



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES
CHAIRMAN BRUCE WESTERMAN

To: House Committee on Natural Resources Republican Members
From: Subcommittee on Federal Lands – Aniela Butler and Brandon Miller; x6-7736
Aniela@mail.house.gov and Brandon.Miller@mail.house.gov
Date: Monday, May 13, 2024
Subject: Oversight Field Hearing on “*Improving Access and Opportunities for Hunting, Fishing, and Outdoor Recreation on America’s Federal Lands*”

The Subcommittee on Federal Lands will hold an oversight field hearing on “*Improving Access and Opportunities for Hunting, Fishing, and Outdoor Recreation on America’s Federal Lands*” on **Monday, May 13, 2024, at 2:00 p.m. CDT at the Steakhouse & Lodge in Hayward, Wisconsin.**

Member offices are requested to notify Will Rodriguez (Will.Rodriguez@mail.house.gov) by 4:30 p.m. on Friday, May 10, if their Member intends to participate in the hearing.

I. KEY MESSAGES

- Outdoor sporting activities, including hunting, fishing, trapping, and shooting, are engrained in the fabric of our American culture and heritage.
- Our nation has been blessed with abundant federal lands that support outdoor sporting activities. Wisconsin is ranked among the top ten states for both fishing and hunting opportunities.
- Unfortunately, access barriers for sportsmen and women limit the ability to experience the splendor of our public lands. These barriers include road decommissioning and closures, preservationist land lockups, a lack of active management, and the weaponization of environmental laws.
- Committee Republicans are committed to pushing back against the Biden administration’s anti-access policies by advancing solutions that increase access and improve management of our federal lands, and enhance opportunities for hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation.

II. WITNESSES

- **The Honorable Rob Stafsholt**, Senator, Wisconsin Senate, New Richmond, Wisconsin
- **Mr. Henry Schienebeck**, Executive Director, Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association, Rhinelander, Wisconsin
- **Mr. Luke Hilgemann**, Executive Director, International Order of T. Roosevelt, Madison, Wisconsin

- **Mr. Tom Dougherty**, President, Voyageur Country Houseboat Operators Association, International Falls, Minnesota
- **Mr. Duane Taylor**, Director of Safe and Responsible Use Programs, Motorcycle Industry Council, Specialty Vehicle Institute of America, Recreational Off-Highway Vehicle Association, Washington, D.C.

III. BACKGROUND

Hunting and Fishing in America

Heritage of Conservation

Hunting and fishing are more than just time-honored pastimes, they are engrained in the fabric of America’s culture and heritage. Values instilled from hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting activities are passed down through generations and sustain



Grouse Hunters in Northern Wisconsin. **Source:** Dorsey Pictures 2020.

our nation’s rich outdoor sporting heritage. Hunting, shooting, and trapping make up the fourth largest share of economic activity among conventional outdoor recreation activities, generating \$16.2 billion in economic output annually.¹ For the approximately 101.6 million Americans (or roughly 40 percent of the population over the age of 16) who engage in some type of hunting, fishing, or wildlife-related activity, reliable access to our public lands is critical.² However, sportsmen and women face numerous challenges, including diminished areas to recreate, lack of access, lack of active management of federal lands and forests, crumbling infrastructure, and the weaponization of environmental laws.³

America’s hunters and fishers have long been leaders in responsibly managing and conserving federal lands and waters.⁴ Efforts by sportsmen and women during the early part of the 20th century are credited with sustaining populations of white-tailed deer, elk, and wild turkey.⁵

¹ Bureau of Economic Analysis, “Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2022,” November 17, 2023, <https://www.bea.gov/news/2023/outdoor-recreation-satellite-account-us-and-states-2022>.

² Department of the Interior, “New 5-Year Report Shows 101.6 Million Americans Participated in Hunting, Fishing & Wildlife Activities,” September 7, 2017, <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/new-5-year-report-shows-1016-million-americans-participated-hunting-fishing-wildlife>.

³ Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation, “Federal Land Hunting and Angling Access”, <https://congressionsportsmen.org/policy/federal-land-hunting-angling-access/>.

