

STATEMENT OF

WHIT FOSBURGH  
PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER  
THEODORE ROOSEVELT CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
UNITED STATES SENATE

“LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON S.556, THE BIPARTISAN SPORTSMEN’S ACT OF 2015”

MARCH 12, 2015

Good morning, Chairwoman Murkowski, Ranking Member Cantwell, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership is a coalition of more than 40 of the nation's leading hunting and angling conservation organizations, and our mission is simple but powerful: to guarantee all Americans a quality place to hunt and fish. The Bipartisan Sportsmen's Act of 2015 is legislation with a similar mission, and includes provisions meant to conserve quality fish and wildlife habitat and to enhance recreational access. That is why we are proud to testify in support of the bill.

America's forty million hunters and anglers generate about \$90 billion in economic activity each and every year. Millions of people earn their livelihoods by catering to sportsmen and -women, as guides, outfitters, gunsmiths, product manufacturers, lodge owners, at bait and tackle shops, gas stations, restaurants, and hotels. These are jobs that, by their very nature, cannot be exported overseas: They are American jobs which serve a great American outdoor tradition.

The outdoor recreation economy is quietly humming along as the lifeblood of rural towns all across this country and an important part of the national economy. For proof of how robust the outdoor recreation economy is, one should look back to The Great Recession, when so many American economic sectors contracted. During that recession, the outdoor recreation economy grew by 5% each year. It is not outrageous to say that the American economic recovery began in the outdoors. Today the outdoor recreation economy contributes \$646 billion in direct expenditures, provides more than 6 million jobs, and returns tens of billions of dollars in state and federal taxes.

TRCP strongly endorses Section 101 of the legislation before the committee today, to ensure that fishing, hunting, and recreational shooting are management priorities across a wide swath of federal public lands. Importantly, this provision also ensures that the planning process on these lands specifically considers the impact of land-use decisions on hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting opportunities. Travel management, energy development, and a host of other activities on federal lands definitely impact outdoor recreation, and this provision acknowledges those impacts. TRCP believes fundamentally that better planning at the landscape level on federal lands will ensure that both development and outdoor recreation can coexist.

Section 101 also emphatically states that lands managed by the US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management are to be considered open for hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting, unless they are specifically closed for a justifiable reason. This is consistent with current law and policy, but provides needed clarity to the agencies. The bill establishes a process by which large tracts exceeding 1,280 acres can be closed to hunting, angling, and/or recreational shooting—a process that appropriately includes notification of the public and

notification of this Committee. We also applaud the inclusion of a requirement that federal land management agencies report to this Committee every other year about the status of recreational access on America's public lands.

If Section 101 of S.556 confirms that hunting and angling should be a part of the very fabric of public land decision making, Sections 201 and 202 seek to expand public access to those lands for the purposes of outdoor recreation. Many public land parcels are surrounded by private lands, in such a way as to make public access all but impossible. Various reports completed over the years indicate that tens of millions of public acres have inadequate access, and as ownership patterns in the West change, the problem is getting worse. Section 201 of S.556, a provision often referred to as *Making Public Lands Public*, has long been championed by TRCP and its partners, and we are pleased with its inclusion in the Sportsmen's Act. Making Public Lands Public specifies that 1.5% of Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars are to be used to establish and expand recreational access to federal public lands.

Section 202 of S.556, the Hunt Unrestricted on Natural Treasures (HUNT) Act seeks to identify those landlocked public lands and to plan ways in which access to those lands might be improved. The provision wisely includes a process for public nomination of candidate access improvement projects, and the language also prioritizes access projects based on the likelihood of resolving the access restriction, and the potential expansion of recreational opportunities that would occur by solving the access issue. This ensures that limited resources are utilized on the most pressing, and potentially impactful, recreational access issues.

Together, Section 201 and 202 could be used to make millions of acres more accessible to the American public. Both include clear language protecting private property rights, including working only with willing landowners for easements and rights-of-way. Making Public Lands Public, as a standalone piece of legislation, has garnered significant bipartisan support, and its provisions have been included in the President's budget for the past several years. It is time to codify this sensible use of LWCF dollars, which will make millions of acres of public lands more accessible to the American public in statute.

TRCP is also very supportive of the inclusion of the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act in the legislation before the committee today. Before its expiration in 2011, FLTFA had leveraged strategic federal land sales to fund 39 priority land conservation projects across the American West, including many which expanded sportsmen's access to world-class hunting and fishing opportunities. Like Making Public Lands Public, FLTFA achieves real, on-the-ground conservation goals, without costing the American taxpayer. Dozens of sportsmen's organizations from across the country support the reauthorization of this expired federal program.

The United States is unique in all the world, in that any American, with the purchase of just a license, and in some cases a tag, can access some of the best fish and wildlife habitat on earth. Outdoor recreation is the economic boom that won't go bust, so long as reasonable investments in habitat and access continue to be made. However it has been documented that lack of access is a—if not *the*—main reason that people stop hunting and fishing. This is a worrisome statistic. When Americans stop hunting and fishing, it has a profound impact on economies at all scales: local, regional, and national. Moreover, hunters and anglers do much to fund conservation that benefits *all* Americans, and without the tens of billions of dollars sportsmen and -women contribute to federal and state tax rolls, many agencies would find their work, indeed their continued existence, in serious doubt.

Hunters and anglers pay our own way, with excise taxes, license and tag fees, and membership in a whole variety of on-the-ground conservation organizations. Hunting and angling will continue to thrive so long as the federal government continues to invest in the outdoor recreation business plan: improving access and conserving habitat. The legislation before the committee today excels on both fronts, and helps to ensure that future generations of Americans will continue to have opportunities to set off into our federal lands and seek the experiences of a lifetime.

On behalf of our more than 40 national and regional partner organizations, the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership would like to encourage the Senate to move the full Bipartisan Sportsmen's Act of 2015 forward in as expeditious a fashion as possible. Since 2012, three bipartisan sportsmen's packages have failed to reach the President's desk, due to partisan politics and gridlock. It is our hope that the bipartisan leadership of this Committee, along with the Environment and Public Works Committee and Senate leadership, will work together to swiftly move this very good package to passage on the Senate floor.