat to numerous plant, fish and wildlife species that benefit sportsmen, wetlands also perform critical flood control functions, recharge groundwater, filter pollutants from drinking water sources and help control erosion.

Short-term Action

- Urge the Obama administration to direct the EPA and Corps of Engineers to revisit the guidance issued in 2007 for reviewing permit applications and assessing what waters are jurisdictional under Clean Water Act protections. We support regulations that most strictly adhere to the original intent of the Clean Water Act and ones that provide the greatest amount of protections for our nation's wetlands, rivers, lakes and streams.

Long-term Action

- Support legislative action to directly remedy the confusion created by the courts. We have supported similar legislation in past Congresses that seek to clearly define "waters of the United States" and restore those federal protections that have been lost. We urge the administration to work with Congress to pass clean water legislation that will accomplish this and sign it into law in 2011.

Bristol Bay, Alaska

Alaska's Bristol Bay is a place of internationally recognized importance for fish, wildlife and sportsmen. The area's lakes and streams host trophy rainbow trout and all five species of Pacific salmon, including the largest run of sockeye salmon in the world. Moose, caribou and brown and black bear also populate the Bristol Bay region. Commercial fishing in the area generates \$450 million and recreational fishing generates \$160 million to the Alaska economy every year. In fact, the Bristol Bay commercial fishery is the most valuable in the world, providing 30 percent of all Alaskan salmon harvest and 52 percent of all private sector jobs in the region.

A proposal to develop a massive gold, copper and molybdenum mine in the headwaters of the Kvichak and Nushagak rivers threatens this important resource area and the recreational and

commercial fishing opportunities it provides. The proposed Pebble Mine complex would cover 54.5 square miles and could produce as much as 10 billion tons of mine waste that would have to be treated and stored in perpetuity.

The Pebble Mine would cause unacceptable adverse effects to the Bristol Bay area's fisheries.

Short-term Action

- Urge the EPA, under its authority granted by section 404(c) of the Clean Water Act, to prohibit the Kvichak and Nushagak River drainages from being used as disposal sites for dredge or fill material from mining activity.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Energy Development

Domestic energy development has become one of the most controversial subjects facing land managers today. With the new push to harness the sun, wind and other forms of renewable energy along with the abundant “shale gas” that has been found in our nation, the necessity of balancing production of domestic energy with the needs of fish and wildlife – and continuing to support traditional sporting activities – will be even more critical.

Sustaining fish, wildlife and sporting resources during energy development activities poses a great challenge. The first step toward its resolution is revision of the current paradigm that gives energy development priority over all other values and uses and recommitment to a true multiple-use approach to managing lands and resources. The TRCP “**FACTS for Fish and Wildlife**” provides the foundation for changes and reforms that could facilitate balanced and responsible energy development while conserving our fish, wildlife, and sporting resources – and integrating renewable energy development in our national energy policy.

Short-term Actions

We will work toward true multiple-use, sustained-yield policy for public lands and advise state and private managers how to balance development of energy resources with other values and resources, particularly fish, wildlife and sporting resources:

- Successfully implement the recently revised federal mineral leasing process to better address conservation of fish and wildlife in important and crucial wildlife habitats (e.g., big-game crucial winter ranges and migration corridors, wetlands/floodplains and core areas for prairie grouse). These areas should be identified and managed in coordination with state fish and wildlife management agencies.
- Revise the practice of granting relief from wildlife protection measures for energy development activities (i.e., waivers, modifications and exceptions) and update BLM policy concerning how and when such relief may be afforded. The BLM must ensure and document coordination with state wildlife management agencies when evaluating requests for relief and require public notice and input prior to such deliberations.
- Establish a process for formal input from sportsmen into policy, plans and projects that is more effective than current processes in place under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), as well as less intimidating to the public.
- Develop an “energy roadmap” for where, when and what type of energy development (including renewable energy) will take place on public lands. This approach should include objectives or goals regarding the extent of energy development in any given area so that entire landscapes are not consumed by some form of development. It also should facilitate identification of a landscape-level strategy for fish and wildlife in which habitats can be identified and managed to sustain populations and sporting resources at current or improved levels.