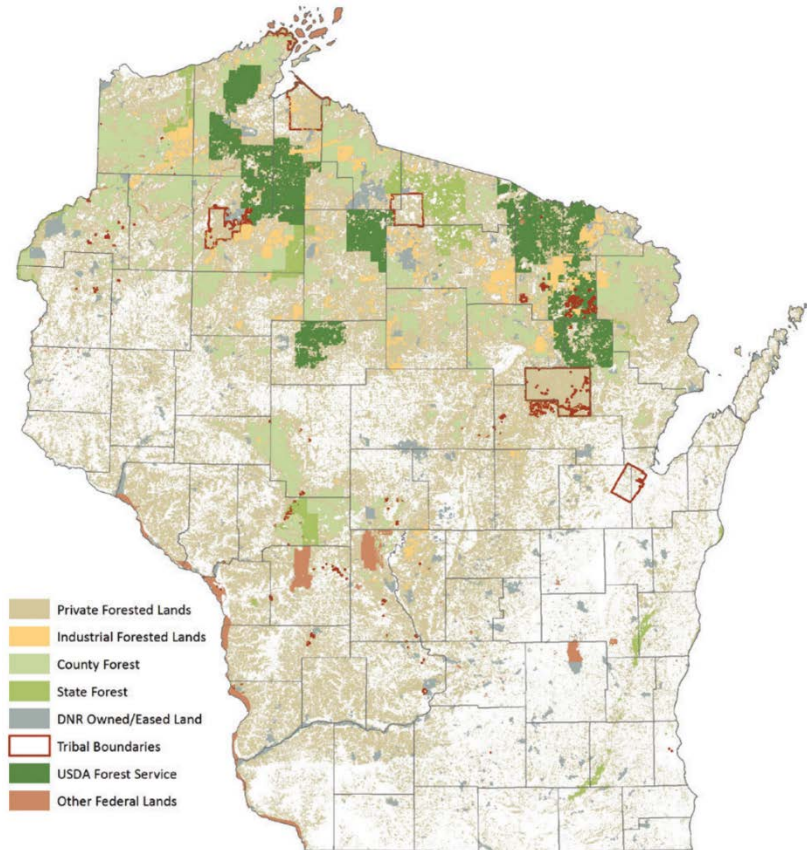
⁴ U.S. Forest Service, “Hunting, fishing and conservation go hand in hand”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/delivering-mission/sustain/hunting-fishing-and-conservation-go-hand-hand>.

⁵ *Id.*

Through tools like the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act (Pittman-Robertson) and the Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act (Dingell-Johnson), sportsmen and women also provided the vast majority of conservation funding for more than 80 years.⁶ These two acts are collectively used to fund restoration, conservation, hunter education and safety, and fishery conservation programs through a user-pays, public-benefits model.⁷ To date, Pittman-Robertson funds have provided over \$16 billion to the Wildlife Restoration and Hunter Education apportionment, including almost \$1 billion this year.⁸ Similarly, Dingell-Johnson, has provided over \$8 billion for the conservation and restoration of fish habitats since 1950.⁹ These conservation efforts allowed the U.S. to remain a global leader in natural resource and biodiversity protection.

Public Lands Hunting and Fishing in Wisconsin

Wisconsin has approximately 6.6 million acres of public land open for recreation, including 1.9 million acres of federally-managed land.¹⁰ These lands are primarily concentrated in northern Wisconsin, where roughly 30 percent are public lands.¹¹ A significant portion of that federal land is contained in the 1.5 million-acre Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (CNNF) in the northern part of the state.¹² The CNNF is categorized as a boreal forest, and its diverse landscape supports multiple uses, including hunting, fishing, outdoor recreation, and the harvesting of forest products. In addition, there are over 15,000



Forest land ownership in Wisconsin.

Source: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, 2020.

⁶ 16 U.S.C. §§669 et seq.; 16 U.S.C. §§777.

⁷ Congressional Research Service, “The Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act”, Erin H. Ward et al, October 12, 2022, <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IF12229?source=search>.

⁸ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, “Wildlife Restoration and Hunter Education Apportionments”, <https://tracs.fws.gov/wildlifeRestorationAndHunterEducationApportionments.html>.

⁹ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, “Sport Fish Restoration”, <https://www.fws.gov/program/sport-fish-restoration>.

¹⁰ Wisconsin Policy Forum, “This Land is Out Land, The Past and Future of Conservation Funding in Wisconsin”, Jason Stein and Tyler Byrnes, March 2023, https://wispolicyforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ThisLandIsOurLand_FullReport.pdf.

Stacker, “See how much land in Wisconsin is owned by the federal government”, August 12, 2022,

<https://stacker.com/wisconsin/see-how-much-land-wisconsin-owned-federal-government>.

¹¹ Forbes, “Ranking America’s 10 Best Hunting States”, Chris Dorsey, January 4, 2022,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/chrisdorsey/2022/01/04/ranking-americas-10-best-hunting-states/?sh=6692dfd32340>.

