



**BACKCOUNTRY
HUNTERS & ANGLERS**

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**House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife & Fisheries Oversight Hearing
for "Hunting and Fishing Access in the Great American Outdoors"**

Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would like to first offer my condolences to the committee on the passing of Representative LaMalfa. The Congressman cared deeply about hunting and fishing access, and his commitment to sportsmen and women will be remembered.

My name is Ryan Callaghan but most know me as Cal. I am a lifelong conservationist, hunter and fisherman, guide, and the President and CEO of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers.

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers' mission is to ensure North America's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing in the wild through advocacy, education, and boots-on-the-ground action. Our membership spans 49 states, two Canadian provinces, and one territory. What unites our politically diverse members, regardless of geography or background, is a shared understanding that hunting and fishing on public lands provide an invaluable sense of freedom, challenge, and solace.

But these experiences require two things: quality habitat and public access to it.

More than sixty years ago, Congress, sitting in the same seats you occupy today, codified into law the National Wildlife Refuge System. In doing so, they carried forward Theodore Roosevelt's conservation legacy and created the world's most enviable and only legally unified system dedicated to wildlife conservation. Your predecessors knew a lot less than we do today about our wild lands and waters. They understood that maintaining this system wouldn't be easy, yet they recognized the inherent value in stewarding our nation's greatest resources for the future, in perpetuity.

Continuing this legacy means we have a shared duty to expand access for hunters and anglers in our great outdoors by maintaining our public lands.

Across the country, public lands face a deferred maintenance backlog exceeding \$32.5 billion dollars, including more than \$2.6 billion dollars within the National Wildlife Refuge System alone. The bipartisan Great American Outdoors Act was a landmark achievement that began addressing this challenge by permanently funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund and establishing the Legacy Restoration Fund.

The importance of these investments is evident on the ground and accessible to the end users, everyday Americans. In West Virginia, a Land and Water Conservation Fund acquisition recently added 963 acres to the preserve portion of New River Gorge National Park and Preserve near Sandstone. Through a willing-seller transfer, this project permanently protected scenic and historic lands while significantly expanding public hunting and outdoor recreation opportunities. Similarly, in Idaho, a Land and Water Conservation Fund acquisition in the Boise Foothills connected fragmented public lands north of Boise, expanded access to a game management unit, and protected critical winter range for elk, mule deer, sage-grouse, and black bear near a rapidly growing community. Together, these projects demonstrate how growing our public lands expands hunting and fishing access.

But this work remains unfinished. The Legacy Restoration Fund which prevents our public lands and water infrastructure, and the access they provide, from falling into further disrepair, is set to expire, and it must be reauthorized. Access for Hunters and Anglers is the difference between being able to launch a boat on a river or not, to reliably and safely drive half a million miles of roads or not, to safely get young families into the outdoors or not, to spend money with outdoor retailers or in rural communities and out of the way places or not.

Infrastructure, however, is only part of the equation. Hunting and fishing access also depends on supporting the full staffing of our public land management agencies.

Our public lands cannot function without refuge managers, wildlife biologists, foresters, field staff, and other dedicated public servants. These professionals are on the ground, maintaining habitat, managing wildlife populations, keeping access points open, and working with local communities and sportsmen for the benefit of us all.

Hunters and anglers are not asking for special treatment – simply the recognition of our greatest American freedoms, our shared public lands. Protect our lands from sale or transfer so that we may continue doing what we have always done: conserve and steward, respect fish and wildlife through responsible take and habitat creation. By doing so we can pass our outdoor traditions of respect and responsible use onto the next generation. They are, after all, the rightful owners of this legacy.

I thank the committee for the work you have done advancing hunting and fishing access, and I truly look forward to working alongside each of you as we continue stewarding our shared resources in perpetuity. With that, I'm happy to answer any questions.

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