

## Hunting for a Solution

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When our government organizations, such as the US Department of Fish and Wildlife, sit down to decide how to best manage our wildlife, they must choose between a number of various management policies, and then between the means they will use to achieve their goals. While many people do not see the need for hunting, or fight against it because they believe it's inhumane, governmentally regulated hunting<sup>1</sup> remains the most effective and sensible wildlife management tool. Based upon economic factors and keeping public safety as a priority, hunting continues to play an important part in our local and national effort to manage wildlife.

Every year when America's 12.5 million hunters take to the field in pursuit of game, they create an enormous positive impact on our economy. From the tax revenue they generate for the government to the money they inject into private industry buying gear, hunters in the United States alone annually spend more money on their age-old pastime than McDonald's worldwide annual revenue (NSSF Economic Impact 6). Hunting isn't free, nor is it a right for each American, despite some arguing it should be. Every season, each hunter must purchase a license, tags for each individual big game animal he hunts, a Duck Stamp, and pay direct taxes through the Pittman-Robertson Act on all the sporting goods he purchases. All of these expenditures directly fund our nation's conservation and preservation efforts with hunters contributing roughly \$4.2 billion each year in tax revenue (The International Association 4). Since the creation of the Duck Stamp in 1934, hunters have raised enough money for the Federal Government to successfully secure and forever protect over 5.2 million acres of waterfowl

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<sup>1</sup> From this point forward in the paper, when I discuss hunting, I am referring to such governmentally regulated hunting.

habitat and breeding grounds (The Federal Duck Stamp Program). That is 5.2 million acres that might just be filled with sub-divisions and industry if society and the government deemed hunting an inhumane and ineffective management tool, and ceased to allow it.

In addition, the various license and tag fees go directly towards each state's own wildlife agencies, and hence fund state parks, forests, and habitat restoration efforts. One of the best aspects of this is that non-hunters are able to reap the benefits of hunters' taxes. This extends to other outdoor enthusiasts such as hikers and bird watchers having their hobbies subsidized by hunters' tax dollars, because hunters fund the lands in which they enjoy these activities. Finally, the Pittman Robertson Act (P-R) is a Federal excise tax levied every year since 1937 on sporting goods. It is a 20% tax, split evenly between purchaser and manufacturer, which annually supplies "a steady source of earmarked funds" for long-term projects to be carried out for the welfare of America's wildlife (The Pittman-Robertson). These funds have directly led to an increase in the populations of many American game and non-game animals that were on the verge of extinction at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. While unregulated hunting led to the demise of many of these species, the responsible hunting of our era has remedied this through the P-R and other programs. Hunting, which at one point was the problem, has now become the solution, and should be allowed to continue helping our natural world.

In the private sector, hunting has created jobs and brought prosperity to many remote, yet wildlife-abundant areas. In fact, hunting contributes over 600,000 jobs to our economy, from jobs in the sporting goods business to guides who run lodges for hunting trips (NSSF Economic Impact 5). Hunting influences so many industries in our economy. Looking at the types of expenses incurred on a modest hunting trip illustrates this: Fuel/airfare for transportation, lodging, food and beverages for the trip, supplies, ammunition, and guides are all areas and in

which hunters spend money and create jobs. A prime example of the positive impacts of hunting are seen even in today's economy, as financial reporter Eric Fox writes of Cabela's, a large hunting goods retailer, "The market may have pronounced the death of retail, but there are some rays of hope shining through as Cabela's reported positive same store sales growth in the fourth quarter of 2008". Given this, it is clear that hunting is one industry that continues to stimulate our economy even in tough economic times. As Pepper Conlin, author of *The Deer Hunter: The Unintended Effects of Hunting* puts it; hunting "gives our economy the most buck for our bang" (185). Clearly one of the unintended effects of hunting is a large economic stimulus, created by hunters' expenditures on the necessities of their sport.

