



The voice of fish and wildlife agencies

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**Statement for the Record
Submitted by the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies
Washington, D.C.**

**Hearing before the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries
House Committee on Natural Resources
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 6352, H.R. 8413, H.R. 8632 & H.R. 8836**

September 10, 2024

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (“Association”) is the professional organization that represents the collective voice of the fish and wildlife agencies in all 50 states, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and District of Columbia (“state agencies”). These agencies exercise primary statutory authority for management of fish and wildlife as public trust resources within their borders. We thank the Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife (“Subcommittee”) for its ongoing leadership ensuring the ability of state agencies and their federal partners to manage the species and habitats they are entrusted to steward. We offer the following statement for consideration as deliberations continue on **H.R. 6352**, the *Tax Stamp Revenue Transfer for Wildlife and Recreation Act* and **H.R. 8836**, the *Wildlife Movement Through Partnerships Act*, and stand ready to assist on these or any other matters related to the responsible management of our nation’s fish and wildlife.

H.R. 6352 the Tax Stamp Revenue Transfer for Wildlife and Recreation Act

The Association strongly supports H.R. 6352, the *Tax Stamp Revenue Transfer for Wildlife and Recreation Act*. This legislation would significantly bolster the ability of state agencies to deliver on their mission as stewards of wildlife and habitats by allocating 85% of firearm suppressor tax stamp revenues to the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Trust Fund (PR). The foundational pillar of the American System of Conservation Funding, PR apportions funds generated by excise taxes on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment directly to State Fish and Wildlife Agencies to enable the scientific management of wildlife and habitats.

Thanks to these funds, over 35.5 million acres and 9,000 Wildlife Management Areas are maintained and operated, with research, monitoring, and inventory conducted for more than 500 species of birds and mammals. Pittman-Robertson not only ensures healthy habitats and abundant populations, but also fuels the “user pays – public benefits” cycle of success contributing to the \$563.7 billion outdoor economy that accounts for 2.2% of the nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). With the addition of revenues from suppressor tax stamps, which are estimated to contribute between \$150 million to \$170 million annually if H.R. 6352 is enacted, Congress can build on and supercharge this enduring legacy of conservation.

Suppressors are increasingly popular accessories that improve ballistics, enhance accuracy, reduce recoil, and alleviate hearing impairment while reducing user conflicts. Suppressors are one of the most vital and effective tools to recruiting and retaining new demographics of hunters and shooters, particularly women and young people to shooting sports. Given their increased popularity and use within the hunting and shooting sport community, we urge Congress to pass this legislation so these funds can more appropriately go to fund the very conservation and shooting activities authorized under PR.

H.R. 8836 the Wildlife Movement Through Partnerships Act

The Association strongly supports H.R. 8836, the *Wildlife Movement Through Partnerships Act*. Secretarial Order 3362 (SO 3362), *Improving Habitat Quality in Western Big-Game Winter Range and Migration Corridors*, has enabled significant and impactful conservation efforts that have improved the habitat for some of our nation's most iconic wildlife species, including elk, mule deer, and pronghorn. The voluntary and collaborative approach directed in SO 3362 has proven to be a model of effective conservation that respects the rights of landowners and incorporates the roles and authorities of state agencies to ensure critical wildlife movement and migration areas are conserved and enhanced.

Under SO 3362, the Bureau of Land Management, in collaboration with state fish and wildlife agencies, Tribal governments, conservation organizations, landowners, and other stakeholders, has successfully removed or modified over 1,250 miles of fencing to facilitate the natural movement and migration of wildlife. This work has directly contributed to the improvement of over 3 million acres of big game habitat, including over 1 million acres located in state-identified migration corridors. These accomplishments represent real, tangible improvements to the ecosystems that sustain these species and, by extension, the outdoor heritage that is so deeply valued by Americans across the country.

State fish and wildlife agencies have been integral to these efforts, contributing their local expertise and ensuring that habitat improvement projects are concentrated in the areas where they are most needed, particularly those identified in State Wildlife Action Plans. The results have been remarkable: approximately 2.9 million acres of habitat have been enhanced for mule deer, 1.7 million acres for elk, and 1.9 million acres for pronghorn. Beyond the numbers, these efforts have also led to improved ecosystem health, benefiting not just big game, but also the diverse plant, animal, and fish species that share these habitats.

Connectivity and migration work is of course already being conducted across the states for more than just big game species. For example, Florida's connectivity efforts have improved habitats relied upon by federally listed species and state Species of Greatest Conservation need including the Florida panther, the population of which has rebounded twentyfold since it was originally listed, and the red-cockaded woodpecker, which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed to reclassify from endangered to threatened. The success of these initiatives underscores the importance of complementary programs such as the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program administered by the Department of Transportation, and the need for continuing and expanding the voluntary, grassroots approach to conservation of SO 3362 to the rest of the country.

This is a winning strategy for both conservation and the economy. By expanding these projects, we are not only safeguarding our natural resources but also supporting the outdoor recreation economy, which is vital to Americans and their local communities. We urge Congress to support H.R. 8836 and to provide the necessary resources to build on the successes state, federal, tribal, and private partners have already achieved.

We again thank the Subcommittee for its consideration of the perspectives of state agencies and the expertise of on-the-ground natural resource managers, and we are glad to offer our assistance on these or any other matters relevant to the management of our nation's fish and wildlife resources. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Kurt Thiede, Government Affairs Director, at kthiede@fishwildlife.org or at (202) 838-3468.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles F. Sykes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with some loops and flourishes.

Charles F. Sykes
President