¹² Forest Service, “Welcome to the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/cnnf>.

lakes and 84,000 miles of rivers that are open for recreation.¹³ These diverse lands and waters provide excellent habitat for animals including whitetail deer, black bears, elk, turkeys, waterfowl, and upland game birds.¹⁴ As a result of the abundant populations of wildlife and ample public lands for sportsmen and women to recreate, Wisconsin ranks among the top ten states for hunting and fishing.¹⁵ In 2019, 1.3 million anglers bought fishing licenses in Wisconsin, the sixth-highest figure for any state in the nation.¹⁶ Hunting is also popular; the roughly 667,000 Wisconsin hunting licenses sold in 2019 was the fifth-highest figure for all U.S. states.¹⁷

Wisconsin is a leader in forest management and timber harvesting, which benefits the state's economy and promotes healthy forests, wildlife populations, and outdoor recreation opportunities. The forest products industry in Wisconsin also supports more than 64,000 jobs and provides \$24 billion annually to the economy.¹⁸ Wisconsin is the largest producer of paper in the nation.¹⁹ Moreover, Wisconsin continues to responsibly harvest forest products, adding trees faster than they can be cut, with a net gain of 185 million cubic feet of saw timber yearly.²⁰ That would provide enough timber to frame approximately 139,000 homes.²¹

The CNNF maintains a large forest management program and is frequently one of the top timber-producing forests in the National Forest System.²² Approximately 11,000 to 12,000 acres are harvested annually from the CNNF, leading to roughly 120 million board feet of timber sold annually.²³ Wisconsin has been a strong champion of the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) program, which provides co-stewardship opportunities for states, tribes, and counties to conduct forest restoration projects on federal lands.²⁴ In 2015, Wisconsin became one of the first states to sign a GNA agreement, and a second signed agreement followed in 2020.²⁵ This agreement is for roughly 30 million board feet of timber each year. Under GNA, Wisconsin has been able to fund projects related to the “restoration of cold-water trout streams, silviculture prescriptions, assessing aspen stand conditions, groundwater surveys and wildlife surveys.”²⁶

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Forbes, “Ranking America’s 10 Best Hunting States”, Chris Dorsey, January 4, 2022,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/chrisdorsey/2022/01/04/ranking-americas-10-best-hunting-states/?sh=6692dfd32340>.

¹⁵ Wisconsin Policy Forum, “This Land is Out Land, The Past and Future of Conservation Funding in Wisconsin”, Jason Stein and Tyler Byrnes, March 2023, https://wispolicyforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ThisLandIsOurLand_FullReport.pdf.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ Wisconsin County Forests Association, “Timber Management”, <https://wisconsincountyforests.com/forest-management/timber-management/>.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Green Stone Farm Credit Service, “Commodity Report: Focus on Forestry”, May 11, 2020, <https://www.greenstonefcs.com/resources/open-fields-blog/2020/05112020-focus-on-forestry>.

²¹ *Id.*

²² U.S. Forest Service, “Resource Management”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/resources/cnnf/landmanagement/resourcemanagement>.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Congressional Research Service, “The Good Neighbor Authority on Federal Lands” January 11, 2023, Anne A. Riddle, <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IF11658?source=search>.

²⁵ Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, “USDA Forest Service Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) Agreement”, <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/forestmanagement/gnaGeneralInfo>.

²⁶ *Id.*

Threats to Hunting and Fishing Access on Federal Lands

Failures to Manage and Maintain Accessible Roads



Closed road on USFS land in Wisconsin.

Source: The Office of Wisconsin State Senator Rob Stafsholt, 2024.

Loss of access to potential recreation sites has frequently been cited as one of the biggest threats to the continuation of hunting and fishing.²⁷ Well-maintained roads are critical to accessing the millions of acres of federal lands for outdoor recreation. While some sportsmen and women do enjoy rugged wilderness terrain, only the most able-bodied sportsmen and women can access these locations. Roads, therefore, play a critical role in ensuring that all Americans can readily access their public lands. In addition, well-maintained and managed roads go hand-in-hand with forest health, as roads allow access to forest management and wildfire suppression activities. In areas without accessible roads, the forest is often too overgrown and fire-prone to allow for any recreation activity or easy access for fire suppression efforts.

The closure, decommissioning, and lack of individual U.S. Forest Service (USFS) roads remains a top concern limiting access for sportsmen and women. USFS manages an estimated

371,000 miles of roads across the country.²⁸ Since 1991, however, USFS has decommissioned an average of 2,000 miles of roads per year.²⁹ A mixture of burdensome regulations, litigation threats, and inconsistent policy decisions that fail to value the importance of access are the primary drivers behind many of these closures. Wildfires, flooding, and other natural disasters are also leading to prolonged closures of roads and trails on federal lands, and federal land managers are consistently struggling to reopen those areas in a timely manner. Additionally, USFS manages approximately 58.2 million acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands (or

²⁷ Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, "Hunting and Fishing Access", <https://www.trcp.org/what/hunting-fishing-access/>.

