



## FARM BILL 2018

NWTF Vice President of Conservation Ross Melinchuck and Director of Government Affairs Joel Pedersen met with congressional members and staff regarding the 2018 Farm Bill. The NWTF has provided suggestions and information to ensure strong conservation and forestry titles as the bill moves to conference. NWTF CEO Becky Humphries penned an op-ed published in The Daily Journal (Fergus Falls, Minnesota) and co-authored a Houston Chronicle article, both of which highlighted the importance of the farm bill to public and private conservation efforts and encouraged Congress to pass a farm bill with strong funding for conservation related programs.

The NWTF spearheaded a letter through the American Wildlife Conservation Partners to the chairmen and ranking members of the House Committee on Agriculture and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry outlining federal forest management priorities for the 2018 Farm Bill. The letter has also been sent to the House and Senate Farm Bill Conferees for their consideration as they work to finalize a farm bill.

## ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT REFORM

The NWTF submitted official comments on a discussion draft of legislation regarding the Endangered Species Act (ESA) introduced by Chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works John Barrasso. Barrasso's discussion draft, Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018, propose changes to the ESA to clarify listing and delisting information and criteria, the role of state wildlife agencies in ESA implementation and increased transparency to address challenges that have been raised from years of legal interpretation and resulting federal agency guidelines.

In our comments, the NWTF highlighted provisions that would improve state involvement in the ESA process. State wildlife agencies often have the best available information regarding species within their borders, allowing them to make informed decisions that will benefit both the species and the community. Additionally, the NWTF recommended that the legislation address the role that other federal agency biologists may have in determining the impact of an agency's action on a listed species.

## NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT

The NWTF submitted official comments to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) with recommendations on how to improve and streamline the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Streamlining NEPA processes and implementation would produce stronger, more constructive NEPA documents that would benefit the environment, the public and the agencies involved.

Recommendations include clarifying when an agency can "adopt" another agency's categorical exclusions and expanding categorical exclusion categories for management practices, such as prescribed burning and invasive species control. Other comments included reiterating the intent of an Environmental Assessment, clarifying the components of Environmental Impact Statements and updating regulations to reflect new technology.

## HUNTING ON NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

The NWTF submitted official comments to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) supporting the expansion of hunting on national wildlife refuges. The New York and California State Chapters submitted similar comments.

## DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR REORGANIZATION

CEO Becky Humphries and Director of Government Affairs Joel Pedersen participated in a roundtable discussion with Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke and other conservation organizations to discuss the Department of the Interior's reorganization effort. Discussions like these are important in opening dialogue between the DOI and other organizations for future projects that will benefit wildlife and habitat. The NWTF encouraged the DOI to balance the pace of the reorganization with important ongoing conservation efforts within the department.

# FIELD NOTES



## FEATURED STATE

**Michigan** NWTF and Ducks Unlimited completed collaborative projects to enhance wildlife habitat on the Allegan State Game Area using North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) and Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) funds. Representative Fred Upton of Michigan's 6<sup>th</sup> Congressional District and his staff toured the project sites and expressed gratitude to the organizations for the great conservation work.

## STATE UPDATES

### Connecticut

The state chapter opposed legislation that would have closed areas to hunting along the Quinnipiac River.

### Delaware

State chapter volunteers met with the state Secretary of Agriculture about potentially "leasing" a tract of state forest land for mentored hunting. The chapter ultimately decided not to pursue this opportunity due to the negative effects of privatizing public land.

### Iowa

- State chapter representatives attended Gov. Kim Reynolds' ceremonial signing of license fee legislation.
- State board member Fred Long participated in the Iowa Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus Day at the Range

### Kentucky

NWTF is helping the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife gather wild turkey population data to support future changes in wild turkey regulations.

### Michigan

The state chapter sponsored a Legislative Caucus Shoot in Lansing, which state chapter President Art Pelon and District Biologist Ryan Boyer attended.

### Missouri

- Co-chairs of the Missouri Sportsmen's Caucus, Rep. Robert Ross and Sen. Dave Schatz, attended and spoke at the NWTF's 4<sup>th</sup> annual Race for Hunt.
- Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) Wildland Fire Program Coordinator and NWTF member Ben Webster announced to the Missouri Prescribed Fire Council at their annual meeting that MDC was initiating in-house conversations to pursue right-to-burn legislation for Missouri.

- The Missouri Supreme Court ruled in favor of MDC in Hill v. Missouri Department of Conservation, allowing the department to maintain regulatory authority over captive cervids.
- State chapter Vice President Dan Zerr and District Biologist John Burk participated in the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucus' Southern Legislative Forum in St. Louis.

### New York

NWTF was represented by three state chapter board members at the annual New York Sportsman-Legislator Breakfast.

### North Carolina

- The state chapter supported legislation that placed a state constitutional amendment protecting the right to hunt and fish on state lands on the November ballot.
- District Biologist Chris Coxen has been nominated for a governor-appointed position on the North Carolina Forestry Advisory Council.

### Oklahoma

Volunteers and staff met with Oklahoma Department of Conservation officials to debrief on the past legislative session and discuss priorities for the upcoming session.

### Pennsylvania

The state chapter met with the Pennsylvania Game Commission to discuss their partnership. Among those topics was support for legislation authorizing a license increase.

### Texas

State chapter volunteers and staff met with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to discuss the need to protect dedicated hunting stamp funds from unauthorized uses.

## PARTNERSHIP UPDATES

To strengthen our partnership with the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation and increase our effectiveness in the states, NWTF and CSF staff have established regular policy conference calls. The intent of the calls is to establish an open line of communication between partners and discuss policy-related priorities within states.