

**Archery Trade Association \* Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies \* Boone & Crockett Club \* Bowhunting Preservation Alliance \* Catch-a-Dream Foundation \* Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation \* Conservation Force \* Delta Waterfowl Foundation \* Ducks Unlimited \* National Rifle Association \* National Shooting Sports Foundation \* National Trappers Association \* National Wild Turkey Federation \* North American Bear Foundation \* Quality Deer Management Association \* Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation \* Ruffed Grouse Society \* Safari Club International \* U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance \* Wild Sheep Foundation \* Wildlife Forever**

The Honorable Rob Bishop  
House Natural Resources Committee  
123 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Raul Grijalva  
House Natural Resources Committee  
1511 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

May 9, 2013

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva

Our organizations represent millions of American hunters who strongly advocate for passage of H.R. 1825, the Recreational Fishing and Hunting Heritage and Opportunities Act of 2013. This legislation is vital to ensure future generations have the same opportunities to hunt and fish on America's public lands as we have had.

H.R. 1825 is an improvement over the language that passed the House of Representatives with a strong bi-partisan vote as part of H.R. 4089 during the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress. There is also companion legislation S. 170 that was introduced by Sen. Lisa Murkowski (AK) and this bill will soon be considered in committee. We hope, and expect, that the House of Representatives will again come together to support hunting and hunters by passing this bi-partisan legislation.

The Recreational Fishing and Hunting Heritage and Opportunities Act recognizes the rightful place of recreational hunting, fishing, and shooting on federal public lands and protects hunting, fishing and shooting opportunities from being closed to the public without justification. According to the National Shooting Sports Foundation "a new survey shows 79 percent of the American public approve of hunting," which was published in conjunction with *Responsive Management*.

President Obama and Former President George W. Bush both authorized Federal Advisory Committees to provide public input directly to the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior on policies related to hunting and hunting access. *The Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council*, which acts as the current Federal Advisory Committee to the Department of the Interior, even adopted a 52 point plan to improve hunting and conservation in the United States.

Despite broad consensus that hunting is a vital part of the American landscape, the existence of Federal Advisory Committees to represent the hunting community in agency decision-making, and a 10 year action plan that requires the implementation of measures designed to benefit hunting interests and concerns, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) still fail to prioritize hunting as recreation on public lands. As a consequence, hunting and other forms of sustainable use recreation are vulnerable to attack from individuals and groups who are opposed to hunting and who seek to impose their preferences on recreational planning for public lands. Statutory protection of these vital interests is imperative. Permanent recreational access for hunters on the millions of acres of public land across our great nation should be a priority for the USFS and BLM, and Congress must act to compel these agencies to act in accordance to the interests of the American public.

The annual economic contribution of hunters in the United States is almost \$40 billion – an incredible positive impact that spans across the nation. By supporting H.R. 1825, Congress will be permanently investing in rural economic growth, because of the benefits these communities reap from traveling sportsmen and women who purchase equipment, hotel rooms, food, and other essential items while recreating on America’s public lands.

The Act:

- Establishes an “open unless closed” policy for recreational hunting, fishing and shooting on lands managed by the USFS-and BLM.
- Retains the discretion of federal land management agencies to establish closures or restrictions, pursuant to existing legal authorities, where and when the agencies determine that such closures or restrictions are appropriate or necessary and supported by the best scientific evidence.
- Directs management of federal public lands to facilitate the use of and access to these lands for recreational hunting, fishing and shooting with certain exceptions such as for national security and within the limitations of other Federal statutes, including the Wilderness Act.
- Requires that recreational hunting, fishing and shooting be addressed in land management plans in order to protect public access and to encourage proactive management of these activities.
- Prevents the sudden closure of lands to recreational hunting, fishing and shooting without public knowledge or input, or when lacking sound scientific support.
- Asserts the authority of the state fish and wildlife agency and ensures that hunting seasons are not unnecessarily restricted by federal land managers.
- Provides federal public land managers with tools to defend against litigation challenges that seek to limit or prohibit hunting access and opportunities.

- Expressly *does not* open units of the National Park System to recreational hunting or shooting and *does not* open lands designated as wilderness to activities prohibited by the Wilderness Act.

Again, thank you for holding a hearing on H.R. 1825, the Recreational Fishing and Hunting Heritage and Opportunities Act of 2013. Our organizations encourage the committee to mark-up this vital legislation and pass it out of the full committee as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

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