CHAPTER 7
Wildlife and American Sport Hunting

OBJECTIVES
After completing this chapter, you should be able to
- Explain the primary sources of funding for wildlife and habitat enhancement in the United States.
- List the acts and legislation that have been passed to aid wildlife.
- Describe the relationship between sport hunters and wildlife populations.
- List some of the major private wildlife conservation organizations.
- Explain how funding generated by sport hunters also benefits nongame species.

INTRODUCTION
Since the fight to conserve America’s wildlife began in the late 1800s, it has been led by American sport hunters. In contrast to the “market hunters” of the late 1800s and early 1900s, sport hunters were concerned about America’s wildlife resources. Market hunters showed little regard for the wildlife that provided for their livelihoods. They harvested wildlife by the millions, basically all year long (Figure 7-1). They took migratory waterfowl and shorebirds during both fall and spring migrations and from their nesting colonies as well. This was an appalling situation to sport hunters, who tried for many years to pass on their own ethics to the market hunters. Sport hunters and conservationists soon realized that as long as wildlife was commercialized and could be shipped and sold for profit, it was in
grave danger of being overexploited. In fact, such species as the heath hen and passenger pigeon were exploited to extinction.

Sport hunting publications such as Forest and Stream and American Field and conservation groups such as the Audubon Society, the League of American Sportsmen, the American Ornithologist’s Union, and the Boone and Crockett Club were instrumental in the passage of the Lacey Act of 1900. This act banned the interstate transportation and sale of most wildlife and wildlife by-products, such as feathers. It was the beginning of the end for the market hunting era. Once it was no longer profitable to slaughter wildlife, responsible management could begin. Even though some progress was being made in regard to wildlife, the early 1900s was not a particularly good period for America’s wildlife. Habitat destruction in the form of cleared forests, plowed grasslands, and dammed rivers was widespread. There were few wildlife laws and fewer game wardens to enforce them. There was no system for funding wildlife management or habitat preservation. The 1930s probably represented the low point for America’s wild creatures. Several species were already extinct, and many more were on the same road. People began to realize that serious action had to be taken. The adage “Leave the wildlife alone and it will be all right” was not working. In many areas the sight of once-common animals such as whitetailed deer was something that only the old-timers could remember.

**FUNDING AT LAST**

Fortunately for America’s wildlife, some dedicated sport hunters and conservationists organized the firearms and ammunition industries and proposed a remarkable plan. They encouraged Congress to continue collecting a 10 percent excise tax on firearms and ammunition used for sporting purposes. However, they
SECTION 1  INTRODUCTION

wanted those funds earmarked for wildlife restoration. These funds were to be used for wildlife research and habitat management to help stabilize and increase animal populations. This effort resulted in the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, more commonly known as the Pittman-Robertson Act. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed it into law in 1937. The excise tax was raised to 11 percent in 1941, and it remains at that level today.

Progress was slow at first. Just as the program was getting started, World War II began, and millions of sport hunters joined the armed forces. This sharply reduced the amount of money raised by the excise tax. However, by the early 1950s millions of dollars began to flow into the management of America’s wildlife. Many species of wildlife, both game and nongame species, have benefited from the Pittman-Robertson Act. In 1930, for example, wild turkeys were rare in all but a few southern states (Figure 7-2). Today turkeys number in the millions and they can be found in nearly every state. Wood ducks were thought to be past saving because of extensive habitat destruction. Today they are one of our more numerous ducks, perhaps the most common breeding duck in the East. The pronghorn antelope population has increased from fewer than 30,000 to more than 1 million. These are just a few of the wildlife management success stories made possible by Pittman-Robertson funding.

FIGURE 7-2  Pittman-Robertson funds have been used to restock many species of wildlife, such as wild turkeys, to their former range.

