

The Fish and Wildlife Diversity Funding Initiative

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Good morning. It is a pleasure and an honor to address this 49th annual meeting of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Aldo Leopold may have said it best when he stated that “the first rule of intelligent tinkering is to save all the pieces.” As wildlife and fisheries managers, the time has come for us to take a hard, critical look at our management practices to determine if we are, indeed, saving all the pieces. Over the past 50 years, we have had a lot of wildlife and fisheries management success stories. White-tailed deer, wood ducks, wild turkey, and striped bass are only a few of the successes that have resulted from well-executed management programs. But, rather than resting on our laurels and boasting, we need to be looking to the future. We need to be looking at how to increase our wildlife success stories and brighten the future of wildlife conservation. In other words, we need to ask ourselves if we’re working to save all of the pieces.

Today, we’ve heard several presentations about ecosystem management as the next challenge for the wildlife profession. The idea is not new and, despite the fact that it has been bantered around in meetings like this one, it is not an idea conceived just by government bureaucrats. If we really stop to think about it, ecosystem management is just common sense wildlife management. And, in many cases we’ve been managing ecosystems for years.

But, the biggest stumbling block in our attempts to manage multiple wild-life species and their habitats has been a lack of funding. It all comes down to money. Pittman-Robertson and Wallop-Breaux, or The Federal Aid in Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Acts, have provided wildlife and fisheries managers with a reliable, constant source of funds to manage game species for decades. And while many other species benefit from these game management practices, the funds to manage specifically for other species of wildlife that are not hunted or fished for are extremely limited as evidenced by this breakdown of my own agency’s budget.

As wildlife and fisheries agencies, we are being asked to stretch our dollars and staff thinner and thinner. As the Director of Georgia’s Wildlife Resources Division, I can sympathize with those of you who are skeptical about managing ecosystems. How, you ask, are we going to fund management programs for

ecosystems when we can barely scrape together enough money and personnel to manage a few key pieces?

Presently, the funding for federal agencies is being reduced. This year, cut-backs of between 5 and 15 percent are expected. It is estimated that there will continue to be a budget decline of approximately 5 percent a year for the next 7 years in an effort to balance the budget. There is also specific prohibition against spending money to list species under The Endangered Species Act. We can expect congressional appropriations for wildlife-related programs to continue to decline. So where does that leave fish and wildlife managers? It leaves them struggling to fund existing programs and new ones that are not considered.

Over the years, a number of programs have emerged with broad wildlife objectives and one common thread—to implement management programs for wildlife species not covered by PR and DJ funds. Partners in Flight, the Shorebird Plan, the presently embattled and debated Endangered Species Act, the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1980, and countless others have been passed or developed to help protect a broad array of wildlife species. Many of these programs have provided great benefits. Others, such as the Nongame Act, have never been funded. Each year, managers of these programs must fight a battle on Capitol Hill to get funding to continue their work. In an ideal environment, these programs would all have consistent funding and carry out their work thus giving us the ability to manage all of the pieces that make up an ecosystem. Unfortunately, it's never an ideal world.

Despite the funding dilemma, we still have an obligation that is much broader than to just manage those wildlife species that are hunted and fished for. What is needed is a paradigm shift in fish and wildlife agencies. It's time for wildlife agencies to diversify their programs—to shift away from managing just for game and sportfish species and take a more holistic approach to wildlife. For most of our careers, we have been managing wildlife for hunters and anglers, our "hook and bullet" audience as we say in Georgia. We like this group, and we are comfortable working with them. But now, we are seeing a dramatic change in the face of the wildlife user. We must respond to this change.

The facts are these—the number of hunters and fishermen is declining and the numbers of non-hunters and non-anglers who enjoy the outdoors is expanding rapidly. We can no longer assume that hunters and anglers can or will continue to foot the bill for the wide-array of wildlife conservation, recreation, and education programs expected by the public.

In 1990, 37.5 million people took trips specifically to view wildlife, up from only 23 million in 1980. Obviously, this audience represents a new and growing group of wildlife users. And, with this new constituent base comes a new list of demands. Demands for lands on which to enjoy these different activities, demands for facilities on these lands, and demands for a variety of wildlife to view. These demands are best served by an ecosystem approach to wildlife management. However, unlike the programs for hunters and anglers, the demands of these non-consumptive users are not backed with funding.