²⁸ U.S. Forest Service, "Travel Management", <https://www.fs.usda.gov/science-technology/travel-management#:~:text=The%20Forest%20Service%20road%20system.opportunities%20for%20thousands%20of%20Americans.>

²⁹ Healthy Forests Health Communities, "Forest roads and American infrastructure", March 1, 2019, <https://healthyforests.org/2019/03/forest-roads-and-american-infrastructure/>.

roughly 30 percent of all USFS lands) as “inventoried roadless areas” (IRAs).³⁰ While IRAs are not part of the National Wilderness Preservation System, certain activities such as road construction and timber harvesting are similarly restricted in these areas, with limited exceptions.³¹ However, there is no comprehensive data that shows these exceptions are being utilized, leaving timber harvesting and road construction as de-facto banned activities in IRAs.³² This leaves millions of acres of NFS lands inaccessible to the public for outdoor recreation.



Inaccessible road on USFS land in Wisconsin.

Source: The Office of Wisconsin State Senator Rob Stafsholt, 2024.

Wisconsin is a prime example of a state where road decommissioning and closures hampered access and limited opportunities for sportsmen and women.³³ According to local stakeholders from the forest products industry, the USFS in Wisconsin consistently closed and

decommissioned roads previously opened as a part of GNA and stewardship contracting work.³⁴ These unnecessary closures can last for prolonged periods of time, or even indefinitely, and affect recreationalists throughout the state. Further, while some roads may not be formally closed, they are not well maintained and therefore access is functionally prohibited for members of the public. Exacerbating these issues is a lack of public information about road closures or access barriers that would otherwise help hunters make informed decisions about where to hunt or shoot on public lands. The failure to maintain access via well maintained roads, both in Wisconsin and across the nation, is inconsistent with the policy Congress has set forth for public lands, which is that “Federal land shall be open to hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting, in accordance with applicable law.”³⁵

³⁰ Congressional Research Service, “Federal Lands and Related Resources: Overview and Selected Issues for the 116th Congress.” Katie Hoover, April 25, 2019,

<https://www.crs.gov/Reports/R43429?source=search&guid=954916e1bf18467b9cde7490958723b&index=0>.

³¹ Exceptions include public safety in case dangers like wildfires, improvement of habitat/ecosystem, and small diameter timber harvesting if it improves roadless characteristics. Congressional Research Service, “Forest Service Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs)” Katie Hoover, August 28, 2020,

<https://www.crs.gov/Reports/R46504?source=search&guid=bdb74457ae7d4fcd925ed39ce11bcffe&index=1>.

³² *Id.*

³³ Healthy Forests Health Communities, “Forest roads and American infrastructure”, March 1, 2019, <https://healthyforests.org/2019/03/forest-roads-and-american-infrastructure/>.

³⁴ Information provided by the Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association.

³⁵ 16 U.S. Code § 7912.

Lack of Active Management and Preservationist Land Lock-Ups

One of the primary ways that access is being lost is through a calculated strategy by extreme environmentalists to remove as much land from multiple-use and sustained yield management as possible. This strategy has recently been embraced by the Biden administration's 30x30 agenda, which seeks to preserve 30 percent of the land and waters in the United States by 2030.³⁶ While the taglines may be new, the overall strategy is not, as proponents of this radical agenda have long sought to remove lands from multiple uses through legislative and administrative actions.

Under the Biden administration, the strategy of locking up lands to prevent access has proliferated. The Obama-Biden administration set a new standard for national monument abuse, using the Antiquities Act to unilaterally designate or expand 34 national monuments totaling a staggering 553,550,000 acres of land and water.³⁷ In a continuation of this effort, the Biden administration has issued seven monument designations, locking up over 3.62 million acres of land, and restored onerous restrictions on a Marine National Monument off the coast of New England.³⁸ Further, under the recently finalized Public Lands Rule, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) states that only "sustainable recreation is compatible with conservation use."³⁹ Concerningly, "sustainable" recreation is not defined and during a House Committee on Natural Resources hearing, Department of the Interior (DOI) Secretary Haaland could not delineate what was "sustainable" recreation versus "unsustainable" recreation.⁴⁰ This opens the door for the BLM to prohibit any recreational activity they view as unsustainable, regardless of any scientific justification, including hunting, fishing, trapping, and shooting.

These radical policies exacerbate existing restrictive land-use designations, including wilderness areas and IRAs. Since the enactment of the Wilderness Act in 1968, Congress has enacted 120 laws which created 803 wilderness areas encompassing a total of approximately 111.7 million acres.⁴¹ Wilderness areas can severely restrict popular forms of recreation that require the use of handcars used by sportsmen or other forms of mechanized vehicles, such as off-highway vehicles (OHVs).⁴² This means that only the most able-bodied sportsmen and women are able to access public lands for hunting or fishing. In total, more than 169 million acres of USFS land are off-limits to active management, including 111 million acres of land classified as wilderness.⁴³ Wisconsin has nearly 80,000 acres of wilderness areas and 69,000 acres of IRAs.⁴⁴

Locking up lands and failures to manage overgrown, fire-prone forests have led to catastrophic wildfires that kill wildlife species and turn once vibrant habitats into moonscapes. As an example of this, the 2020 Bobcat Fire in California turned one of the most abundant wildlife habitats with

³⁶ Department of the Interior, "America the Beautiful," <https://www.doi.gov/priorities/america-the-beautiful>.

