



SWS Responds to Blue Ribbon Panel Request for Information on Funding U.S. Wildlife Conservation

Earlier this summer, the Society received a request from a [Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources](#) for information on how to equitably and sustainably finance fish and wildlife conservation to help prevent more species from becoming endangered. The Panel reached out to influential organizations for ideas on how to sustainably fund conservation work that will benefit the full array of fish and wildlife. SWS sent the following response which was presented to the Panel in a summary report in Washington D.C. on July 23rd:

“The Society of Wetland Scientists is a non-profit, international organization of over 3,000 individuals who engage in research, science-based management, conservation, protection, restoration, and promotion of sustainability of wetlands around the world. Our membership includes employees of national, state, and local governments, academic institutions, NGO's, and private consultants who are keenly interested in the actions and policies that affect wetlands and the variety of wildlife that make these diverse habitats their home. In 2008, we formed a Wildlife Section of the SWS that focuses on the relationships between wetland habitat dynamics and wildlife population dynamics. It is from this perspective that we offer these suggestions on how best to secure dedicated and sustained funding to support fish and wildlife conservation.

The Wildlife Section of the SWS recognizes that wetlands are often the focus of habitat that is acquired for wildlife management and that more funding is desirable to acquire and manage wetland wildlife habitat on public and private lands. We agree with efforts to increase funding from non-hunters via excise taxes on outdoor recreational equipment. While recognizing such efforts have been largely unsuccessful since the 1970s (see Loomis and Mangun 1987), our sense is that many non-hunters would support such taxes. However, this support has not been reflected by the policies and legislation offered by elected officials. We believe it is necessary for users of outdoor recreation equipment (recreational vehicles, bird seed/ feeders, photographic equipment, binoculars, nature books, etc.) to mount a grass-roots campaign to rival the one by hunters in the 1930s that led to the creation of the existing duck stamp and



excise taxes on firearms and ammunition. In addition, dedicated sales tax revenue, like the 1/8 of 1 cent in Missouri and Arkansas, has been effective in funding non-game habitat conservation in those states. Approaches like this allow citizens to share in the conservation of important wetland habitat and the species that use them.

Below we offer additional, creative ideas that may prove to be successful if implemented strategically. Some ideas are specific while others are broadly applicable.

- Develop state license plates supporting species or habitats (e.g. “Helping Sea Turtles Survive” license plates in Florida where 100% of the \$23 over the base cost of the tag goes to two turtle conservation programs; Indian River Lagoon license tags in Florida where 100% of the \$15 / tag funds lagoon restoration and education projects).
- Institute low-cost permits to run ecotourism businesses on public lands (e.g. airboat excursions at public boat ramps).
- Implement “Adopt-A-Manatee” (Florida), “Adopt-a-Park” (Minnesota), “Adopt-A-Trail” (Ohio) type programs for imperiled species and habitats (including wetlands) that are promoted at schools, libraries, rotary clubs, zoological parks, wildlife refuges, etc. This could be for solicitation of in-kind services, as well as, funding for research and protection of fragile ecosystems and species.
- Utilize crowd source funding – a 21st century model deserves 21st century technology. This requires that adept users of FaceBook, Twitter, and other social media outlets are tasked with getting the word out and selling the program. Hire professional videographers, photographers, writers and speakers to make it work.
- Sell “Sustaining America’s Diverse Fish and Wildlife” merchandise (hats, t-shirts, backpacks, etc.) to market and brand the efforts of the group.
- Start a “Give the Gift of Nature” campaign (similar to WWF) to give a birthday or anniversary gift of conservation to the person who already has everything. Also, start a program of “In Memoriam Gifts” to donate to a fish and wildlife trust.
- Develop techniques that focus on getting the young, digital generation outdoors so that they develop an investment in the environment and nature, even if it is tangential to the ultimate purpose; something such as geocaching, laser tag, etc.
- Install outdoor movie screens in state/national parks that bring in guests during the night hours when visitation numbers are low and feature nature films (i.e. For kids - ‘Hoot’ based on novel by Carl Hiaasen where kids save burrowing owl habitat from being developed in Florida, ‘Furry Vengeance’ about animals sabotaging a new housing development that threatens to destroy



wilderness areas in Oregon; For adults – ‘Dances with Wolves’, ‘Gorillas in the Mist’, ‘Fly Away Home’, etc.)

Finally, the most important aspect of any campaign, such as this, is to focus on education. It is critical to educate the public about the value of conserving fish and wildlife resources (not only for the species in those habitats, but also for themselves). Outreach should be in a variety of mediums to appeal to all generations effectively. Efforts for fundraising should be specific so that an individual feels like they can make a difference (no matter how small). Research shows that if a problem seems too big, people will see their contribution as insignificant and donate less or not at all (Vedantam, 2014). So instead of an appeal for people to “donate to save fish and wildlife resources in America”, it should take a more targeted approach such as “donate to build nest cavities for red-cockaded woodpeckers in Florida that don’t have enough live pine trees to nest in”.

The SWS appreciates the opportunity to offer suggestions on building a sustainable base of funding for fish and wildlife conservation in the nation. Although we expect that several of these ideas will be similar to other contributors, we are happy to support the effort that ultimately supports our mission to promote understanding, conservation, protection, restoration, science-based management, and sustainability of wetlands and the fish and wildlife that call these ecosystems their home.

Loomis, J.B., and W.R. Mangun. 1987. Evaluating tax policy proposals for funding nongame wildlife programs. *Evaluation Review* 11:715-738.

Vedantam, S. (2014, Nov 5) Why your brain wants to help one child in need – but not millions. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2014/11/05/361433850/why-your-brain-wants-to-help-one-child-in-need-but-not-millions>.

Sincerely,

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*An international organization dedicated to the conservation, management
and scientific understanding of the world's wetland resources*

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SWS, Past-Chair of Wildlife Section”

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