- Consistent with other programmatic evaluations recently completed for wind energy, oil shale and tar sands, assess oil and gas development potential on public lands throughout the West and prioritize energy production potential to avoid conflicts with fish and wildlife resource values. Develop a matrix and interim policy that allow for development to continue in certain areas but conserve sensitive areas.
- Work with the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council to establish a process for immediate review and implementation of federal land-use plans and major energy projects to ensure compliance with the spirit and intent of Executive Order 13443 (Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation).
- Ensure federal and state management strategies and planning for sage grouse and other prairie grouse adequately conserve the birds and their habitats in order to avoid listing under the Endangered Species Act. Science-based changes are critical to the long-term survival of sage grouse and to maintaining sage grouse as a game species with ample hunting opportunities.
- Establish an interagency agreement between the BLM and state fish and wildlife agencies establishing, clarifying and strengthening the coordination and collaboration among agencies for mule deer management during review of energy development projects and land-use planning.
- Prohibit the practice of using or transferring funding intended for fish and wildlife management (or other renewable resource management) to energy programs and/or activities. Ensure adequate funding and resources for proper fish and wildlife management.
- Establish a mitigation trust fund to provide financial support and stability to the management of fish and wildlife resources affected by energy development. Funding could be derived from fees, royalties, rents or voluntary contributions to support agencies, local actions and other activities that directly mitigate losses or degradation of fish, wildlife and sporting resources from energy development.
- Advise state and private land and resource managers on how to implement strategies and actions during energy development that will sustain fish and wildlife populations through understanding of current science, experience and sound implementation of adaptive management principles.
- Ensure all mitigation and monitoring are effective in reducing or avoiding impacts to fish, wildlife and sporting resources and are based on current science or knowledge.
- Establish a competitive renewable energy leasing program for federal lands that balances development with fish and wildlife conservation and dedicates a portion of royalties to reduce impacts to fish and wildlife populations.
- Require disclosure and reduction of toxic substances used for hydraulic fracturing, and reinstate storm water protections for oil and gas drilling.

Long-term Actions

- Restore balance in the management of public lands and resources through implementation of true multiple-use, sustained yield practices as mandated by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act.

Local offices must ensure actions will carry out the mission as Congress originally envisioned and not severely diminish or eliminate other uses such as hunting or fishing on lands that are being developed for energy.

- Advocate for legislative action ensuring the sustainability of abundant and diverse fish and wildlife populations and recreational opportunities. A fish and wildlife sustainability act or provision in law would signal a commitment to the American public that our conservation heritage will not be sacrificed.
- Demonstrate proper, balanced energy development on lands important to fish, wildlife and sportsmen through coordination and collaboration with TRCP partners.

The TRCP advocates responsible energy development and believes a better way exists to manage energy resources in important fish and wildlife habitat. Conflicts with wildlife and our fishing and hunting heritage can be minimized to ensure a lasting conservation legacy.

Hard-rock Mining Reform

The 1872 Mining Law, which governs hard-rock mining (gold, copper, silver, etc.) on America's public lands, was signed into law more than a century ago. While the economies, cultures, and politics of the West have changed since 1872, the mining law has not. More than 270 million acres of federal land are open to hard-rock mining under the law. Because the law has never been meaningfully reformed, many of America's most treasured public lands are at risk, including important wildlife habitat and hunting areas, valuable fisheries, popular recreation sites, vital municipal water supplies and sensitive roadless areas.

Since 1872, certain modifications have been made to the law. But these basic doctrines remain public law:

- Public lands are available for private mineral claims;
- Miners on public lands are entitled to exclude the public from their claims;
- Mining takes precedence over all other uses on public lands, including hunting and fishing;
- The public receives no payment for this private use of the lands or the value of the minerals removed; and
- Miners can eventually own both the minerals and the land for a nominal fee.

While considerable hard-rock mining occurs on lands overseen by the Department of the Interior, national forest lands administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture also host widespread hard-rock mining activities.

Short-term Actions

- Persuade Congress to pass meaningful 1872 mining law reform legislation that would end mining's priority status on public lands, thus balancing mining with other public-land uses such as hunting, fishing, timber harvest and water quality; recover a reasonable royalty on minerals taken from public lands, similar to royalties that oil, gas, coal and timber interests already pay; establish an abandoned mine cleanup fund, with a portion of those funds dedicated to fish and wildlife habitat restoration to address impacts of past mining; and prohibit patenting or sale of public lands, keeping public lands in public hands for all Americans to use and enjoy.
- Give land management agencies the authority to safeguard invaluable fish and wildlife habitat areas, like high value backcountry areas, from mining activities that could lead to devastating and irreversible impacts.

