


continue to educate the public, especially those charged with developing state and federal policies.

So what do all these challenges mean for the future of hunting, and the future of policy work at California Waterfowl? They mean that the battles have only just begun, and the competitions

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and compromises we face for land, resources, and space to pursue our lifestyle are going to get tougher. To strengthen our capabilities, California Waterfowl has reconfigured our approach to dealing with policy issues and established COHA to pursue policies we feel will provide a future for hunting, as well as waterfowl and their habitats. The people whose successes and skills were honed at California Waterfowl are now offering their expertise to other nonprofit organizations and corporate stakeholders to help us fund and share the benefits of work that serves all hunters – not just waterfowl hunters. California Waterfowl has also maintained its own policy specialist on staff to coordinate our needs with COHA staff, maintain the strong ties with government agencies and other partners that have been built over the past 40 years, and assure policies are founded on what is best for California's waterfowl and waterfowl hunters.

We've got to open our minds, and our checkbooks, to ensure that we can compete with the ever-increasing masses of humanity to preserve the land and lifestyle we need and love. Expenses for policy work are rising rapidly, and other 501 c(3) organizations need to step up to the plate and add to what California Waterfowl supplies in base funding for COHA. Unlike donations to 501 c(3) nonprofit groups, individual donations to COHA are not tax-deductible, so their fundraising potential is limited. However, COHA can raise and spend funds above and beyond their base-funding for direct lobbying and even provide funds for political candidates (through Political Action Committee funds), which is not legal for 501 c(3) groups. The political hurdles to sustain waterfowl, their habitats, and hunting will get more difficult in the future, and policy coordination and funding demands more effort than ever before. This issue features many of the public policy issues, successes and challenges, which should be pertinent to members of California Waterfowl. Grab a cup of coffee and take the time to learn about policy; it is important to waterfowl and your days of enjoyment in the field. 

America's Only TOP MODEL

by Greg Yarris, California Waterfowl Director
of Conservation Policy

As Americans, we live in a land of plenty. The fishing, hunting, and other recreational activities available are numerous, and days in the field pursuing the quarry of our choice are more often limited by work, family, or financial commitments than opportunity. The opportunity for a "commoner" to hunt, and the healthy wildlife populations that make it worthwhile, can be attributed to the underpinnings of something called the "North American Model of Wildlife Conservation." A lackluster name, to be sure, but our privilege to hunt and fish in this country is based on policies entrenched in a philosophy that is unique to this model. In essence, this philosophy balances our desire to harvest what nature has to offer with the need to insure sustainable populations of game for future generations. Most importantly, the North American Model ensures wildlife as a public resource in this country, and not only provides for hunters, but also depends on hunters for funding through a "user pay" system.

The current policy of "wise use" to achieve and maintain a sustainable harvest came only after wildlife populations for many species reached critically low levels, or in such cases as the passenger pigeon, disappeared altogether. When North America was settled by Europeans, the land seemed infinite and the natural resources appeared inexhaustible. As early settlements expanded as a result of the Industrial Revolution, demand for resources grew, and populations of game species dwindled from

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overhunting and habitat loss. Many species that once thrived were rarely encountered at the close of the 19th Century. Beginning in the late 1800s, hunters realized they needed to establish some guiding principles in order to protect rapidly disappearing wildlife.

Market hunting especially took a large toll on duck and goose populations, and waterfowl hunters were one of the first special interest groups to demand that measures be adopted to conserve their cherished resource. They lobbied for hunting regulations and established local conservation groups to protect



The unique North American Model of Wildlife Conservation benefits the resource and the individual – through the model it is both a privilege and obligation for all citizens to protect our wildlife.

Photo by Bob McLandress

habitat. Finally, in 1913, the first effective protection for waterfowl began with passage of the Weeks-McLean Act, which mandated federal control over migratory birds, allowed seasonal closures, and ended spring waterfowl hunting. Passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act in 1917 established formal cooperation between the United States and Canada for the protection of both game and nongame birds (Mexico was added in 1937).

Similar efforts led by early conservationist-hunters marked the return of elk, deer, and many other game species throughout their range. The efforts of hunters were the impetus of the early conservation movement, and their perseverance to enact policies that prevented an ecological “tragedy of the commons” provided the bedrock upon which the foundation of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation was built. Over the years, the North American Model has been discussed and refined into the following seven tenets:

- (1) Wildlife as public trust resources
- (2) Elimination of markets for wildlife
- (3) Allocation of wildlife by law
- (4) Wildlife can only be killed for a legitimate purpose
- (5) Wildlife are considered an international resource
- (6) Science is the proper tool for discharge of wildlife policy
- (7) Democracy of hunting

The North American Model is now so ingrained in our society and our management that it is hard to imagine wildlife conser-

The Seven Tenets in Plain English

- (1) Wildlife belongs to all North Americans – not the government or private landowners.
- (2) Wildlife or wildlife products cannot be commercially bought or sold.
- (3) Every citizen in good standing is allowed to take part in harvesting of wildlife, but only in accordance with federal and state regulations.
- (4) Wildlife can only be killed for a legitimate purpose: for food, for fur, or for protection of self or property.
- (5) Wildlife are an international resource – they are not owned by any country and are managed cooperatively.
- (6) Laws relating to wildlife, their habitat, and their management are based on science.
- (7) All citizens have equal access to wildlife resources regardless of wealth, ethnicity, or social standing – every citizen has a stake.

vation without these seven tenets. In fact, it is often argued, and for good reason, that we have been operating under this model for so long that both hunters and policy makers take it for granted. Chiefly, because we cannot imagine an alternative. But alternative models do exist, and in many countries equal access for all, as implied by our tenet number seven, “democracy of hunting,” is not part of wildlife policy, and wildlife belongs to the landowner, not the public. Hunting in the U.S. and Canada has remained open to all citizens regardless of class, and hunting has become central to the success of the model. Hunters are the primary stakeholders, and continue to be the main funding source for wildlife management through the revenue from hunting license sales, duck stamps, and excise tax on firearms and ammunition. And rather than complain about the expense, hunters instead contribute additional hard-earned dollars to organizations like California Waterfowl, Ducks Unlimited, and Delta Waterfowl because they recognize the value of public and private partnerships in achieving conservation goals.

It is critical to the future of our hunting heritage that we not only remember, but celebrate the early hunter-conservationists and policy-makers whose vision shaped the North American Model. It is even more important that the general public is aware of the seven tenets of the model, or at least their meaning, and the significant role hunters have played in its past and continuing success. Public demographics are changing; luring people (especially youth) out of the house is an increasing challenge. And while certain forms of outdoor recreation are gaining popularity, participation in hunting is declining. California Waterfowl is at the forefront of providing opportunity to current and prospective hunters, to ensure that all who have an interest can participate. But the fact remains, an increasingly urban population will not hunt, regardless of our recruitment efforts. It is up to all hunters, and concerned non-hunters, to insure that the roots of wildlife conservation are not forgotten, because if the roots decay, the tree will eventually fall. 🌿