³⁷ Congressional Research Service, "National Monuments and the Antiquities Act," Carol Hardy Vincent, November 28, 2022, https://www.crs.gov/Reports/R41330?source=search#_Ref473733653.

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ Despite the announcement of its finalization, a final rule has yet to be published in the Federal Register. A copy of the "final" rule can be found here: <https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2024-04/BLM-Conservation-Landscape-Health-Final-Rule.pdf>.

⁴⁰ In response to questions asked by Rep. John Curtis; <https://youtu.be/-5792wWCO-M?t=9973>.

⁴¹ Congressional Research Service, "Wilderness: Overview, Management, and Statistics," July 29, 2022, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL31447>.

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ *Id.*



Wildlife during a fire in the Bitterroot National Forest.
Source: John McColgan, 2000.

“lush canyons and [a] mixture of rare and endangered species” into an “apocalypse” that looked like “ground zero after a nuclear explosion.” Wildfires in Washington also killed nearly half of the state’s endangered pygmy rabbit population. A Seattle Times report stated: “The rabbits had asphyxiated as the fire in its fury devoured oxygen from the atmosphere. ‘There was nothing but ash and dust,’ ... ‘No

movement, no footprints. There was no chance anything survived.”⁴⁵ Single wildfire seasons can send entire species into an “extinction vortex,” destabilizing entire animal species.⁴⁶ In addition to wildfires, other natural disasters can also devastate forest health and wildlife populations. In 2019, a massive derecho (windstorm) swept through northern Wisconsin, leveling hundreds of thousands of trees.⁴⁷ USFS officials in Wisconsin predicted that full recovery from the event could take up to 10 years, a substantial setback for wildlife habitats.⁴⁸

In contrast to restrictive designations that turn federal forests into powder kegs, active management of federal forests creates better wildlife habitat and opportunities for hunters and anglers. Many species benefit from a “contiguous mosaic of habitat types” that provide diverse “roosting, brood-rearing and foraging habitat[s].”⁴⁹ The species that thrive in this habitat include “nearly all game species, birds, pollinators and native vegetation.”⁵⁰ Early successional habitats are particularly important for ground-nesting birds like quail, pheasants, and turkeys.⁵¹ Early successional forests are characterized by open canopies with fast-growing grasses and shrubs that

⁴⁵ Mapes, Lynda, “2020 wildfires left precious endangered species habitat in Central Washington ‘nothing but ash and dust,’” The Seattle Times, June 7, 2021, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/2020-wildfires-left-precious-endangered-species-habitat-in-central-washington-nothing-but-ash-and-dust/>.

⁴⁶ USA Today, “Spotted owls pushed closer to ‘extinction vortex’ by Oregon wildfires,” Zach Urness, Salem Statesman Journal, Dec. 1, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/12/01/northern-spotted-owl-habitat-threatened-oregon-fires/6462923002/>.

⁴⁷ Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, “It could take 10 years for Wisconsin to recover from the violent July windstorm that wrecked northern forests”, Larry Parnass, October 23, 2019, <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/special-reports/2019/10/23/wisconsin-july-2019-derecho-wind-storm-affect-economy-decade/4047898002/>.

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ NWTF, “Turkeys and Fire: A Strategy for the Future,” January 24, 2022, David Gladkowski, <https://www.nwtf.org/content-hub/turkeys-and-fire-a-strategy-for-the-future>.

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ Natural Resources Conservation Service, “Conservation Programs & Practices for: Early Successional Wildlife Habitat”, <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2022-10/Early%20Successional%20Habitat.pdf>.

provide food and cover for wildlife.⁵² These habitats are often created through sustained active management, including robust tree thinning and timber harvesting.

Lead Ammunition and Tackle Ban

Another major threat to hunting and fishing comes from efforts to ban the use of lead ammunition and tackle on federal lands. Hunting and fishing are allowed at nearly 400 national wildlife refuges, 35 wetland management districts, and 20 national fish hatcheries.⁵³ Each of these units is managed differently and, in some cases, hunting and fishing is only allowed for certain species or in certain sections of a particular refuge. In addition, hunting and fishing in the National Wildlife Refuge System (System) is governed pursuant to state laws concerning hunting seasons and licensing.⁵⁴ According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), “as practiced on refuges, hunting does not pose a threat to the wildlife populations—and in some instances it is necessary for sound wildlife management.”⁵⁵ Science-based hunting is used as a tool to manage species, like deer, that can threaten habitat for other vital species if left free to overpopulate. The harvesting of wildlife on refuges is intended to be regulated on a case-by-case basis based on the conditions at each refuge unit, not by a one-sized fits all mandate that is implemented system-wide.⁵⁶

