

Sportsmen's Act of 2015

Lead Sponsors: U.S. Senators Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.)

Original Cosponsors: U.S. Senators Jim Risch (R-Idaho), Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.), Heidi Heitkamp (D-N.D.), Deb Fischer (R-Neb)

Access to public lands is the number one issue for America's sportsmen and women. The Sportsmen's Act of 2015 includes a broad array of bipartisan measures to enhance opportunities for hunters, anglers, and outdoor recreation enthusiasts, reauthorize key conservation programs, improve access to public lands, and help boost the outdoor recreation economy.

Title I – Regulatory Reforms:

Sec. 101 – Hunting, Fishing and Recreational Shooting Protection Act

Makes the existing exemption from EPA regulation for lead shot permanent, and adds lead tackle to the exempted products, leaving regulatory authority to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and state game and fish agencies.

Sec. 102 – Target Practice and Marksmanship Training Support Act

Extends and increases states' authority to allocate Pittman-Robertson funding for shooting ranges on public lands, and encourages federal land agencies to cooperate with state and local governments to maintain shooting ranges.

Sec. 103 – Polar Bear Conservation and Fairness Act

Enables the Secretary of the Interior to authorize import permits of 41 Polar Bears legally harvested from approved populations in Canada before the polar bear was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 2008.

Sec. 104 – Farmer and Hunter Protection Act

Authorizes state extension offices to determine "normal agricultural practices." This will remedy recent situations in which the Fish and Wildlife Service has interpreted the Migratory Bird Treaty Act to include hunting of migrating birds on rolled rice fields as illegal baiting, resulting in fines up to \$10,000 for farmers and hunters.

Sec. 105 – Recreational Fishing and Hunting Heritage Opportunities Act

Requires Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service lands to be open for recreational hunting fishing and shooting unless specifically closed. National Parks and Wildlife Refuges will remain exempt from this provision, and the BLM or Forest Service will retain authority to implement restrictions when needed.

Sec. 106 – Permits for Film Crews of Five People or Less

Directs the U.S. Departments of the Interior and Agriculture to issue permits and assess fees on an annual-basis for commercial filming on federal land for crews of five people or fewer. This will allow for greater access for small media groups and individuals.

Sec. 107 – Carrying guns according to state law on Corps of Engineers water resource projects

Authorizes the lawful possession of firearms pursuant to state law on lands managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as part of a water resource development project.

Sec. 108 – Equal Access to Justice Act and Judgment Fund Transparency

Requires public reporting of fees, awards, and payments provided under the Equal Access to Justice Act, as well as payments made from the Judgment Fund for claims against the federal government, along with relevant information pertaining to each case. The report would be made accessible online, with protections for private information regarding individual litigants.

Sec. 109 – Transporting Bows Across National Park Service Lands

Authorizes the lawful transportation of bows and crossbows on National Park Service lands. The National Park Service is prohibited from restricting the lawful transportation of bows and crossbows that remain in the vehicle while in a National Park unit.

Title II – Habitat Conservation:

Sec. 201 – Making Public Lands Public

Requires the greater of 1.5 percent or \$10 million of annual Land and Water Conservation Funds be made available for the improvement of recreational access to existing federal lands with significantly restricted public access.

Sec. 202 – HUNT Act

Directs all federal public land management agencies to identify high priority federal lands where hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation are permitted but where access is non-existent or significantly restricted, and develop plans to provide access.

Sec. 203 – Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act Reauthorization (FLTFA)

Reauthorizes FLTFA, enabling the government to sell public land for ranching, community development, and other projects. The revenue allows federal agencies to acquire high-priority in-holdings from willing sellers.

Sec. 204 – North American Wetlands Conservation Act Reauthorization (NAWCA)

Reauthorizes NAWCA through 2019, providing matching grants to organizations, state/local governments, and private landowners for the acquisition, restoration, and enhancement of wetlands critical to migratory birds. This program generates three additional dollars for every federal dollar and reduces the annual authorization level from \$75 to \$50 million.

Sec. 205 – National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Reauthorization

Reauthorizes NFWF through 2019, directing conservation dollars to pressing environmental needs with matching private funds. NFWF supports conservation projects across the country and administers the Gulf Environmental Fund established to remedy harm from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.