Fifty years ago, when populations of game animals were at all-time lows,

sportsmen and women banded together in support of the Pittman-Robertson and Wallop-Breaux Legislation. Last year alone, these two programs provided \$411 million for wildlife and sportfish conservation and management. These user-pay, user-benefit programs have had tremendous successes with restoring many game species to their native habitats.

Fifty years later, we have a new group of constituents who are concerned about other types of wildlife and wildlife conservation. Over the past decade, we have been trying to meet the needs of this new group using existing resources. It hasn't been easy and we are still left with a funding dilemma.

If we are going to address the concerns of this new type of wildlife enthusiast and assume responsibility for all species, including fish, flora and fauna, we must shift our way of thinking about wildlife. The distinction between game and nongame, sport fish and non-sport fish was created by traditional wildlife managers limited by funding sources. If we are going to embrace wildlife diversity and embrace ecosystem management, we need to find a way to fund this shift.

I believe the answer to many of these problems lies in the Fish and Wildlife Diversity Funding Initiative, now being called "Teaming With Wildlife." Modeled after Pittman-Robertson and Wallop-Breaux, this program would provide a consistent, reliable source of money which would allow us to meet some of the needs of ecosystem management. It would fill in the funding gaps separating the Federal Aid in Sportfish and Wildlife Restoration programs from other wildlife conservation programs by allowing state agencies to fund the personnel and resources needed to manage a broader array of wildlife. Teaming with Wildlife is the bridge that will span the gap between our traditional roles of game and sport fish management agencies and help us evolve into the new wildlife management agencies that will "save the pieces" and place us at the forefront of the environmental movement into the 21st century. It will allow us to meet the demands of our new constituent base without leaving behind our traditional users.

The approach used in the Wildlife Funding Initiative is not new. It is simply an expansion of a concept born in the 1930s with the Pittman-Robertson Act, expanded in the late 1940s to the Dingell-Johnson Act, then into the Wallop-Breaux Act. Now we need to expand it once again to encompass other wildlife. The Wildlife Funding Initiative would effectively create the third leg of the wildlife conservation stool by funding management of many nongame species.

The Wildlife Funding Initiative would raise approximately \$350 million per year to fund state wildlife conservation, recreation and education programs. The money would be raised through a modest surcharge on a spectrum of outdoor products, including binoculars, hiking boots, backpacks, sleeping bags, field guides, birdseed, birdfeeders, tents, film, cameras, and other equipment. In essence, it's a wildlife user-fee paid for by those who benefit from and enjoy wildlife. The surcharge would never exceed 5% and it would be levied at the manufacturers level. Studies show that Americans spend approximately \$18 billion annually on wildlife-associated recreation and this number is increasing, not

decreasing. The average cost to the typical wildlife enthusiast would be less than \$10 per year.

Not only could these funds be used to acquire lands and build facilities for wildlife enthusiasts, but they would fill the funding gap that, in the past, has prevented our agencies from managing for all species of wildlife. The monies could be used to purchase critical wildlife habitats, to fund research and surveys on various nongame species and to develop management plans for these species. Nongame species management will be blended into existing management programs that presently target game species.

Monies from Teaming With Wildlife could also provide funding to meet the objectives of other programs, such as the Shorebird Plan, the Lower Mississippi Valley Ecosystem Management effort, GAP Analysis, the South Atlantic Migratory Bird Initiative, and Partners in Flight, which have been strapped for funding.

The program will work by allowing overlap of a variety of plans. For example, the North American Waterfowl Plan could be combined with the Shorebird Plan. Waterfowl experts and shorebird experts could get together to decide on the management practices that would be the most effective for the most species. Species that are declining in large numbers would receive the most emphasis. Then, you could add the South Atlantic Migratory Bird Initiative which identifies specific goals for specific migratory bird species. This would provide protection not only for the wood thrush, but also for black bears. The habitat would be manipulated to benefit prairie warblers as well as bobwhite quail. The program would allow for ecosystem management on a broad scale that would benefit a broad array of wildlife, both game and nongame. The program would inject \$350 million into states and bring in partners like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Duck Unlimited, Quail Unlimited, the Wild Turkey Federation and other conservation groups. We must include industry and private landowners as well. By combining our dollars, expertise and energy, we can accomplish great things for wildlife conservation. Since the program will not be dependent on annual appropriations, it can bridge the funding gap and open up a realm of new management possibilities for wildlife conservation.