HOW THE ACT WORKS

The equipment excise taxes collected directly from manufacturers and importers go to the U.S. Treasury’s Trust Fund Branch. The money is then distributed to the states using a formula that takes into account both the number of hunting licenses sold in the state and the state’s area. Additional funding was
provided in 1970, when a 10 percent tax on handguns was added to the original act, and in 1972, when an 11 percent tax was placed on archery equipment. Both of these amendments provided significant additional funding. It is estimated that these taxes, paid by sportsmen and sportswomen, have produced over $10 billion for wildlife conservation since the program began. Today taxes collected from sportsmen and sportswomen contribute over $400 million per year for wildlife conservation programs. This steady, earmarked supply of money has allowed wildlife managers to undertake the long-term projects essential to successfully manage wildlife. The states and territories use these funds where they are most needed, typically to purchase land for wildlife habitat, manage and maintain existing habitat, and conduct research. Perhaps the best thing about the Pittman-Robertson Act is that many people do not realize they are paying a tax because it does not occur at the cash register when they check out, like a sales tax does.

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF HUNTING

In addition to the money generated by the Pittman-Robertson Act each year, sportsmen and sportswomen spend millions more. Hunters must buy licenses and tags for the wildlife they attempt to harvest. This provides millions of dollars to the wildlife departments in most states. In 2007 a hunter in Kansas, for example, would have spent $20.50 for a resident hunting license. This entitled the hunter to hunt small game such as quail, rabbits, and pheasants. To hunt waterfowl required a federal waterfowl stamp costing $15.50 and a state waterfowl stamp for $6.75. This totals $42.75 in license fees to hunt birds and small game. To hunt white-tailed deer or other large game, additional license fees would apply. These fees are typical of the license fees paid by hunters throughout the country. License fees currently supply state wildlife agencies with more than $900 million each year for wildlife management, research, habitat preservation, restoration of species, and other tasks.

Many sportsmen and sportswomen travel out of state to hunt. Some species of game animals may not be available in their state or may not be as abundant as in a neighboring state (Figure 7-3). When hunters are not residents of the state or states in which they intend to pursue game, they must pay nonresident fees. These fees are usually considerably higher than resident fees. For example, a nonresident small-game license in Kansas is $72.50, compared to a cost for residents of $20.50. A general nonresident hunting license in Texas would cost $300. It is important to note that license fees provide a significant portion of each state’s wildlife conservation budget. In western states such as Colorado, Wyoming, Montana,
and Idaho, a permit to hunt elk or mule deer may cost $400 or more. As states tighten their budgets, these license fees have become even more important to the wildlife conservation efforts of each state.

License fees are only part of the economics of hunting. Sport hunters spend many billions of dollars each year on hotel rooms, meals, gas, clothing, and other equipment. In some states, such as Texas, where leasing of land for hunting is commonplace, the lease fees received by the landowner are very important. Leases are becoming more and more common in many Midwestern states, and leasing also helps landowners realize the economic value of their wildlife resources. In some cases lease fees might be the difference between profit and loss for the landowner. Many farmers and ranchers have been helped through tough economic times by lease fees. When cattle or crop prices are low, fees paid by hunters to landowners can make the difference between survival and bankruptcy. Many rural communities, already hard hit by tough economic times, are dependent on money generated by hunters for their survival. In addition, lease fees encourage farmers and ranchers to leave some areas for wildlife. Once landowners realize the economic value of wildlife, they are more likely to manage and protect that resource. It is estimated that Texas hunters spend over a billion dollars per year to pursue game animals. Of course, many species other than game species benefit from hunter-generated funds. The total economic impact of hunting in the United States easily exceeds $12 billion per year. It is easy to see how important hunting is to wildlife and to the economy in general.

PRIVATE CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS

There are dozens of privately funded and managed wildlife conservation organizations. The majority of those that take an active role in wildlife management and conservation were begun by sport hunters. These organizations spend millions of dollars each year on habitat acquisition and improvement, research, and management of a variety of wildlife species. It is impossible to discuss each of the several hundred private conservation organizations in the United States. However, a brief description of a couple of these conservation organizations is in order.

