September 8, 2016

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell:

The Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council (Council) is writing regarding legislation in Congress to modernize the Pittman-Robertson Fund to address today’s conservation funding and participation challenges. According to the Council’s charter, the WHHCC is tasked with providing recommendations on subjects including but not limited to: Increasing public awareness of and support for the Wildlife Restoration Program; Fostering wildlife and habitat conservation and ethics in hunting and shooting sports recreation; Stimulating sportsmen and women’s participation in conservation and management of wildlife and habitat resources through outreach and education; and improving implementation of Federal conservation programs that benefit wildlife, hunting and outdoor recreation on private lands. Pending legislation in Congress entitled Modernizing the Pittman-Robertson Fund for Tomorrow’s Needs (S. 2690 and H.R. 4818) would facilitate positive changes that are consistent with these directives as well as the goals outlined in existing Department of Interior initiatives such as Let’s Move! Outside and America’s Great Outdoors. We feel strongly that these bills warrant serious consideration by this administration as a model for legislative strategies to sustain conservation funding and participation levels in hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting.

The Wildlife Restoration Program, commonly referred to as Pittman-Robertson, is a foundational act in the United States system of funding wildlife conservation. The taxes paid by hunters and recreational shooters provide the funds that support the management of wildlife populations and their habitats for both game and non-game animals. Preserving and enhancing this volunteer revenue source enables state agencies to provide outdoor recreational activities for all Americans who enjoy the outdoors. This “user pay/public benefits” act benefits not only hunters and recreational shooters but all of our citizens through the delivery of on the ground wildlife and habitat conservation by the state fish and wildlife agencies. The increasing urbanization and suburbanization of our population has made it more difficult for the public to participate in hunting and recreational shooting than it was when Pittman-Robertson was enacted in 1937. To ensure continued successful funding for wildlife conservation that benefits all Americans, the Council feels it is necessary to update the provisions of the Pittman-Robertson Act to:
(1) Provide funding support at the national level for the state wildlife agencies to use to develop, guide and enhance collective efforts to recruit hunters and recreational shooters; and

(2) Authorize state wildlife agencies to spend Pittman-Robertson Act funds on projects that support the growth of hunting and recreational shooting.

Supported by 35 national sportsmen’s conservation organizations, S. 2690 and H.R. 4818 would clarify that one of the purposes of the Pittman-Robertson Act is to extend financial and technical assistance to the states for the promotion of hunting and recreational shooting. The legislation would expand the definitions section of the Pittman-Robertson Act to include a definition of “hunter recruitment and recreational shooter recruitment” activities and projects and make clear that Pittman-Robertson act funds under sections 4(b), 4(c), and 10 may be used for hunter recruitment and recreational shooter recruitment. To ensure that traditional wildlife conservation remains the primary focus of these funds, the legislation would put a cap (25%) on the amount of Section 4(b) funds that can be spent on hunter and recreational shooter recruitment. The discretion to determine the amount, if any, of Wildlife Restoration Fund monies spent on “hunter recruitment and recreational shooter recruitment” activities remains entirely with the State fish and wildlife agency Director.

The legislation would also clarify, by removing an existing prohibition on “public relations,” that state spending for management of wildlife areas and resources may include spending for the promotion of hunting and recreational shooting. The legislation would clarify that the construction, operation, and maintenance of public target ranges under the Basic Hunter Education funding is not restricted to ranges that include hunter safety programs. Finally, the legislation would expand the Multistate Conservation Grant program (Section 11) by providing for an additional $5 million per year (from archery related excise tax collections) to be used for making hunter and recreational shooter recruitment project grants that promote a national hunting and shooting sport recruitment program and related communication and outreach activities.

The Council stands as an enthusiastic partner in your commitment to facilitating the enjoyment of America’s great outdoors through the development of new and innovative strategies that help create strong ties between citizens and our nation’s unmatched natural resources. For this reason, we respectfully urge you to consider the concepts of S. 2690 and H.R. 4818 as part of a suite of potential tools for attracting new participants and funding to outdoor recreation and conservation.

Sincerely,

John Tomke, Chair
Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council

cc: Dan Ashe, Director, USFWS