

May 22, 2009

The Honorable James L. Oberstar  
Chairman  
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure  
Infrastructure  
2165 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John L. Mica  
Ranking Minority Member  
Committee on Transportation &  
2163 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Peter A. DeFazio  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Highways & Transit  
2134 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John J. Duncan, Jr.  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Highways & Transit  
2207 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Committee Leadership,

Our nation's transportation programs and policies have a tremendous impact on wildlife and water quality and pose some of the greatest conservation challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As America's leading conservation, hunting and fishing organizations, we look forward to working with you to develop transportation legislation that will actually improve fish and wildlife habitat and water quality. We believe the policy and funding priorities of our community mesh well with the vision of transportation and priorities articulated by Members of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

Important conservation markers were established in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Act; a Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) with respect to Highway Safety and Wildlife, Highway Planning, Invasive Species Management, Sportsmen's Access, and Aquatic Resource Funding and Management. Attached for your consideration are the transportation policy and funding priorities of the conservation community. Please contact Jeff More at (202)289-9800 with any questions and/or comments regarding the policy and funding priorities outlined below. We appreciate your thoughtful consideration of these critical conservation matters and look forward to working with you in modernizing America's transportation system.

Sincerely,

**The Transportation Conservation Coalition**

cc: Members of the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee

## **The Transportation Conservation Coalition**

<b>American Bird Conservancy</b>	<b>National Rifle Association</b>
<b>American Fly Fishing Trade Association</b>	<b>National Shooting Sports Foundation</b>
<b>American Land Conservancy</b>	<b>National Wildlife Federation</b>
<b>American Rivers</b>	<b>National Wildlife Refuge Association</b>
<b>American Sportfishing Association</b>	<b>National Wild Turkey Federation</b>
<b>Archery Trade Association</b>	<b>North American Bear Foundation</b>
<b>Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies</b>	<b>North American Grouse Partnership</b>
<b>Audubon Society</b>	<b>Pheasants Forever</b>
<b>Bear Trust International</b>	<b>Pollinator Partnership</b>
<b>Boone and Crockett Club</b>	<b>Pope and Young</b>
<b>Bowhunting Preservation Alliance</b>	<b>Quail Forever</b>
<b>Campfire Club of America</b>	<b>Quail Unlimited</b>
<b>Catch-A-Dream Foundation</b>	<b>Quality Deer Management Association</b>
<b>Chesapeake Bay Foundation</b>	<b>Restore America's Estuaries</b>
<b>Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation</b>	<b>Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation</b>
<b>Conservation Force</b>	<b>Ruffed Grouse Society</b>
<b>Dallas Safari Club</b>	<b>Safari Club International</b>
<b>Defenders of Wildlife</b>	<b>Sand County Foundation</b>
<b>Ducks Unlimited</b>	<b>Sierra Club</b>
<b>Everglades Foundation</b>	<b>Texas Wildlife Association</b>
<b>Federation of Fly Fishers</b>	<b>The American Fisheries Society</b>
<b>Healthy Habitats Coalition</b>	<b>Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership</b>
<b>Izaak Walton league of America</b>	<b>The Wildlife Society</b>
<b>Mule Deer Foundation</b>	<b>Trout Unlimited</b>
<b>National Association of Conservation Districts</b>	<b>Whitetails Unlimited</b>
<b>National Audubon Society</b>	<b>Wildlife Forever</b>
<b>National Fish and Wildlife Foundation</b>	<b>Wild Sheep Foundation</b>

# CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

## Policy Initiatives

- **Highway Planning / Habitat and Fish and Wildlife Considerations**

Significant strides were made in SAFETEA-LU to facilitate cooperation between State Departments of Transportation and State Department of Natural Resources/Fish and Wildlife agencies to meet both transportation and conservation objectives. Delivery of important transportation projects can be accelerated while protecting and enhancing wetlands and other natural habitats if: (1) long range transportation plans incorporate the best scientific information on fish, wildlife and native plant occurrences; (2) high-quality wetland and other natural habitats are set aside in advance to provide mitigation credits for future transportation projects; and (3) State Fish and Wildlife Agencies are consulted early in the highway/transportation planning process to help identify potential problems that might impact important habitats, or that relate to migration corridors of deer, elk, other large animals, and aquatic/riparian corridors for fish. Consultation will provide opportunities for problem resolution, before millions of dollars are invested in the design of the transportation projects. The Western Governor's Association's recent Wildlife Corridors Initiative (institutionalized as the Western Wildlife Council under WGA) establishes a decision-support system for individual (western) Governors to use in making better informed decisions on balancing fish and wildlife conservation with transportation corridors, energy development, and climate change impacts. We strongly support both increased funding for such efforts and the encouragement of the use of such approaches in the rest of the Nation.

