

U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries

Legislative Hearing on H.R. 839 (Rep. Arrington), H.R. 1809 (Rep. Quigley), H.R. 2293 (Rep. Ezell), H.R. 2316 (Rep. Hurd), – April 8, 2025, 10:15 AM

Written Testimony of Mikkel Anderson (Aurora, Colorado) – Ducks Unlimited Board Member

Madam Chair, Ranking Member Hoyle, and Members of the Committee – thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Representatives Hurd and Elfreth’s Wetlands Conservation and Access Improvement Act of 2025, H.R. 2316.

My name is Mikkel Anderson, and I am a resident of Aurora, Colorado. I am a 30-year active volunteer, supporter, and currently a Board Member of Ducks Unlimited, the world leader in waterfowl and wetlands conservation. It is an honor to represent Ducks Unlimited, and our one million supporters across the United States to talk about the importance of preserving America’s wetland habitat through investment of Pittman-Robertson Trust Fund interest into funding of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, referred to as NAWCA.

Ducks Unlimited, Inc.’s (DU) mission is to restore, conserve and protect wetlands to fill the skies with waterfowl today, tomorrow and forever. We have been working towards this mission since our founding in 1937 and have conserved more than 18 million acres of habitat across North America. DU boasts a million supporters across the country and 850 staff operating in all 50 states. We have sister organizations in Canada and Mexico that provide critical links to a duck’s long journey from the arctic breeding grounds of the Boreal Forest to the tropical floodplains of the Yucatan Peninsula. Ducks cannot distinguish national borders and freely move between the three countries of North America. Therefore, our work spans the habitat necessary for the entire life cycle of North America’s waterfowl.

I have been a DU volunteer since 1994, and a hunter and outdoorsman for seventy years. Professionally, I recently retired as Executive Vice President at Resight Holdings, LLC, completing real estate transactions and managing environmental cleanup to create value from environmentally impaired real estate. Before that, I spent 20 years with national engineering consulting firms focusing on water and wastewater infrastructure development. I am a licensed Professional Civil Engineer with a specialty in water resources.

During my time with Ducks Unlimited I witnessed the transformative work that occurs when hunters and conservation organizations collaborate with federal and state governments to restore wetlands and other habitats to benefit waterfowl, people, and the multitude of other species that use these habitats. In my home state of Colorado, and across the United States, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) and the Pittman-Robertson Act have achieved tremendous success on the ground for habitat benefiting game and non-game species. These laws are the cornerstone for funding wetlands conservation and connecting people with the outdoors and wildlife. These critical funds have enabled Ducks Unlimited to work hand-in-hand with private landowners, farmers and ranchers, indigenous peoples, conservation partners, and local government agencies to achieve these ends. Passage of H.R. 2316 is the next step in the long journey we have been on for nearly 100 years.

The Wetlands Conservation and Access Improvement Act of 2025, H.R. 2316, reauthorizes the allocation of trust fund interest earned by the Pittman-Robertson Act’s monies to NAWCA and empowers partner organizations like Ducks Unlimited to multiply those dollars to deliver vital projects that help ensure healthy populations of many animal species, not just waterfowl. This partnership between the users, states, firearms industry, and federal government was established through the Pittman-Robertson Act almost a century ago, recognizing the critical role each party plays in habitat restoration. Congress has, and must, continue to recognize the incredibly important force America’s hunters and outdoorsmen and women play in protecting wildlife and waterfowl.

Hunters and anglers have paid for conservation, ensuring that our country was taken from the brink of wildlife decimation in the early 1900s, to a renaissance of wildlife abundance today. In the late 1800s, the country's original conservationists sounded the alarm over the near extinction of America's iconic species like bison, white-tailed deer and wood duck. By the early 1900s, as a society, we began to understand the collective need to act to protect the last vestiges of wild America, and the keystone species and habitats they require. From the beginning, hunters were first to raise their hands and donate their money to address these problems. In 1937, a senator from Nevada and a congressman from Virginia worked with hunters to create a new system to fund wildlife and habitat restoration work, paid for by the hunters themselves. Later that year, President Franklin Roosevelt signed into law the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, more commonly referred to as the Pittman-Robertson Act, in honor of the two visionary members of Congress who brought it to the President's desk.

The Pittman-Robertson Act (P-R) collects an 11% excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition which is placed in the Wildlife Restoration Trust Fund. The more sporting arms and ammunition bought by hunters, the more money raised for conservation of the very species they were pursuing. The fund distributes money every year to each state fish and wildlife agency, ensuring local control of these monies. The states themselves provide a 25% match of funds they receive from Pittman-Robertson, again ensuring that every state commits to the crucial management of habitat and wildlife. The amount each state receives is based on a formula that accounts for state geographic size, and critically, how many hunting licenses sales. The higher the numbers, the more money a state receives. Since its inception in 1937, Pittman-Robertson has generated more than \$17 billion for the Wildlife Restoration Trust Fund.¹ The passage of the Pittman-Robertson Act fundamentally shifted the paradigm of how conservation was conducted, and hunters led the charge. This created the "user pays-public benefits" model, which remains a key component of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. This model is unique to North America and has been singularly responsible for preventing many species from being relegated to the annals of history, to now flourishing in numbers that have not been seen in generations.

