

## American System of Conservation Funding

*This short article will introduce you to the American System of Conservation Funding. Please read through the document and answer the questions at the end. Be prepared to discuss this in class.*

### Wildlife belongs to us all

In the United States, wildlife is owned by the people (public trust) and managed by state wildlife agencies. State wildlife agencies are responsible for managing wildlife on public and private lands and for developing [management plans](#), [season dates](#), and hunting/fishing license quotas to sustain the resources. Additionally, wildlife agencies make regulations when species are in decline and retire restrictions when populations rebound. Many of these decisions are open for public comment such as the [hunting season setting](#) process. The regulation and preservation of hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing activities are known as the [North American Model of Wildlife Conservation](#).

### Seven principles of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation

*(Used in Canada and the U.S.)*

1. Wildlife resources are conserved and held in public trust.
2. Markets for game are eliminated, preventing commercial decimations of species.
3. Wildlife is allocated according to democratic rule of law.
4. Wildlife may only be killed for a legitimate, non-frivolous purpose.
5. Wildlife is an international resource.
6. Every person has an equal opportunity under the law to participate in hunting and fishing.
7. Scientific management is the proper means for wildlife conservation

### Consumptive and non-consumptive wildlife activities

Consumptive uses of wildlife resources involve activities such as hunting, fishing, harvesting shellfish, and trapping. Non-consumptive uses of wildlife include watching birds, taking photographs, hiking, and canoeing and do not involve the direct harvest of wildlife or other natural resources. Both consumptive and non-consumptive uses can have indirect impacts such as habitat loss or alteration. A great blue heron, for example, will leave its nest and young if startled by the presence of a photographer.

### Wildlife-based recreation is important to our economy

Wildlife-based recreation is important to many people. Consumptive activities contribute millions of dollars to the economy through the sales of hunting and fishing equipment, firearms, ammunition, and boats and chartered tours (hunting and fishing). People who enjoy non-consumptive activities may purchase items such as binoculars, photography equipment, canoes, bird food, off-road vehicles, gardening materials, and backpacking gear. While there is currently [no tax on non-consumptive goods](#) in Washington, it is something that wildlife managers and legislators have explored in past years. In addition to money generated for local economies, hunting and fishing gear are subject to a federal excise tax that provides millions of dollars annually to state wildlife agencies. The Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration (also known as the [Pittman-Robertson Act 1937](#)) and the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Recreation Programs (also known as the [Dingell-Johnson Act 1950](#)) have been crucial funding sources in the last 80 years.

Expenses related to hunting and fishing licenses and fees go to state wildlife agencies to support wildlife management. [Entrance fees](#) to publicly-managed lands (such as [WDFW wildlife areas](#)) also contribute. Additionally, non-profit organizations such as The Nature Conservancy and Ducks Unlimited contribute millions of additional dollars toward wildlife management and protection of wildlife habitat. Other sources of wildlife conservation funding include [Federal Duck Stamps](#), wildlife themed [license plates](#), and general tax dollars.

### **Wildlife-related recreation trends are changing**

Funds provided by hunters, anglers, and trappers have historically been the primary source of income for most state wildlife management programs and some federal programs. As the population has grown over the last 25 years, the total number of people engaging in hunting, fishing has declined. For example, between 2021-2023, WDFW expects a \$2.7 million shortfall from the Pittman-Robertson federal fund as [license revenue](#) has decreased 24% in Washington the last two years. \*

At the same time, non-consumptive activities have doubled. These economic and demographic trends are creating additional pressures on wildlife and habitat, while revenue generated from hunting, fishing and trapping fees has been in decline. As a result, many state wildlife agencies are concerned about their ability to meet the changing demands for wildlife resources.

*\*In 2020 license sales were considerably higher than previous years as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.*

*\*\*Part of this narrative has been adapted from Project Wild.*

### **Why fund fish and wildlife resources?**

Washingtonians value the outdoors. Despite this fact, less than 1% of the general tax fund goes to support **all** of the state's natural resource agencies combined - that includes the Department of Natural Resources, State Parks, the Recreation and Conservation Office, Conservation Commission, Department of Ecology, the Puget Sound Partnership, and the Department of Fish and Wildlife. Yet, we know that people who are exposed to nature show better conservation behaviors, improved learning, and stronger physical, mental and social health.<sup>3</sup>

- **268 Washington species** are in need of conservation.
- **1 million people** will choose Washington as their home in the next decade, adding development and recreation pressure on scarce resources.
- **24,300 times per year** WDFW officers respond to calls for service, from wild animal conflicts to illegal poaching.
- **1 million acres** of public WDFW land supports habitat, clean water, and recreation.
- **\$3.5 billion** in annual expenditures are driven by Washington hunters and wildlife watchers.<sup>1</sup>
- **\$1.8 billion** in annual economic benefit comes from sustainable Washington fisheries.<sup>1,2</sup>

**Sources:** <sup>1</sup> 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation; <sup>2</sup> Fisheries Economics of the United States, 2016, <sup>3</sup> The North American Conservation Strategy: Benefits of Outdoor Skills to Health; Learning and Lifestyle: A Literature Review, 2010/Home to Us All: How Connecting with Nature Helps us Care for Ourselves and the Earth, 2018

### Questions from reading:

- 1) Who owns wildlife in the U.S.?
- 2) Describe the importance of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.
- 3) Do you think the North American Model fits all wildlife uses? Why or why not?
- 4) Brainstorm other ways that state wildlife agencies might increase revenue for fish and wildlife conservation.
- 5) The current model of conservation is known as a user-pays, public benefit model. This means that historically, hunters, anglers, and trappers have paid for the bulk of wildlife conservation. Do you think this is an effective model of conservation? Why or why not?