Good Samaritan Cleanup Protections

An estimated 500,000 inactive or abandoned mines exist in the United States. A significant percentage leaks acid-rock or acid-mine drainage into waterways, affecting fisheries and waterfowl. Many of these mines lack a financially viable potential responsible party that can clean up the pollution after the mining is complete. Good Samaritans, such as state fish and wildlife agencies and nonprofit organizations, are willing to clean up mine waste because of the

benefits restoration provides to fish and wildlife habitat, but a strong legal disincentive discourages these organizations and agencies to take action.

Under the Clean Water Act of 1972, any party wanting to clean up an abandoned mine must be willing to meet strict water quality standards and take permanent responsibility for the pollution source after ground-breaking activity begins. As a result, the worst-polluting mine sites often remain on the landscape with no reclamation because organizations are not willing to accept the perpetual liability that would result from a cleanup. While the CWA helps safeguard fish and wildlife habitat important to sportsmen, this law unintentionally discourages abandoned mine reclamation.

Short-term Action

- Ensure passage of legislation that would protect “Good Samaritans” wishing to clean up abandoned mines from perpetual liability for continued pollution from mine waste, therefore providing individuals and groups with the assurances they need to tackle important mine restoration projects that benefit American sportsmen.

Bureau of Land Management – Wild Lands

On Dec. 23, 2010, Department of the Interior Secretary Ken Salazar issued Secretarial Order 3310, directing the Bureau of Land Management to develop an inventory of pristine backcountry areas administered by the agency. This order also directs the BLM to designate as “wild lands” those inventoried lands holding the highest values, committing the agency to conserving their primitive character.

Similar to national forest roadless areas, backcountry BLM lands provide many benefits to fish, wildlife and sportsmen. Many of these areas provide intact winter habitat for mule deer, pronghorn and elk and important escape and security cover. BLM backcountry lands also provide key habitat for unique native trout and primitive hunting and fishing experiences for sportsmen looking to escape crowds, experience solitude and pursue trophy-class animals.

Short-term Action

- Urge the BLM to thoroughly and promptly inventory all primitive lands through project and land use planning level efforts. The agency should include areas encompassing high-quality fish and wildlife habitat and with remote backcountry character in the “Lands with Wilderness Characteristics” national inventory.

Long-term Action

- Ensure that LWC lands with valuable fish and wildlife habitat and backcountry hunting and fishing are analyzed through land use plan amendment and revision processes. LWC lands important to sportsmen should be designated “wild lands” to ensure their conservation.
- Work to cement the BLM’s commitment to retaining the primitive character of all backcountry lands classified as “wild lands.”
- Urge the BLM to develop additional administrative policies to conserve the undeveloped character of LWC lands that are not designated as “wild lands.”

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Transportation Legislation

Not usually thought of as a vehicle for conservation, the legislation commonly called the “Highway Bill” can have immediate and lasting benefits for America’s fish and wildlife populations. When forging the 2005 Highway Bill, our leaders had the foresight to include an unprecedented \$2 billion in projects that benefited American sportsmen by conserving our fish and wildlife resources. Critter-friendly culverts, invasive species control, refuge roads, trails and highway construction mitigation all received much-needed funding boosts.

Short-term Actions

- Publicly affirm the need to include significant funding for fish and wildlife conservation in the next Highway Bill while communicating to Congress that expanded fish passage, wetlands protection, water quality improvement and wildlife collision reduction measures are to be considered matters of urgent national priority.
- Expand the Recreational Trails Program to provide funding for sportsmen access to landlocked public lands.

Long-term Action

- Spur and support congressional efforts to pass a new Highway Bill in the 112th Congress.

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE

Tax Incentives for Conservation Easements

Conservation easements allow landowners to receive fair compensation for development rights without having to sell their farms and ranches. Easements also are valued by the sportsmen's community because many encourage or allow access for hunters and anglers. In the 2008 Farm Bill, Congress extended provisions in the tax code that widened the availability of conservation easements, making them attractive to a far broader swath of the public. These incentives were extended at the end of 2010 through Dec. 31, 2011. If they are not made permanent, a powerful tool for protecting the landscapes on which we hunt and fish may be lost forever.