On August 18, 2020, DOI announced it was expanding hunting and fishing opportunities on 2.3 million acres across 147 national wildlife refuges and national fish hatcheries.⁵⁷ In response, the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) filed suit against the DOI in the U.S. District Court for the District of Montana on November 29, 2021.⁵⁸ On November 30, 2022, USFWS and CBD reached a settlement agreement that mandated USFWS to take steps to protect wildlife “harmed by expanded hunting and fishing” on refuges.⁵⁹ Also included in the settlement were USFWS promises to expand lead ammunition bans as a part of the 2023-2024 annual rule governing the management of the System. USFWS also agreed to respond to CBD’s petition to ban lead ammunition and fishing tackle across all refuges, which they subsequently denied.⁶⁰ On June 22, 2023, the USFWS followed through on the settlement agreement by proposing to ban the use of lead ammunition and tackle by 2026 in seven specified national wildlife refuge (NWR) areas and lead ammunition (and not tackle) in one additional NWR.⁶¹

⁵² Verl Emrick, “Early Successional Habitats: The Plants and Critters You’ll Find in Your Weedy Backyard,” Virginia Tech-Conservation Management Institute, https://cmi.vt.edu/content/dam/cmi_vt_edu/docs/Early%20successional%20habitats.pdf.

⁵³ “Hunting.” U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. [Hunting | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service \(fws.gov\)](https://www.fws.gov/hunting).

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ “Why Hunting is Allowed on National Wildlife Refuges.” U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. [Why Hunting Is Allowed on Refuges | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service \(fws.gov\)](https://www.fws.gov/why-hunting-is-allowed-on-national-wildlife-refuges).

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, “Secretary Bernhardt Announces Historic Expansion of Hunting and Fishing Opportunities on Public Lands.” August 18, 2020, <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/secretary-bernhardt-announces-historic-expansion-hunting-and-fishing-opportunities>.

⁵⁸ E&E News, “Greens sue to block expanded hunting on wildlife refuges.” Michael Doyle, November 29, 2021.

<https://www.eenews.net/articles/greens-sue-to-block-expanded-hunting-on-wildlife-refuges/>.

⁵⁹ Fox News, “Biden’s war on hunting faces blowback from Republicans, sportsmen groups.” Thomas Catenucci, April 30, 2023.

<https://www.foxnews.com/politics/bidens-war-hunting-faces-blowback-republicans-sportsmen-groups>.

⁶⁰ Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies, “The Association Support the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Decision to Reject CBD’s petition.” June 7, 2023, [AFWA Supports USFWS Decision to Reject CBDs Petition: Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies \(fishwildlife.org\)](https://www.fishwildlife.org/afwa-supports-usfws-decision-to-reject-cbd-petition).

⁶¹ 88 Fed. Register 41058.

A ban on cost-effective traditional lead ammunition and tackle would discourage sportsmen and women's participation and, therefore, reduce the total dollars contributed to wildlife conservation. Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson require the sale of hunting and fishing equipment have an excise tax attached to it that is paid by manufacturers and, ultimately, consumers.⁶² In 2021, the National Shooting Sports Foundation concluded that lead-free hunting ammunition is, on average, 24.66 percent more expensive than lead ammunition.⁶³ The cost of lead-free alternatives for fishing tackle is even more stark. Tin, a leading alternative, costs \$13.04/lb, compared to \$0.98/lb for lead.⁶⁴ This price difference could increase if a System-wide ban on lead ammunition and fishing tackle is implemented, as the demand for copper and other alternatives would most likely increase due to market conditions. Increasing costs on consumers could result in a substantial decrease in hunting and fishing participation, which increased substantially during the pandemic after years of decline.⁶⁵

Gray Wolves Listing

For far too long, the failure to properly manage the gray wolf has been a consistent problem for sportsmen, farmers, ranchers, and even pet owners. Before the enactment of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1973, USFWS listed some gray wolf subspecies for protection.⁶⁶ In 1978, after the passage of the ESA, USFWS combined these listings into one listing for the gray wolf species as endangered throughout the lower 48 states, except Minnesota, and a separate listing for the gray wolf in Minnesota as threatened.⁶⁷ The 1978 rule specified that “biological subspecies would continue to be maintained and dealt with as separate entities.”⁶⁸ As such, USFWS implemented gray wolf recovery programs in three regions: the northern Rocky Mountains, the southwestern United States for the Mexican wolf, and the eastern United States (including the Great Lakes States) for the eastern timber wolf.⁶⁹

The Great Lakes region has the largest concentration of gray wolves in the lower 48 states, with approximately 4,200 wolves inhabiting the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan.⁷⁰ Under the current management framework, wolves in Minnesota are listed as threatened, whereas wolves in Wisconsin and Michigan are listed as endangered.⁷¹ The recovery plan for the gray wolf in the Great Lakes is quite clear when it comes to criteria for delisting: A stable or

⁶² Congressional Research Service, “The Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act.” Erin H. Ward, Pervaze A. Sheikh, and Mark K. DeSantis, October 12, 2022, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF12229>. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, “Sport Fish Restoration,” <https://www.fws.gov/program/sport-fish-restoration>.

