

Testimony for the Record of

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Before the

Committee on Environment & Public Works
United States Senate

Regarding

*S. 1514, the Hunting Heritage and Environmental Legacy Preservation for
Wildlife Act*

July 19, 2017

Dear Chairman Barrasso and Ranking Member Carper:

The National Shooting Sports Foundation appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony for the record in support of S.1514, *the Hunting Heritage and Environmental Legacy Preservation for Wildlife Act* (HELP Act). This bipartisan legislation includes a number of provisions that will enhance wildlife habitat and expand access and opportunities for hunting, fishing and recreational shooting. NSSF strongly urges members of the committee to engage in the bipartisan and bicameral collaboration necessary to enact this legislation during the 115th Congress.

The National Shooting Sports Foundation is the trade association for the firearms, ammunition, hunting and shooting sports industry. Our mission is to promote, protect and preserve hunting and the shooting sports. Formed in 1961, NSSF has a membership of more than 12,000 manufacturers, distributors, firearms retailers, shooting ranges, sportsmen's organizations and endemic media organizations.

The HELP Act includes a provision modeled after S.593, sponsored by Senator Capito, along with lead cosponsors Senators Bennet, Boozman, and Heitkamp, that would remove a number of barriers that are currently preventing state wildlife agencies from utilizing Pittman-Robertson excise tax funds to develop much needed shooting range infrastructure. In recent years, demand for safe places for recreational shooters, hunters, law enforcement and others to shoot has increased. Unfortunately, the additional range infrastructure needed to meet the increased demand has not been developed. Adding additional range infrastructure to meet the growing demand would recruit and retain new hunters and recreational shooters while also significantly increasing the conservation revenues generated by excise taxes on firearms and ammunition that are utilized to pay for wildlife conservation and management, law enforcement and hunter education.

Hunters, recreational shooters and firearms, archery, and ammunition manufacturers are the largest financial supporters of wildlife conservation throughout the United States having contributed over \$12 billion to habitat conservation, recreational shooting and wildlife management through Pittman-Robertson excise tax payments since the program's inception. A significant portion of this amount is directly attributable to recreational shooters who, per-capita, spend even more than hunters on firearms and ammunition and archery equipment subject to these important excise taxes. For example, NSSF conservatively estimates over 75% of all ammunition manufactured is used for target shooting.

Despite the unqualified success of this historic “user-pays” system, Pittman-Robertson funds have not always been administered in a manner that encourages the creation of recreational shooting opportunities, even though these shooters who may never go afield are helping to fund conservation. Section 2 of the HELP Act would help address this loss of access and opportunity by reducing existing local and state Pittman-Robertson matching requirements for shooting ranges from 25% to 10%. Pittman-Robertson funds are allocated to states on a formula basis. Therefore, while this change would provide additional flexibility and capability to states, the reimbursement rate would not result in increased federal spending.

Section 2 would also amend an existing requirement that Pittman-Robertson funding used for shooting ranges be obligated within two years by allowing the funds to accrue over five years. This extension would allow individual projects to be funded over multiple budget cycles and significantly enhance the ability of states to build and maintain shooting ranges.

Additionally, NSSF strongly supports Section 7 of the HELP Act which affirms previously issued U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service rules to remove wolves in the Great Lakes and Wyoming from the Endangered Species Act (ESA), returning management of these populations to state wildlife agencies. The federal government’s decision to remove the gray wolf from the list of threatened and endangered species was the scientific based threshold indicating the time to resume state management. Following through on the resumption of state authority is the only way to manage wolf population in concert with other species under state management and consider questions of future wolf management under the widest set of options.

After being listed for decades on the ESA, populations of gray wolves have recovered beyond expectations. Effects on wildlife populations, such as changes to big game species behavior and declining fawn and calf recruitment, along with continuing risks to farmers, ranchers and sportsmen, can be addressed only if the United States Congress again supports the Fish and Wildlife Service in returning management authority of gray wolves to the states.

Remaining attempts to extend federal authority are clearly designed to revise the recovery goals. Advocates seeking to do this through the courts are undermining the credibility of the ESA. They have the option to use the ESA legitimately by petitioning the Fish and Wildlife Service for a new listing if they can make the case that the wolf still requires the protections of the ESA.

State agencies are fully qualified and best positioned to responsibly manage wolf populations in accordance with the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. All should recall that the wolf has never been managed under the North American Model and doing so now will be a milestone in the evolution of scientific management.

The success of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation relies upon sportsmen's ability to participate in the regulated and ethical harvest of game species. To that end, states must have the ability to utilize hunting and trapping as a wildlife management tool for wolves as they successfully do for other species.

Congress has enacted this language before for Idaho and Montana and should do so again in order to strike the proper balance between sustaining wolf populations and protecting the other wildlife and livestock that are vital to the economic wellbeing of communities throughout the wolves' range.

We applaud your leadership on this bipartisan conservation and outdoor recreation bill. We also encourage your collaboration with your colleagues on the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources in order to get the best ideas from both committees and ensure the greatest likelihood that one or more packages of sportsmen bills become law.

Sincerely,

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National Shooting Sports Foundation