Decades after Pittman-Robertson passage, to stem the accelerating loss of wetlands and waterfowl habitat, hunters who had been privately funding habitat conservation saw that more resources were needed and advocated for a program specific to wetlands and waterfowl restoration. Founded on scientific research from federal and state agencies and the conservation community, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan was born, helping inform the creation of NAWCA, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. In 1989, President George H. W. Bush signed NAWCA into law, producing another seismic shift in American conservation. NAWCA prioritizes funding the most critical wetlands habitats across the country to ensure maximum efficiency in delivering waterfowl population benefits. Most NAWCA dollars go to hunting lands that support public hunting opportunities.

NAWCA has a unique model for how grants are adjudicated and awarded. The Migratory Bird Conservation Committee, a committee composed of two Senators and two Representatives, one from each party, the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture, and the Environmental Protection Agency Administrator, reviews all grant applications to ensure only the highest quality projects, those specifically benefitting waterfowl and waterfowl hunting, will be approved. This system provides a rare level of Congressional and Administrative oversight, inserting a high level of fidelity into the process. Each dollar granted through NAWCA requires at least one dollar of match from grantees. Because of program competitiveness, match contributions multiply the impact of federal dollars by a factor as high or higher than four times. NAWCA is one of the most economically efficient conservation programs that Congress funds, providing the tremendous benefits for the American taxpayer. Since the program's creation in 1989, NAWCA has granted \$2.1 billion, resulting in a further \$4.3 billion in matching partner money, and funding over 3,300 projects and conserving more than 32 million acres of wetland habitat!²

This impressive history does not account for all the secondary benefits that derive from NAWCA projects. Prairie wetlands capture sediment runoff from plowed fields. They capture and neutralize a range of potential pollutants before water is released to surface streams or aquifers. Wetlands in stream systems temporarily store flood waters

and lessen flood impacts. Non-migratory species use wetlands, especially for winter sanctuary, breeding and migration. Coastal wetlands dampen storm and tidal damage, doing so while providing crucial habitat for fish and shellfish. A wide range of native pollinators rely on wetlands and associated habitats. Wetlands are vital for much more than just waterfowl, but healthy waterfowl populations are the clearest indicator that wetlands are providing these benefits. Not least, wetlands provide significant recreational opportunities for hunting, fishing, boating, and wildlife viewing.

Twenty years ago, the Pittman-Robertson Fund began generating record levels of funding. Because the dollar amounts were so large and the reality of time delay associated with allocating funds to the states, Pittman-Robertson allows the Secretary of the Treasury to invest a portion of the trust fund's revenue in interest-bearing U.S. treasuries.³ Since 2004, this interest has been allocated to NAWCA funding because of the continued pressing need of funding wetlands restoration. These interest earnings have generated an average of at least \$10 million per year for wetlands conservation. This supplemental funding has provided a boost to NAWCA, as project grant applications and demand for funding have skyrocketed. This trust fund interest mechanism has a timespan, requiring reauthorization from time to time. In its current phase, this authorization expires in 2026. Thanks to Representative Hurd and Representative Elfeth's leadership in identifying this impending issue, H.R. 2316 will ensure Pittman-Robertson interest will continue until 2033.

Sending additional revenue generated by hunters' initial investment from Pittman-Robertson to NAWCA is representative of the effectiveness of the mutually beneficial relationship between hunters, state wildlife agencies, and the firearm and ammunition industry. For example, to access any of Pittman-Robertson's federal funding, states must guarantee that license fees paid by hunters will be used only to support state fish and wildlife departments. In addition to directly providing money for critical wildlife conservation and habitat restoration, the Pittman-Robertson trust fund interest allocated to NAWCA ensures that fees paid by hunters are not diverted by states for other uses that do not benefit hunters, wildlife, and their crucial habitats.

State wildlife agencies will continue to benefit greatly from reauthorizing Pittman-Robertson interest investment into NAWCA, aiding the nation's ability to continue to conserve game and non-game species alike. The willingness to leverage Pittman-Robertson trust fund dollars through NAWCA with non-federal resources demonstrates the wide-spread support for these programs amongst the entire outdoor recreation and conservation community. Strengthening NAWCA with Pittman-Robertson interest empowers non-profit organizations like Ducks Unlimited and others to magnify public-private partnerships for the common good, supporting hunting opportunities across the country and benefitting the very sportsmen and women who pay into these funds.