The economic reality of wildlife management comes down to which options are most sensible for achieving the determined population goals. Since all parties in our society, both those in favor of and opposed to hunting, can all agree that animal populations need to be managed for both human and animal welfare, we only need to decide *how* to go about doing so. While a handful of alternatives to hunting for reducing populations exist, they are ineffective and economically impractical. While many opposed to hunting point to using contraception on herds to reduce population, the results are questionable and costs for wide scale use are unreasonable. For instance, White Buffalo, America's leading deer control company, charges about \$750 per deer treated with birth control. According to the senior editor of Outdoor Life magazine, Frank Minitzer, if this were to be used in a state like Pennsylvania, where hunters kill around 500,000 deer each season, it would cost the taxpayers of the state around \$375 million annually (122). Now, this \$375 million would be the cost of getting someone *else* to do the job hunters are *already* doing. And the *biggest* reason for not using this method is that hunters are actually *paying* the government just for the privilege to do this job. So not only would this lead to the

government spending extra money, but it would also exclude them from billions in tax revenue. Clearly, the most effective and economical wildlife birth control system is not an employee in a uniform, but an average citizen in camouflage and orange.

Overpopulated species pose numerous risks to public safety, so the kind of population management that hunting provides is essential. Overpopulation in species like deer has proven to be detrimental to both deer and humans alike. One of the biggest problems associated with it is deer-motor vehicle accidents. As deer population begin to exceed areas' carrying capacity<sup>2</sup>, the deer start to cross roads more. It doesn't take a wildlife biologist to figure out that this leads to more chances for cars to hit deer. This is exactly what happens, and because of this, deer are actually the most deadly mammal to humans. Each year they send around 25,000 people to the ER, and take about 150-200 lives, which is roughly 10 times more people per year than sharks, bears, cougars, and alligators kill ...**combined** (Minitier 121). These collisions are not only detrimental to our health, but they also cause an increasingly large amount of liability to insurance companies. With estimates of 1.5 million deer-car collisions each year, the insurance industry pays out \$1.1 billion annually on claims solely related to deer (Insurance Information Institute). These payouts are all funded by the average citizen's insurance premiums, which means that all drivers across the nation, those hitting deer and those not, are feeling the pinch because of this overpopulation issue.

Without the large presence of natural predators anymore, deer herds are only augmenting. In fact, while some anti-hunting organizations would like to argue that hunting forces populations into extinction, at their current population of 30,000,000, "deer are now more numerous in the US than at the time of the Pilgrims" ("White-Tail Deer"). According to a report

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<sup>2</sup> Carrying capacity refers to "the maximum population that an area will support without undergoing deterioration" (Merriam Webster).

by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, if hunting were stopped now, deer-car accidents would increase by 218% (Hunting not the Reason 9). And yes, of course, there are the alternatives to hunting in addressing this issue. Infrared sensors have been invented that can warn drivers when deer cross them. However, just as a deer could set off the sensor, so could raccoons, squirrels or even a shaking tree branch, rendering them very unreliable. Plus, at \$1,200 a unit, if the government were to implement them, they would once again be turning their back on hunting revenue in favor of draining their budget with “humane” options (Forman 42). Some may think that fences, and not hunting, are the solution. And while fences have been shown to reduce accidents by 96%, they could only realistically be used on major highways (which only compose 5% of US roads), and would hit the taxpayers’ pockets at \$250,000 per mile (Minter 91). Yet again, hunting proves to be the most rational and cost-effective method in keeping drivers safe and deer in healthy populations.

Given the numerous societal benefits of hunting, it is clear that it’s both the most effective tool in wildlife management and a necessity. With the problems we, hunters and non-hunters alike, face with disappearing forests and wetlands, the need for hunting and caring about our natural world has never been greater. While non-hunting conservation groups try their best to conserve these animal habitats, hunters do the most for conservation because they have a vested interest in *using* these lands and wildlife resources. This is why hunters are happy to fund about 75% of state game departments, which makes them the largest fundraising group for conservation (Minter 89). Without hunting, many jobs, government revenue (and the beneficial projects it undertakes), and public safety would all be put in jeopardy. Despite many anti-hunting groups placing the hunting tradition within their crosshairs, hunting remains the most reasonable approach to striking a balance between the welfare of wildlife and the public.

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