



HUNTERS ON THE HILL



NWTF ON THE HILL

In February, NWTF Director of Government Affairs Joel Pedersen represented the organization at the Congressional Western Caucus’ Policy Forum on Forest Management and Fire Mitigation. The NWTF was the only conservation organization invited to speak. Pedersen served on a panel that included congressmen Bruce Westerman and Paul Gosar, and he talked about the role of active management in healthy forests and fire prevention and highlighted some of the challenges facing forest managers, including disruptive litigation and injunctions that impact projects as well as the lack of federal funding and agency capacity. He also discussed opportunities to expand the scope and scale of work such as collaborative efforts like the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative, and how forest managers can leverage climate change solutions to include forest management.

CONSERVATION AND COVID-19

As Congress looks for ways to stimulate the economy and create jobs after the shutdowns forced by the COVID-19 crisis, the NWTF and partner conservation organizations used the opportunity to highlight how conservation-related projects can do both, as well as achieve other benefits for conservation and society. The NWTF led a coalition of groups on a letter to congress outlining how supplemental funding to the U.S. Forest Service could create jobs by addressing maintenance backlogs, scaling up forest restoration and hazardous fuels reduction projects. These investments will also improve recreational access, reduce fire hazards and protect communities and water sources. The NWTF also joined other organizations to advocate for additional key legislative priorities, including increased funding in the transportation bill for wildlife corridors and Forest Service road maintenance, Recovering America’s Wildlife Act and increased enrollment opportunities in the Conservation Reserve Program.

HUNTING AND FISHING ACCESS

The NWTF provided comments in support of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services’ proposal to expand hunting and fishing opportunities on National Wildlife Refuges. Their 2020 proposal will open new areas or expand opportunities on 2.3 million acres. This continuing effort by the Service aligns perfectly with the NWTF’s Save the Habitat. Save the Hunt. initiative.

GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT

The Great American Outdoors Act (S.3422) was introduced in March and passed by the Senate in June. This bill combines two longtime NWTF priorities: funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Save our Parks legislation that would address maintenance backlogs of the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

#RESPONSIBLERECREATION

In conjunction with our #ResponsibleRecreation efforts, the NWTF joined with other organizations to send a letter to all governors — as well as state legislators that are members of their respective states’ sportsmen’s caucus — encouraging them to keep public lands and opportunities to hunt and fish open during the pandemic.



FIELD NOTES



STATE UPDATES

Arkansas: The state NWTF chapter is monitoring proposed changes to the 2021 spring turkey season that are likely to include a reduction in the number of zones, limit harvest to one turkey per hunter during the first seven days, reduce the bag limit to one turkey per wildlife management area and prohibit the take of bearded hens.

California: The state NWTF chapter provided support for AB1206, a bill that will make funding available for landowners to improve habitat for ground nesting birds, and for AB3022, which would provide hunting opportunities to youth 17 and under instead of 15 and under.

Colorado: The state NWTF chapter along with other conservation groups submitted a letter opposing a Humane Society-led citizen petition to the Wildlife Commission to ban trapping. The petition was pulled before the Commission made a decision. The Commission did, however, approve another citizen petition led by the Humane Society to ban hunting contests in the state.

Florida: NWTF District Biologist David Nicholson attended task force meetings to voice the state NWTF chapter's opposition to expanded toll road construction due to the loss of habitat and fragmentation that would occur. He also made recommendations in support of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's proposed rule change to require mandatory reporting of harvested wild turkeys.

Maine: The NWTF provided comments in opposition to LD1117/SP337, which proposed to rescind the authority of the wildlife agency to regulate turkey seasons and bag limits. It would also have eliminated turkey permit fees and the requirement to register harvested birds at physical check stations.

Michigan: The state NWTF chapter urged the Department of Natural Resources to adjust their limited quota hunt permits to allow hunters to hunt during COVID-related stay-at-home orders. The DNR made adjustments for this season, which allowed people to hunt closer to home.

Minnesota: The state NWTF chapter opposed legislation (HF4554) that would have diverted dedicated wildlife accounts funding to provide additional incentive payments for landowners to enroll in the Conservation Reserve Program.

Missouri: NWTF District Biologist John Burk provided testimony in support of HB1547, a bill to enhance prescribed burning in the state, and testified in opposition of HJR100, which would have taken final authority on conservation regulations from the Department of Conservation and given it to the legislature.

Nebraska: The state NWTF chapter opposed several pieces of legislation during the current session: LB126 would provide free deer permits for private landowners and establish a special

season; LB829 would require the Game and Parks Commission to pay an additional \$2.4 million in lieu of taxes (PILT), taking away funding from other important programs; and LB863 would prohibit the state from acquiring any additional public lands.

New Hampshire: The NWTF provided comments in opposition to HB 1115, a bill which would have extended the discharge distance for firearms around non-residential, commercial buildings and would have restricted shooting (and by extension hunting) on town recreational land. Staff also provided comments in opposition to HB1571, which would have removed the requirement for New Hampshire Fish and Game commissioners to possess a hunting, fishing or trapping license.

North Carolina: The state NWTF chapter has voiced their support for expanded Sunday hunting opportunities on public lands.

Ohio: The state NWTF chapter is supportive of a proposal to change the spring turkey season opening to a Saturday instead of the traditional Monday.

Oregon: NWTF staff is working with the Department of Fish and Wildlife regarding the upland game bird regulation package for the next 5 years, which contains significant proposed changes to fall turkey seasons and quotas.

Rhode Island: The state NWTF chapter supported a proposed license fee increase, the first since 2003.

South Carolina: The NWTF continues to work with other conservation organizations to modify state raffle laws to provide more flexibility in our fundraising.

South Dakota: The state NWTF chapter opposed a proposal to reinstate rifles as a legal weapon for turkey hunting on private lands in western South Dakota. Ultimately, the proposed regulation failed.

Texas: The state NWTF chapter provided a letter of support for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department as they enter a regular legislative review of state agency effectiveness.

Utah: The state NWTF chapter provided public comment and an official letter opposing a proposal by the Division of Wildlife Resources to allow air rifles as a legal weapon for fall turkey season.

Virginia: NWTF District Biologist Cully McCurdy provided an update on the work accomplished through the cooperative agreement between the NWTF and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

Washington: In response to COVID-19, the state of Washington closed all hunting and fishing in the first phase of their stay-at-home order. The state NWTF chapter sent a letter outlining how turkey hunting was #ResponsibleRecreation. The state opened the season 3 days later.