The year 1937 holds a special place in the heart of duck hunters around the country as the founding year for both Ducks Unlimited and the Pittman-Robertson Act. Both are institutions of American conservation efforts and resulted from a unified call to action from America's sportsmen and women. Since the 1930s, Ducks Unlimited and sports enthusiasts have continued to lead the way in funding the restoration and protection of wildlife habitat across the country. Fifty years after the establishment of Pittman-Robertson and Ducks Unlimited, enactment of NAWCA was a natural progression. Everyone with a deep and personal connection to the outdoors owes a debt of gratitude to the hunters and conservation pioneers who laid the groundwork for this harmonious relationship between Pittman-Robertson and NAWCA.

Doubtlessly, outdoor recreation, especially waterfowling, is an essential part of the U.S. ethos and our economy. In a 2024 report reviewing 2022 economic data, the Sportsmen's Alliance found that recreational hunting and target shooting generated more than \$106.2 billion in combined retail sales and contributed \$133 billion to economic growth.⁴ These data are substantial in the aggregate, but the districts of members of this subcommittee represent some of the strongest in terms of economic contributions of their hunter constituents. For example, in Wyoming, 132,190 hunters spent \$218 million on hunting-related purchases.⁵ Of the statewide totals, Oregon's 4th congressional district represented 63,060 hunters and \$336 million in spending.⁶ The return on investment from the excise taxes on these transactions can be felt directly in the beautiful natural spaces of the West where I and

some members of this subcommittee call home. In Colorado alone, we received \$24.9 million in 2025 from Pittman-Robertson funds. NAWCA in turn has funded 49 Colorado projects with \$26.5 in federal money and \$75.8 million in partner match.

The NAWCA project known as Water 4 Colorado's San Luis Valley I & II is an excellent example of how much further these projects can go with the compounding power of Pittman-Robertson interest and public-private funding matches. Of the over \$8 million total investment in habitat improvements and water management for this project, \$5.6 million came from non-federal partner contributions. This project will protect, enhance, and restore over 10,000 acres of migratory bird habitat, including over 2,100 acres of wetlands, on both public and private land. Flood-irrigated wetlands, riparian areas, and uplands totaling 1,845 acres on important private farms and ranchlands will be enhanced by modernizing irrigation infrastructure. The San Luis Valley (SLV) is recognized as critically important nesting and migration habitat for Mallards, Northern Pintails, Southwestern Willow Flycatchers, and Greater Sandhill Cranes.⁷

Preserving this incredible model of wildlife conservation funding benefits all Americans, not just hunters, and helps ensure sustainable waterfowl habitat and populations for future generations. The nearly 1.5 million waterfowl hunters spend a collective 17 million days in the field and expend more than \$1.3 billion on trip and gear expenses alone. That economy is supported in large part by the investments made by NAWCA to conserve waterfowl habitat in all parts of the country. This nearly century of success has been almost entirely possible due to the proven structure of that "users pay - public benefits" system. And while hunters are paying for this critical conservation work, the public who enjoy waterfowl, wetlands and the outdoors benefits from their investment. A passionate few create benefits for all of us.

We need to fortify the common-sense approach to funding in H.R. 2316 and empower partner organizations like Ducks Unlimited that stretch these finite dollars to achieve more with less.

Ducks Unlimited's work and that of our partners continues to focus on educating the public about the vital benefits of Pittman-Robertson and NAWCA, protecting crucial programs like Pittman-Robertson and NAWCA. We cannot do this without your support of these crucial legislations today and in the future.

Madam Chair, Ranking Member, Members of the subcommittee, thank you again for the invitation to testify in support of H.R. 2316 and thank you for all you do to protect North America's wetlands and waterfowl.

¹ Partners with a Payer. (n.d.). *Funding sources*. <https://partnerwithapayer.org/funding-sources/>

² Ducks Unlimited. (n.d.). NAWCA - North American Wetlands Conservation Act: Ducks Unlimited. <https://www.ducks.org/conservation/public-policy/nawca-north-american-wetlands-conservation-act>.

³ Irby, L. (2017, February 23). *Celebrating 80 years of the Pittman-Robertson Act: Ducks Unlimited*. Ducks Unlimited. <https://www.ducks.org/newsroom/celebrating-80-years-of-the-pittman-robertson-act#:~:text=An%20amendment%20to%20the%20Pittman,million%20per%20year%20since%202004>

⁴ Sportsmen's Alliance. (2024). *Hunting in America: An economic force for conservation*. [2024 SAF Hunt Report Page 090924.pdf](#)

⁵ Sportsmen's Alliance. (2024). Wyoming economic contributions - Hunting. In *Hunting in America: An Economic Force for Conservation*. [2024 SAF Senate Handouts WY.pdf](#)

⁶ Sportsmen's Alliance. (2024). Oregon economic contributions - Hunting. In *Hunting in America: An Economic Force for Conservation*. [2024 SAF Senate Handouts OR.pdf](#)

⁷ Ducks Unlimited. (n.d.). NAWCA Colorado state fact sheet. [colorado.pdf](#)