Although some conservation organizations are designed to help a specific species, projects they undertake benefit a variety of nontargeted wildlife. For example, a restored freshwater marsh helps not only the target species, such as ducks, but also dozens of other animals, such as muskrats, raccoons, shellfish, predators, and fish. Similarly, it is unlikely that bobwhite quail would be the only species to use a food plot planted for their benefit. Many species of seed-eating birds, small mammals, and their predators would use such a food plot. In this way hundreds of nongame species benefit from the management of a few game species. The millions of dollars that sportsmen and sportswomen spend to help game animals actually benefits many more nongame animals.
CHAPTER 7  Wildlife and American Sport Hunting

DUCKS UNLIMITED

Waterfowl are some of the most intensely managed species in the entire world. Many species fly thousands of miles each year between nesting and wintering grounds. Thus, waterfowl require not only national but international management. Ducks Unlimited (DU), one of the oldest conservation organizations in the United States, deals exclusively with waterfowl. Since its incorporation in 1937, DU has been a pioneer in waterfowl research, habitat conservation, and habitat improvement (Figure 7-4). An avid duck hunter, Joseph Palmer Knapp of New York is considered the father of DU. Upset by a serious decline in waterfowl numbers during the early Dust Bowl years; Knapp formed the More Game Birds in America Foundation in 1930. The board of directors of More Game Birds soon realized that to improve duck numbers significantly in the fall, nesting habitat and thereby nesting success would have to be improved. To achieve this goal DU was formed in 1937. The majority of the ducks in North America originate in the prairie pothole region of southern Canada, so all of DU’s early efforts were aimed at this region.

By 1940 DU was raising about $140,000 per year for waterfowl management, and More Game Birds phased itself out, giving DU all its assets. In 1943 DU had 103 projects on 1 million acres. In 1966, DU had its first $1 million fundraising year. Ducks Unlimited established Ducks Unlimited de Mexico (DUMAC) in 1974, with the goal of protecting critical winter waterfowl habitat south of the border. Today DU has some 500,000 members and has raised at least $750 million for wetland conservation. This is a far cry from the $90,000 and the 6,000 supporters DU had in its first year of existence. DU has a mission statement that reads: “The mission of Ducks Unlimited is to fulfill the annual life cycle needs of North American waterfowl by protecting, enhancing, restoring, and managing important wetlands and associated uplands.” The importance of DU’s work on behalf of wetland and waterfowl conservation cannot be

FIGURE 7-4  Major efforts have been made to preserve and maintain wetlands.
overestimated. With the continued efforts of thousands of conservation-minded sportsmen and sportswomen, our **dwindling** waterfowl habitat and the many species that live there have a fighting chance.

**DELTA WATERFOWL**

Dozens of other conservation organizations work to protect and enhance wildlife resources and habitats. Delta Waterfowl is dedicated to waterfowl and wetlands research and education. Delta Waterfowl is a division of the North American Wildlife Foundation, established in 1911. The Delta Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Station had its beginnings in the 1930s and today is considered one of the premier waterfowl and wetlands research centers in the world. For half a century the Station, which is located on the 50,000-acre Delta Marsh in central Manitoba, Canada, has conducted scientific research and trained biologists.

Recognizing that the majority of ducks grow up on private prairie potholes, Delta Waterfowl launched a program known as Adopt a Pothole. Within the framework of its Prairie Farm Program, Delta contracts with farmers to protect and enhance private potholes throughout the prairie pothole region. Farmers are paid incentives to maintain their wetland areas, and nesting structures known as hen houses are erected. Research has indicated that up to 90 percent of all duck nests may be destroyed by predators. The hen house is designed to reduce these losses to predators. We have covered only two conservation organizations in any detail, but there are dozens more. Many, such as Pheasants Forever, Quail Unlimited, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and the Desert Bighorn Sheep Council, for example, are concerned with a specific species of wildlife. Others, such as the Boone and Crockett Club and the Foundation for North American Sheep, are involved with multiple species. The Boone and Crockett Club, for example, was founded by Theodore Roosevelt and other concerned sport hunters to promote hunting ethics and establish wildlife conservation practices, which led to the recovery of many big-game species in North America. Additional information on these and other conservation organizations can be found in Appendix C.

**SUMMARY**

America’s sport hunters are largely responsible for the recovery and current abundance of many species of wildlife (Figure 7-5). The funding and leadership they provide are crucial to the continued well-being of our wildlife resources. Regulated sport hunting has never threatened or endangered a species. Habitat destruction and competition from introduced species are responsible for the bulk of our endangered and threatened species. The protection of wildlife habitat should concern everyone who cares about America’s wild animals.
FIGURE 7-5 Sporting organizations have installed thousands of nesting boxes. These boxes, complete with predator guards, have brought the wood duck back from the edge of extinction. Today the wood duck is one of the most common ducks in the eastern United States.