⁶³ National Shooting Sports Foundation, “2021 Economic Impact of Ban on Traditional Ammunition in the United States.” https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2021_economic_impact_banning_traditional_ammunition_united_states_pdf.pdf.

⁶⁴ Daily Metal Price: Tin Price (USD / Pound) Chart for the Last 2 Years <https://www.dailymetalprice.com/metalpricecharts.php?c=sn&u=lb&d=480>.

⁶⁵ “Hunting pastime spikes during pandemic. Conservationists are glad. Here’s why.” Alex Brown. The Washington Post. [Hunting pastime spikes during pandemic. Conservationists are glad. Here’s why. – The Washington Post](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2020/04/22/hunting-pastime-spikes-during-pandemic-conservationists-are-glad-heres-why/)

⁶⁶ The USFWS listed the first gray wolf subspecies, the eastern timber wolf as endangered in 1967 under the Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966. In 1973, the USFWS listed the northern Rocky Mountain wolf (*C. lupus irremotus*) as endangered.

⁶⁷ Congressional Research Service, “U.S. District Court Vacates Gray Wolf Delisting Rule.” Erin H. Ward, March 9, 1978, [LSB10697 \(congress.gov\)](https://www.congress.gov/legislation/115/10697).

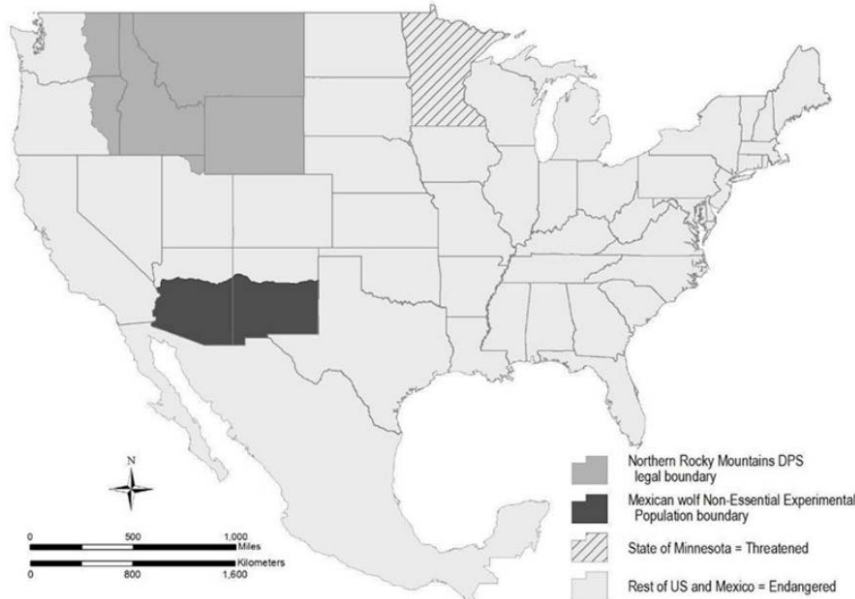
⁶⁸ 43 Fed. Register 9607, <https://www.federalregister.gov/citation/43-FR-9607>.

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ Natural Resources Defense Council, “America’s Gray Wolves Get Another Chance at Real Recovery”, Shelia Hu, April 21, 2022, <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/americas-gray-wolves-get-another-chance-real-recovery>.

⁷¹ “U.S. District Court Vacates Gray Wolf Delisting Rule.” Erin H. Ward. Congressional Research Service. [LSB10697 \(congress.gov\)](https://www.congress.gov/legislation/115/10697).

increasing population of wolves in Minnesota and at least 200 wolves outside of the Minnesota population.⁷² According to former wildlife biologist at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Nathan Roberts, “these goals have been met since at least 1994.” He went on to say, “[i]t is remarkable to note that, given the natural life span of wolves, every wolf on the landscape in the Great Lakes region was born long after recovery goals were met.”⁷³



Gray Wolf listing status. **Source:** USFWS, 2022.