Short-term Action

- Advocate making the enhanced tax incentive for conservation easement donations permanent via recommendations in the fiscal year 2012 budget proposal.

Long-term Action

- Support legislation making the enhanced tax incentive permanent.

Climate Change

America's anglers and hunters enjoy a profusion of outdoor pursuits, including tarpon fishing in the Florida Keys, stalking elk in the Rocky Mountains, hunting waterfowl in the hardwood bottoms of Louisiana, fishing for eastern brook trout in the Appalachians, and chasing pheasants in the Great Plains.

The country's diverse habitats and conservation actions by hunters, anglers and conservationists of the last century have delivered abundant and widely distributed populations of fish and game. Global climate change threatens to disrupt generations of plant and animal evolution and the abundance and well-being of animals and their habitats. Gradually increasing worldwide temperatures will result in changes in amounts and patterns of precipitation, frequency and intensity of weather events; distribution and duration of drought; levels of snowpack and when they melt; runoff and flooding patterns; and the timing of animal and plant life-cycles. These factors alone and combined can affect plant growth, structure and distribution, as well as species' abilities to reproduce and survive.

As shown in [*Seasons' End*](#), the geographic ranges of fish, wildlife and their habitats are shifting. Species like moose, elk, mule deer and pronghorn will have to adapt to changes in forage and alter their migration patterns. Changing water quality and quantity will affect aquatic ecosystems and fisheries. Wetland losses in the Prairie Pothole Region will severely reduce waterfowl productivity in North America's duck-breeding "factory." Invasive species, parasites and disease-causing organisms may flourish in warmer temperatures, profoundly affecting the habitat and survival of upland game birds. Combined with increasing human populations and the impact human demands have on the environment, these natural-world changes threaten to take an unprecedented toll on America's landscapes.

Sportsmen likely will be the first to experience the repercussions of climate change as declining populations of game species result in shortened seasons and fewer hunting permits. If fishing or hunting exists in the lifetime of our children and theirs, it may take on an entirely new face. How we address the challenges of global climate change now will dictate whether future generations will continue to enjoy our time-honored sporting traditions.

Sportsmen-conservationists believe that wildlife management agencies must monitor species now to detect and adapt to changes in abundance and distribution as a result of climate change. They also believe that these government agencies must work to mitigate the effects of such change by protecting crucial habitat and adapting management programs that conserve fish and wildlife populations.

Consequently, congressionally mandated State Wildlife Action Plans, implementation of which currently are funded by State Wildlife Grants, are being revised to serve as the fundamental set of strategies to help fish and wildlife adapt to and survive climate change.

Short-term Action

- Urge the Obama administration to increase the annual appropriation to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the State Wildlife Grants Program to fund the full implementation of congressionally mandated State Wildlife Action Plans that address the challenge of climate change.

Long-term Actions

- Advocate for a new Natural Resources Adaptation Fund to include substantial dedicated funding for state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies and federal environmental and land-management agencies to help fish and wildlife adapt to climate change.
- Advocate for new dedicated funding for state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies through the existing Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Account of the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act, the Coastal Management Act of 1972, state and tribal wildlife grants and the Land and Water Conservation Fund of 1965.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

The Land and Water Conservation Fund is one of our nation's most successful land conservation programs. The original premise of the LWCF was to balance the development of one of America's natural resources – offshore oil and gas resources – with long-term investments in its land and water resources. Citizens throughout the nation have enjoyed the national parks, forests and wildlife refuges that have benefited from the program.

Sportsmen are heavily dependent on public lands outdoor recreation, where they can find abundant fish and wildlife habitat and hunt and fish. The LWCF has helped conserve some of America's richest habitat and most popular sporting destinations. The program's conservation easement features also have helped numerous ranching and farming families stay on their lands and continue their traditional way of life, all while sustaining healthy landscapes. Because of the benefits it provides, the LWCF has enjoyed strong bipartisan support since it was authorized almost a half-century ago.

Short-term Actions:

- Secure full funding (\$900 million annually) for the Land and Water Conservation Fund to conserve fish and wildlife habitat.
- Promote the authorization of 1.5 percent of LWCF funds to be spent on increasing recreational access to public lands.