I believe this Initiative is the answer to many of our funding problems. This program will allow us to expand our list of wildlife success stories by providing funding for a wide variety of species. Ten years from now, I hope we can look back and say that we were able to protect 10,000 acres of critical habitat in Georgia. For example, maybe we can boast that we have successfully stopped the decline of 15 to 25 species of neotropical migratory birds that nest in Georgia. I hope that in a decade we can say that we have identified many of the problems with declining frog populations and are developing management techniques that will solve these problems. These are only a few examples of success stories I believe can become realities with a consistent funding source. Managing all wildlife is the wave of the future, and it is one that we, as fish and wildlife managers, need to be positioning ourselves prominently on the crest.

Now, where are we with the Wildlife Funding Initiative? Already, IAFWA has signed on a long list of national supporters, including the National Audubon Society, BASS Anglers Sportsmen's Society, the National Wildlife Federation, The Wildlife Society, the American Fisheries Society, the Wildlife Management Institute and others. The list of groups and organizations endorsing this program now numbers 135, and it is expanding every day.

Presently, IAFWA and many states are launching a nation-wide letter writing campaign targeting industries who would be affected by this surcharge and encouraging them to support the program. The program has been well-received in Georgia and already a large number of individuals and groups have been writing letters in support of this program. These groups not only represent hunters and anglers, but they also represent hang gliders, cavers, garden clubs, bird-watchers, and other groups with whom our division previously had little or no contact. This is a great opportunity to increase the constituency base of your agency. We have made contacts through our nongame program with many organizations who have never worked with us before. For example, The Garden Club of Georgia is working on Community Wildlife Project with DNR, and we now have their support for many of our other programs. What these people are saying is that they are willing, as hunters and anglers were willing 50 years ago, to put their money where their mouth is in support of wildlife conservation.

If the letter writing campaign is successful, we hope to see legislation introduced within the next six months. When the Republicans swept into office during last November's elections, many of us were gravely concerned that any chance of passing the Fish and Wildlife Diversity Funding Initiative was dead. I am pleased to report that this is not the case. While the Republicans say they are against any new "taxes," they do not see Teaming With Wildlife as a tax. Instead, they say they can support the Funding Initiative's "user-pay, user-benefit" concept and are especially fond of the idea that the money will be returned to state fish and wildlife programs.

Another positive appeal to this Congress concerns endangered species. The Congressional leadership is not very sympathetic towards our present endangered species laws and the manner in which they have been enforced. Offering the Fish and Wildlife Diversity Funding Initiative as a means of keeping wildlife species from becoming endangered is particularly appealing to this Congress.

I personally met with the Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich, and explained the importance of passing the Wildlife Funding Initiative. He said the Republicans could support this concept. Others have also been in contact with Congressional representatives and have received favorable responses.

If we can get this legislation passed, I believe it will solve the funding dilemma that state wildlife agencies are facing. It would also provide us with money which could be used for personnel, research, land acquisition and other aspects that are critical components of the ecosystem management approach. Those of you who view this as just a nongame program need to get your heads out of the sand and get on board. Teaming With Wildlife will benefit every aspect of your agency no matter which section you work for.

This Initiative has to be a grassroots effort involving all of the users. It is critical that you create a base of support within your agency and take a lead role in this conservation effort. If you have not already done so, you need to be forming state coalitions made up of conservation organizations and obtaining support of your congressional delegation. You should also be encouraging any industries in your state that would be affected by this Initiative to support this wildlife conservation effort. There are cards and information on the table in back of this room. Please pick them up on your way out and take time to write letters of support.

This is not a “flash-in-the-pan” project. We have been working on this since the 1980 passage of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act and have yet to secure a nongame funding source. I firmly believe that this program can brighten the future of wildlife management. The time to get this Act passed is now, and, I am confident that it can happen in this Congress. But, each and every one of us, must work for its passage. The Wildlife Funding Initiative could well be the most important piece of wildlife conservation legislation that many of us will see in our lifetimes. It is potentially the most important project that I, and many of you, will work on in our careers. Today, I am asking each of you to get involved, to take a leadership role, and to ensure that you are a key player in passing this important conservation legislation. Thank you!