Congressman Austin Scott of Georgia received the 2019 Government Partners Award. Scott has been a strong advocate for the conservation and hunting communities, and introduced Modernizing the Pittman-Robertson Fund for Tomorrow’s Needs Act in the last Congress, which passed the House of Representatives. He also co-sponsored Recovering America’s Wildlife Act and a variety of other legislation to benefit sportsmen and women.

Priorities for the 116th Congress

As we move into a new year and new legislative session, the NWTF is crafting legislative priorities for the 116th Congress. These priorities will be shared with officials to better communicate the significant issues and policies that our organization cares about. Some of these priorities include:

• Swift rulemaking for timely implementation of Farm Bill programs;
• Continued work towards solutions that will improve the pace and efficiency of forest management;
• Renewed support for conservation, access, and R3 related legislation, including Recovering America’s Wildlife Act, Pittman-Robertson Modernization, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund; and
• Reauthorization of vital Federal conservation programs and funding.

Finalized Farm Bill

The 2018 Farm Bill was signed into law by President Trump on December 20th, 2018, and the finalized bill included many of the NWTF’s recommended provisions. Within the Conservation Title, which remained funded at the previous bill’s level, key programs received increased funding and improved provisions to benefit forest landowners and wildlife habitat. The following programs were included in the 2018 Farm Bill:

• The Environmental Quality Incentives Program, which provides financial resources and one-on-one assistance to help farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners conserve natural resources, received nearly double the funding with 10% set aside specifically for practices that benefit wildlife.
• The Voluntary Public Access Program, which provides financial resources for states to pay private landowners to improve habitat and open their land for hunting and fishing, increased funding to $50 million.
• The Regional Conservation Partnership Program, which encourages partnerships between landowners and organizations to implement practices that increase the sustainability of natural resources, was reauthorized and received increased funding for state-level projects and critical conservation areas.
• The Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, which encourages collaborative ecosystem restoration on priority landscapes; doubled its funding level to $80 million.
• The Conservation Reserve Program, which incentivizes taking marginal farmland out of production to create wildlife habitat, received increased funding and acreage limits as well as $12 million for landowner incentives to thin or burn pine stands.

Government Partners Awards

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**Featured State**

**New Hampshire:** The state chapter submitted a letter opposing House Bill 282, which would reduce the authority of fish and game officers to search without a warrant. The state chapter also opposed House Bill 322, which would have mandated New Hampshire Fish and Game to adopt a phone and internet registration system for reporting turkey harvest instead of the physical check stations currently in place. Neither of these bills passed. Finally, Regional Director Carter Heath was asked by Governor Sununu to serve on a committee that is working to introduce “conservation driven curriculum” in New Hampshire schools. Conversations have centered around possible courses in the North American Model for Wildlife Conservation, Aquatic Ecology, Archery, and hunter education.

**State Updates**

**Colorado:** Tom Spezze, senior director of conservation for the West, and Jamie Nogle, district biologist, attended the Colorado Sportsmen’s Caucus and luncheon at the state capitol.

**Iowa:** The state chapter partnered with Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, and other organizations to encourage the passage of legislation that will fund IWILL (Iowa’s Water and Land Legacy), which will result in millions of dollars for future conservation. The state chapter contributed $5,000 which was matched with $5,000 from the American Hunting Heritage Fund to assist in this effort.

**Illinois:** The state chapter sent Governor Pritzker a letter of recommendation for Representative Jerry Costello to be appointed as Director of Illinois DNR. Costello is an avid sportsman and NWTF member, and currently serves as the Chairman for the state House Agriculture and Conservation Committee.

**Indiana:** Jason Lupardus, director of conservation operations, and Matt Underwood, regional director, met with Indiana DNR Commissioner Cameron Clark and Policy Director Bausman regarding Senate Bill 610, which would create duplicity in oversight of management of state forests. The state chapter submitted a letter to the state Natural Resources Committee opposing SB 610, and members were encouraged to reach out to their senators urging them to oppose the bill.

**Massachusetts:** Massachusetts Wildlife Director Mark Tisa attended the state chapter meeting in October to introduce himself to the board members and thank them for their productive partnership.

**Minnesota:** Planning is currently underway for a new Governor’s “One Shot” mentored turkey hunt to be held in the spring of 2019.

**Mississippi:** The state chapter supported the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks’ clarification to current law that hunting wild turkeys using bait is illegal.

**North Carolina:** The state chapter joined with other conservation groups to fund a digital ad campaign in support of the North Carolina Right to Hunt and Fish amendment, which passed in November.

**Nebraska:** The state chapter opposed Legislative Bill 126, which would create special deer permits and a special firearm deer season for certain landowners, over concerns regarding the potential negative impacts on other hunters and the state’s deer population.

**Ohio:** The state chapter, as part of the Ohio Conservation Federation, outlined key Ohio sportsmen’s issues for Governor Elect Mike Dewine to focus on in his first 100 days and first year in office. The Director of Ohio DNR, Mary Mertz, attended the state chapter awards dinner in January and spoke on the need for more hunters and public access.

**South Carolina:** The state chapter provided comments to the state senate endorsing the South Carolina DNR’s recommendations for a later spring season opener to address concerns over the declining turkey population. Members were encouraged to reach out to their senators and representatives, as well as the members of the pertinent state House and Senate committees through our advocacy platform urging legislation based on the DNR recommendations.

**South Dakota:** The state chapter supported rule changes proposed by the South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks Department to increase hunter safety by removing rifles from spring turkey hunting.

**Washington:** Regional Director Richard Mann met with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife staff to discuss turkey hunting, turkey tags, and to promote the NWTF. Mann also worked with DFW staff to modify a new regulation requiring fall turkey hunters to wear “hunter orange” so that it only applies when the season overlaps deer and elk rifle season.