SAFETEA-LU included a new planning provision, (Section 6001), requiring transportation planners to consult with natural resource agencies, compare transportation and conservation maps, and discuss mitigation options, forever changing how we plan roads and protect habitat. Early indications suggest this collaboration is successful, but will need ongoing training and support for transportation and natural resource planners. Efforts of state and federal resource agencies to complete the mapping of conservation plans that are essential to successfully integrating conservation and transportation planning should be supported. Likewise, the efforts of state fish and wildlife agencies to complete priority habitat mapping and habitat connectivity planning should also be supported. Further efforts to enhance collaboration on the implementation of State Wildlife Action Plans and other similar landscape-level programs should be facilitated and incentivized.

- **Highway Safety and Wildlife**

The number of wildlife-vehicle collisions has increased dramatically in the U.S. over the last two decades, now comprising 1 in 20 of all reported motor vehicle crashes. Last year there were over 1.8 million accidents involving motorists and deer. Highway crossing technology and improved management of highway right-of-ways offer tremendous opportunities to dramatically reduce wildlife – vehicle collisions.

- **Invasive Species Management and Response**

The transportation sector is the single most important vector in the spread of invasive species and the governmental response to an introduced invasive is slow and often ineffective. A coordinated national program is needed to control the spread of invasive species through transportation activities. Incentives must be provided to ensure the use of native plant species in highway construction and maintenance projects. States must also adopt mowing practices and construction practices that do not facilitate the spread of invasive plants.

- **Public Land Access – Making Public Lands Public**

Federal public lands are an important destination for American hunters, anglers and other outdoor enthusiasts. For instance, nearly half of all hunters conduct a portion of their hunting activity on these lands. Numerous reports demonstrate access to Federal land is problematic in a number of areas. In fact, a General Accounting Office (GAO) report concluded that more than 50 million acres of BLM and USFS land have inadequate access. Inadequate access to public lands is cited as a primary reason that hunters stop participating in this traditional sport. People who fish, canoe and kayak would also benefit from improved, safe, and reasonable access to our nations rivers and streams along and adjacent to roads and bridges.

To identify projects that will improve public access and focus more attention on this issue, the Federal Lands Hunting and Shooting Sports Roundtable (Roundtable) worked with the USFS and BLM to issue a voluntary Request for Proposals to all agency field offices seeking quality projects that have a high probability of success. This effort reflected the direction given in Executive Order 13443, Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation, and was subsequently included as an action item in the Recreational Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Plan that was a product of the Executive Order. The Roundtable was created through a Memorandum of Understanding signed by 40 NGOs that comprise the American Wildlife Conservation Partners, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The Roundtable was created to improve partnership efforts between the agencies and the NGOs to address issues impacting access to Federal lands

for hunting and other wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, including shooting sports activities.

The proposals are reviewed by representatives from the NGO community, BLM and USFS. Proposals will be reviewed to identify quality projects that can be completed quickly once funding is secured. Successful completion of these projects will act as a springboard for further efforts. The Recreation Trails Program should allow states to enter into property leases to enhance public access to isolated parcels of federal public lands.

- **Sportfishing and Boating Safety**

Minor policy changes to help improve the effectiveness of the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund have been developed by conservation and boating communities and should be adopted as part of the reauthorization process.

- **Mitigation Incentives**

Transportation agencies can partner early with resource agencies to anticipate the impacts of several projects at once in order to identify and bundle regional mitigation opportunities. Early coordination not only prevents permitting and regulatory delays, it stretches public mitigation dollars further by securing and conserving valuable natural resources on a more economically efficient scale and before related real estate prices escalate. Support the efforts of state fish and wildlife agencies to complete priority habitat mapping and habitat connectivity planning.