Money generated from the Pittman-Robertson Act is also used to fund hunter education and firearms safety classes in every state. All states have some requirements for hunter education, with most being mandatory. Contact your state’s wildlife conservation agency (see Appendix B) for more information on hunter education and firearms safety.
Fill in the Blank

Fill in the blank to complete the statements.

1. American ____________ have led the fight to conserve wildlife.
2. Species of wildlife such as the ____________ and the passenger pigeon were exploited to extinction.
3. The ____________ Act of 1900 banned the interstate transportation and sale of most wildlife and wildlife products.
4. The ____________ Act, better known as the Pittman-Robertson Act, provided funding for wildlife management.
5. By the early ____________, millions of dollars began to flow into the management of America’s wildlife.
6. Many species of wildlife, both ____________ and ____________, have benefited from the Pittman-Robertson Act.
7. Excise taxes on firearms and ammunition are collected directly from ____________ and importers.
8. Pittman-Robertson funds are distributed to states based on their area and the number of ____________ sold in them.
9. Additional funding was provided in ____________, when a 10 percent tax on handguns was added to the original Pittman-Robertson Act.
10. In 1972 an 11 percent tax was placed on ____________ equipment.
11. It is estimated that taxes paid by sport hunters have provided ____________ for wildlife conservation since the program began.
12. Pittman-Robertson monies are typically used to purchase land for wildlife habitat, to manage and maintain existing habitat, and to ____________.
13. Hunters must purchase ____________ and tags for the wildlife they intend to harvest.
14. License and tag fees provide ____________ dollars to the wildlife departments in most states.
15. Waterfowl hunters must purchase ____________ stamps regardless of which state they live in.
16. Sport hunters spend millions of dollars on such things as hotel rooms, ____________, gas, clothing, and other ____________.
17. ____________ fees encourage farmers and ranchers to leave some areas for wildlife.
18. Hunting-generated money is important to wildlife and to the ____________ in general.
19. There are ____________ of privately funded and managed wildlife conservation organizations.
20. Some conservation organizations are designed to help a ____________ species.
21. Hundreds of ____________ species benefit from the management of a few game species.
22. ____________ are some of the most intensely managed species in the world.
23. ____________, one of the oldest conservation organizations in the United States, deals exclusively with waterfowl.
24. Ducks Unlimited was incorporated in ____________.
25. By 1943 DU had 103 projects over ____________ acres.
26. Today DU has ____________ members and has raised at least ____________ for wetland conservation.
27. __________________ is another private conservation organization dedicated to waterfowl.
28. One of Delta Waterfowl’s key programs is the Adopt a __________________ program.
29. List four private conservation organizations other than DU and the Delta Waterfowl Foundation.
   (a) __________________
   (b) __________________
   (c) __________________
   (d) __________________
30. Regulated __________________ has never been the cause of a single threatened or endangered species.
31. __________________ and competition from introduced species are responsible for the bulk of our endangered and threatened species.

Short Answer
1. How can nonhunters help to support wildlife and wildlife management?
2. How important have sport hunters been to the success of wildlife management in America? Why?

Discussion
1. In your opinion, how important is continued funding for wildlife? Why is it important?
2. How can we work to ensure continued funding for wildlife, wildlife habitat, and wildlife management?

Learning Activities
1. Contact your state wildlife and fisheries management agency (Appendix B) and determine what percentage of its total budget comes from Pittman-Robertson funds. How are these funds used? This activity is similar to learning activity 1 in Chapter 4. The information you need to complete this activity should be in the material you received to complete activity 1 in Chapter 4.
2. Contact one of the private conservation organizations listed in Appendix C. Request general information about the organization, what it does to help wildlife, and how it accomplishes its goals. Present a report on your findings to your class.

Useful Web Sites
DELTA WATERFOWL
<http://www.deltawaterfowl.org>

DUCKS UNLIMITED
<http://www.ducks.org>

BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB
<http://www.boone-crockett.org>

QUAIL UNLIMITED
<http://www.qu.org>

NATIONAL SHOOTING SPORTS FOUNDATION
<http://www.nssf.org>

Appendix C contains additional private conservation organizations and their Web addresses.