In November 2020, the Trump administration issued a rulemaking returning management of Gray Wolf populations to each of the lower 48 states within their borders. At the time of delisting, the Gray Wolf population in the lower 48 states was approximately 6,000 wolves, which greatly exceeded the combined recovery goals of the Northern Rockies and Western Great Lakes populations of 650 wolves.⁷⁴ On February 10, 2022, U.S. Federal District Court Judge

Jeffrey White, in response to a lawsuit filed by Defenders of Wildlife, WildEarth Guardians, and other environmental groups, vacated and remanded the November 2020 rulemaking. In his ruling, Judge White stated that he believed USFWS had failed to show that wolf populations could be sustained outside of the core areas that were being managed by USFWS.⁷⁵ This ruling reinstated ESA rules for the Gray Wolf in the lower 48 states, except for the Northern Rockies Ecosystem, which was delisted by previous rulemakings in 2011 (Montana and Idaho) and 2017 (Wyoming).⁷⁶

State management of delisted wolves has proven to be a success. In states where wolves had been delisted prior to the 2020 rulemaking, wolf populations were either stable or thriving, with Montana being 500 percent above USFWS recovery goals, Idaho 700 percent above recovery goals, and the Wyoming population being stable.⁷⁷ This was made possible by state management

⁷² “Recovery Plan For the Eastern Timber Wolf.” U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 3. January 31, 1992. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-I49-PURL-LPS37439/pdf/GOVPUB-I49-PURL-LPS37439.pdf>.

⁷³ “Testimony of Nathan Roberts.” House Committee on Natural Resources. March 23, 2023, https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/testimony_roberts.pdf.

⁷⁴ National Association of Counties, “U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Delists the Gray Wolf in the Lower-48 States.” Jonathan Shuffield. [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service delists the gray wolf in the lower-48 states \(naco.org\)](https://www.naco.org/press-releases/2020/11/10/us-fish-and-wildlife-service-delists-the-gray-wolf-in-the-lower-48-states).

⁷⁵ U.S. District Court Northern District of California. *Defenders of Wildlife, Et. Al. v. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Et Al.* 10 Feb 2022.

⁷⁶ E&E News, “Judge restores gray wolf protections.” Michael Doyle, 02/10/2022. [Judge restores gray wolf protections - E&E News \(eenews.net\)](https://www.eenews.net/stories/1090927).

⁷⁷ Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, “RMEF Strongly Supports Delisting, State Management of Wolves,” October 29, 2020, <https://www.rmef.org/elk-network/rmef-strongly-supports-delisting-state-management-of-wolves/>.

plans that successfully balanced wolf population health and human activity. Hunters in Wisconsin have been vocally supportive of these efforts. The Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association stated, “The science overwhelmingly supports [delisting the Gray Wolf] but unfortunately, past attempts to delist wolves have been challenged by animal-extremist groups who have never set foot in Wisconsin and are driven by a dangerous ideology, not science.”⁷⁸ The group went on to say that the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources should retain management authority over the Gray Wolf.

Republican Solutions

House Republicans are committed to advancing solutions to increase access to public lands and provide greater opportunities for hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation across the country. A selection of bills already considered this Congress by the House Committee on Natural Resources include:

H.R. 615 (Rep. Wittman), “Protecting Access for Hunters and Anglers Act”: Bars DOI and the U.S. Department of Agriculture from prohibiting or regulating the use of lead ammunition or tackle on federal lands and waters that is made available for hunting or fishing without the necessary science to support such action. The bill passed the House by a 214-201 vote.⁷⁹

H.R. 764 (Rep. Boebert), “Trust the Science Act”: Removes the recovered Gray Wolf from the endangered species list. The bill passed the House by a 214-201 vote earlier this month.⁸⁰

H.R. 6492 (Rep. Westerman), “Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences (EXPLORE) Act”: The EXPLORE Act requires USFS and BLM to establish new target shooting ranges in every national forest and BLM district, make a public list of national forests and BLM districts that currently have shooting ranges, and prevent the closure of target shooting ranges. The EXPLORE Act passed the House this year by voice vote.⁸¹

H.R. 6994 (Rep. Kim of California), “Restoring Our Unopened Trails for Enjoyment and Safety (ROUTES) Act”: Requires federal land managers to prioritize reopening trails, campsites, recreation areas, and roads within two years of a closure caused by a natural disaster. This bill provides important streamlining tools, including a new categorical exclusion, that would expedite activities like hazard tree removal to facilitate the reopening of roads. This bill had a hearing earlier this year.⁸²

H.R. ____ (Rep. Westerman), Forestry Discussion Draft: Comprehensive legislation that would restore the health and resiliency of federal forests by expediting and streamlining reviews for forest health treatments, ending frivolous litigation, and promoting greater coordination with non-federal partners. The discussion draft had a hearing earlier this year.⁸³

⁷⁸ Sportsmen’s Alliance, “Sportsmen’s Coalition Petitions USFWS to Delist Wolves, June 29, 2023, <https://sportsmensalliance.org/news/sportsmens-alliance-petitions-to-delist-wolves/>.

⁷⁹ H.R. 615, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/615>.

⁸⁰ H.R. 615, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/615>.

⁸¹ H.R. 6492, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/6492>.

⁸² H.R. 6994, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/6994>.

⁸³ https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/discussion_draft_of_h.r._04.17.24.pdf.