

What Have We Done for Each Other Lately— A Frank Assessment of the Industry Conservation Partnership

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Fourscore and 3.2 billion dollars ago, the industry that I represent and the wildlife agencies that you represent entered into a partnership.

Industry committed to send you 11 cents out of every dollar's worth of firearms and ammunition we sold, and you promised to use those revenues to restore the wildlife populations on which my industry, your agencies, and our collective outdoor and sporting heritage was based.

This morning I can say, without hesitation, that the manufacturers of sporting firearms and ammunition have been proud of their role in this historic partnership—a partnership that is one of the most impressive and successful in history. We hope, and we suspect, you feel the same way.

But today—partly because it is my assigned topic and in part because my industry and your resource agencies are at a collective crossroads—it is appropriate to revisit this partnership.

Overview

My industry's support of the Pittman-Robertson (P-R) program has been impressive as has your tremendous work in using P-R funds to restore our wildlife populations. But the title of this talk and the challenges facing our collective constituencies demand that we look beyond P-R this morning. In doing that I will divide my comments into 2 basic sections; a rather quick overview of how my industry is contributing to our partnership beyond P-R and the more lengthy analysis of how we must go forward together.

I'd like to begin with hunter education, perhaps our greatest success story.

Hunter Education

Industry and wildlife agencies have been partners in the development and administration of hunter education programs for nearly 50 years. The industry underscored

its commitment to this partnership in 1970 when it successfully lobbied to earmark the proceeds from an existing 10% excise tax on handguns from general revenue to your agencies for use in hunter education and range construction.

Known as the Dingell-Hart bill, this legislation has provided states with more than \$700 million in funding for these important programs and adds some \$40 million per year. The archery industry which I am also proud to represent, though not directly or as eloquently as Dick Lattimer, came on board in 1972 with their own 11% tax which now yields some \$11 million annually for hunter education and range construction.

Public Awareness of What You Do

Over and above P-R and hunter education, industry has invested millions of its discretionary promotional dollars, largely through the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), to provide the American public, especially young people, with factual information on the conservation success story that all of you have written.

Target Shooting

My industry invests millions each year in the promotion of the target shooting sports. State agencies benefit directly and significantly from this effort as a dime for every dollar spent on every long gun, every handgun, every shotshell and every cartridge used at that range is returned to your agencies. Confidential industry statistics suggest that 25 cents of every P-R dollar you receive is generated at the shooting range.

Expanding target shooting opportunity and elevating the quality of the target shooting experience is one of the key challenges and opportunities facing our partnership in the coming decade.

Looking Forward

In 1995, the National Shooting Sports Foundation conducted the first comprehensive strategic analysis of the hunting and shooting sports industries. In 1996, to address the challenges and opportunities revealed by that analysis, we sponsored a first-of-its-kind shooting sports summit. We also sponsored an even more successful follow-up summit in 1997.

Among the concepts and challenges addressed at the summit which bear closely on this morning's subject are:

Hunter retention—the need to maintain the participation of our current population of hunters because they not only represent our current market but have traditionally been the source of tomorrow's hunters. The NSSF and the Wildlife Management Institute have received preliminary approval of a Federal Aid administrative grant to design and test programs to win back latent hunters and to help maintain the interest of current license buyers. When we find a program that works, it will be up to you to put it in place in your states.

Hunter recruitment—just as industry has joined with state agencies in supporting the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Project and its goal of breaking down barriers to women's participation in the outdoor sports, we must now also join together in a major attempt to break down barriers to minority participation in these sports. This is a critical effort because those that we refer to as minorities this morning—African, Asian, and Latin Americans—will represent the majority of our nation's population in some 10 years.

Recruitment

No one doubts that we have to do a better job of recruiting young people into the outdoor sports. The statistics are powerful and alarming. In 1986, hunters below the age of 24 made up 17% of the hunting population according to NSSF studies. In 1991, the percentage dropped to 9%, and in 1996, the percentage of hunters under the age of 24 fell to 8% of the hunter population. Just as there is no one reason for this decline, there will be no one answer. But there are answers. By working together, being more creative and more aggressive than we have in the past, we can welcome back the future of our sport.

Here's just one example of how we might do that. Bob Byrne of the Wildlife Management Institute was the first, to my knowledge, to advance the following very intriguing and very promising idea.

The concept is that a hunter—no, make that a million hunters—volunteer to undertake a higher level of training than is currently required, and therefore earn a higher level of certification. Hunters so certified may take a prospective hunter afield with no prior certification of the student required. The student is the responsibility of the mentor hunter and may harvest wildlife, whether it's a deer or a squirrel, on the mentor's license. The advantages and potential of such a program are obvious.

Invitation to "Step Outside"

"Step Outside" is one of several concepts to emerge from our shooting sports summit. The concept is brilliant in its simplicity and its flexibility. It can be one person introducing one person, one employer hosting 100 employees, or one state agency hosting an open house for thousands.

Step Outside will provide industry, state agencies, individual manufacturers, retailers, sportsmen's clubs, and individuals with an opportunity to provide potential new customers with a hands-on introduction to the outdoor sports.

I believe the following will help underscore why we are so excited about this concept. In a national public opinions poll conducted by the Roper Starch organization for NSSF, 46% of the men surveyed and 38% of the women said that they would definitely or probably accept an invitation to go target shooting if asked. My friends, that is 145 million Americans. Sixty-seven million men and nearly 48 million women who would definitely or probably accept an invitation to step outside. We just need to ask. If we ask, they will come. If we don't, they will find something else to do. They've proved that already.

Shooting Range Construction

I mentioned earlier that, by industry calculations, roughly 25 cents of every Pittman-Robertson dollar you receive, originates at the target range.

I also mentioned earlier that my industry and the archery industry supported excise taxes in the early 1970s to fund hunter education and range construction. What I didn't say is that these taxes collectively have raised half a billion dollars that could have been used for range construction and swell that total by \$25 million a year.

What I didn't say at that point is that less 10%, in fact, way less than 10% of those funds have been earmarked for range construction.

Earlier I said it's time to take a look at whether or not each of us is holding up their end of the bargain. In this case, my friends, I don't think you are.

In making this statement, I am fully mindful of its complexities. I am aware that our industries-agency partnership is not one partnership, it is 50 separate ones. Some of our partners have embraced the concept of shooting range construction. Others are slowly warming to the notion, and still others continue to keep the concept at stiff arm length. The use of Federal Aid money is not the sole measure of a state's range development effort. However, we are also convince that we can do better in this area.

In closing, there may be no better example of the need to revitalize our partnership than the following unsettling announcement. Collection of P-R tax revenues for the last fiscal year were down 16%. This is the largest single decrease in the 60-year history of the Pittman-Robertson program. It translates into hundreds of millions of dollars of lost revenue for industry and tens of millions of dollars of lost revenue for yours. More importantly, it translates into fewer hunters and fewer shooters. And fewer hunters and shooters today translates into far fewer customers today unless we act aggressively and decisively. Our partnership will be tested.

Conclusion

But 60 years ago we joined together in responding to a far more urgent and far more serious problem with historic success. It is because of the success of that partnership that we are here today, and it is because of the strength of that partnership that I am confident we can successfully respond to the challenges and opportunities which face us today.

Thanks pardners.