- **Fish and Wildlife Corridors**

Where fish and wildlife movement corridors are fragmented by highways, transportation agencies can restore habitat connectivity via a number of measures including wildlife crossings, expanded culverts, viaducts and elevated roadways. Habitat connectivity analyses identify the most important habitat areas and fish and wildlife movement corridors across the state as they intersect with existing and proposed highways.

- **Stormwater Management**

Highways are a major source of stormwater runoff and ultimately a leading cause of water quality impairment in lakes, rivers and estuaries across the nation. We believe that all new and reconstructed highway projects should be required to assess and mitigate for stormwater impacts.

- **Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management**

Seventeen million acres of land are contained within public rights-of-way, making transportation agencies land managers on a grand scale. While rights of way are not always high quality habitat, they have substantial conservation value when managed correctly. Best practices such as reduced mowing regimes and native plantings can reduce maintenance costs while establishing conservation corridors. With direction, guidance and incentives, IRVM programs can be the standard, resulting in more sustainable roadside vegetation patterns, meeting identified goals.

- **Bridge Construction and Maintenance**

Thousands of bridges will be replaced and rehabilitated in the United States over the next few decades, presenting an exceptional opportunity to incorporate design modifications that reestablish or improve fish passage, hydrology and habitat connectivity. Where appropriate, bridges can be extended slightly to reduce flow constrictions and restore passage for aquatic organisms and provide a movement corridor for terrestrial wildlife. Include habitat conservation and connectivity in bridge design standards, add habitat connectivity to bridge inspections and make habitat connectivity eligible under the Highway Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program.

**\*\*\* BRIEFING PAPERS ARE AVAILBLE FOR EACH OF THESE POLICIES \*\*\***

## **Funding Initiatives**

- **Sportfishing and Boating Safety**

Current law provides critical funding for fisheries management, wetland restoration, vessel pump out station, habitat conservation programs and boater safety programs through the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund. It is of paramount importance to the conservation and boating community that this Trust Fund remains secure and sustainable.

- **Recreational Trails**

Current law provides funding for the development and maintenance of trails that are used by millions of anglers, hunters, wildlife viewers, and hikers annually. However, millions of acres of public land remain inaccessible to the public. We believe \$110 M should be dedicated annually to this program of which funds shall be made available to improve access to public lands through the “Making Public Lands Public” initiative discussed under the “Policy Initiatives”.

- **Invasive Species Response**

The transportation sector is the single most important vector in the spread of invasive species and the governmental response to an introduced invasive is slow and often ineffective. We believe a separate account, administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, should be established to combat invasive species in a timely and effective manner. This new account would receive \$30 M annually.

- **Integrated Planning**

Current law does not provide States with adequate funding to facilitate the needed coordination between State Departments of Transportation and State Departments of Natural Resource / Fish & Wildlife. Heightened coordination of these critical state players will ultimately improve the timely delivery of transportation projects and benefit fish and wildlife habitat. We believe each state should be provided an additional \$2M annually to pay State Natural Resource Staff assigned to assess the impacts of individual transportation projects and better integrate fish and wildlife planning tools such as State Wildlife Action Plans and other landscape-level strategies, into transportation planning decisions.

- **Forest Roads Maintenance**

Current law does not provide adequate resources for the repair and replacement of culverts and bridges on forest roads to facilitate fish passage and the maintenance of reasonable flows. We believe \$65 M should be dedicated annually to this program.

- **Refuge Roads**

The road systems in our nation's Wildlife Refuges have documented annual needs in excess of \$70 M. Currently, Wildlife Refuges are receiving less than half of the transportation funding required. We believe that Refuge Roads should receive no less than \$50 M annually and that project eligibility should be modified to reflect the unique transportation challenges facing Refuges.

- **Park Roads and Parkways**

Currently, the roads and bridges maintenance backlog for the National Park Service is \$4.9 billion, and it is estimated that 90% of its roads are in poor to fair condition. By making regular maintenance eligible for federal highway funds, we can protect taxpayers' investment through rational asset management. We believe the Park Roads and Parkways program should receive no less than \$350 million annually and that project eligibility should be modified to reflect the transportation challenges facing our national parks.

- **Fishing, Hunting, and Recreation Signage**

Current law does not provide adequate funding for signage identifying access points for hunting, angling and outdoor recreation. We recommend \$2 M annually for new signage identifying hunting and angling access.

**\*\*\* BRIEFING PAPERS ARE AVAILABLE FOR EACH FUNDING PRIORITY \*\*\***