

The Politics of State Wildlife Management: Why Anti-Conservation Forces Usually Win

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At the end of 2017, President Trump announced the decision to cutback Bears Ears and Grand Escalante Monuments in a move that was strongly supported by Utah politicians including its governor Gary Herbert. However, a 2016 bipartisan poll found that 70 percent of Utahans thought the Grand Escalante Monument was good for the state and 99 percent of the 3 million comments on the Monument supported it.ⁱ Also, a 2018 Western States survey found that 49 percent of Utahans thought the cutbacks were a bad idea versus 46 percent who liked the idea.ⁱⁱ In Alaska, voters chose overwhelmingly to ban airborne hunting of wolves in 1996 but in 1999, the Alaskan state legislature overturned this ban.ⁱⁱⁱ A 1992 Idaho survey found that 72 percent of residents favored the reintroduction of wolves but the State legislature that same year forbade the state's Department of Game and Fish from entering into agreements with the Federal agencies to do achieve this.^{iv} Furthermore, "Butch" Otter, Idaho's governor from 2007 till recently made a career out of opposing wolves such as refusing to prosecute poachers of them and approving decision to kill two packs in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Area.^v A survey of New York State residents found a "high levels of acceptance of the proposal to reintroduce wolves to the Adirondack Park among New Yorkers from almost all walks of life" but elected officials in the area elected officials in the park were "overwhelmingly opposed" to any plan for reintroduction.^{vi} North Carolina's Wildlife Resources Commission "passed a resolution" calling for red wolves to be declared extinct and an end to the Federal program aimed at restoring them.^{vii} However, when the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) asked for comments on the program, 99.8 percent were in favor of the program and even in area of North Carolina where the wolves lived, more than 78 percent favored keeping the wolves.^{viii} Surveys in Colorado showed strong support (71 percent of registered voters in one survey) for the restoration of wolves to the State but in 1989 the Colorado Game Commission opposed the reintroduction and even imposed a bounty on them.^{ix} In 2016, this same Commission again opposed reintroduction of the Mexican wolf and were supported by the State's Democratic governor, Hickenlooper.^x There is a wealth of evidence that presence of predators such as wolves provides a tourism bonanza for states and locales they populate. For example, Glacier National Park naturalists get more questions about wolves than "any other topic" and more people come to the state to view wildlife than "to kill it."^{xi} Despite substantial evidence of tourism dollars and favorable attitudes towards predators such as wolves and grizzlies on the part of their residents, many state legislatures and state departments concerned with managing wildlife in the West have opposed protections for them or, as in case of Colorado, resisted efforts to reintroduce them. The evidence above presents an interesting research question: Why do conservation efforts such as the protection of predators

and other conservation efforts such as new monuments lose out in state politics to opposing forces at the state level? What are the forces that makes this outcome so predictable in many states, especially those in the West? The purpose of this article is to analyze the forces that dominate state legislatures and agencies that manage wildlife issues, especially those involved in controversies involving predators and other wildlife that become a “nuisance” to some people.

Methods

It is not easy to gather information concerning political aspects of wildlife management decisions because decision making is often hidden from the public and organizations do not want to reveal such information. The author has reviewed academic sources but much of the information is derived from newspaper and other media accounts of wildlife conservation issues. Of course, such sources are not anonymously reviewed research and are subject to bias but links have been provided to all of these sources and thus readers can judge for themselves their validity. I have also used information from websites of all 50 state wildlife management department and related websites. In addition, I have drawn on data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and others who have systematically gathered data on wildlife management such as the Wildlife Management Institute and Responsive Management’s studies by Mark Duda et al. Relatively little has been written about the political aspects of state wildlife management organizations and I hope that this effort stimulates more such research.

State Agency Decision-Making: Scientific, Political and Organizational Influences

State wildlife management departments are complex organizations whose behaviors are influenced by a variety of factors. They like to emphasize that their decisions are based on biology and related sciences and they are critical of attempts to influence their decisions by political forces such as referenda on banning (or approving) various forms of hunting and trapping—they often derisively refer to these as “ballot box biology,” implying that their decisions are based on scientific principles.^{xiii} However, there is no question that political and organizational factors are also integral to decisions made by these agencies. For example, they now often employ the concept “wildlife acceptance capacity” as distinguished from “biological carrying capacity,” the former referring to the tolerance of people for a species that may be limited even if the habitat of an area can support a much larger population of a species.^{xiii} Furthermore, in implementing controversial programs (e.g., Habitat Conservation Plans), Federal and state agencies often form decision-making groups using a “stakeholder approach” in which agencies leaders seek to resolve controversial issues by forming decision-making groups with representatives of conflicting interests (e.g., environmental, developer, farmer) with the hope that they will work out an approach that is accepted by all of the groups. The stakeholder approach has had mixed success in achieving compromises and it implies that a “political consensus” is the basis for the decision which may or may not be based on the “best available science” that is the criterion for making decisions under the Endangered Species Act.^{xiv} Moreover, science is complex and there can be disagreements among different scientific experts based on a number of factors such as assumptions made by models, the degree of uncertainty that will be allowed (e.g., confidence intervals ranging from 90 to 99 percent), the nature, availability, and quality of the

data collected (e.g., aerial surveys vs. on-the-ground counts vs. professional judgments).^{xv} Thus science often has room for disagreement as to the best course of action to take. Although science can play a role in decisions, political and organizational factors (e.g., funds needed for the organization to carry out its duties) often prevail as I will detail below. In short, I view wildlife management organizations as “open systems” and subject to organized forces such as interest groups that pressure them and organizational factors such as the necessity of acquiring funds to sustain the organization.

Hunters versus Wildlife Watchers: Trends

Much of the opposition to predators such as wolves and grizzlies comes from hunters many of whom view them as competitors for their prized game. Thus, they often oppose efforts to protect or restore them and often support measures to lessen their numbers such as relaxed hunting seasons and use of aids such as poison, baiting and dogs. Hunters have been influential in the politics of wildlife management in every state but especially in states where these predators are prominent such as Western states. However, there has been a long-term trend of decline in hunting in the U.S. The following data are based on the 2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, & Wildlife-Associated Recreation—the most recent survey conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).^{xvi} The survey reported a decrease in number of hunters and their expenditures from 2011 & 2016 while wildlife watching viewing and their expenditures increased by 20 and 29 percent respectively during this period. The report concludes that “The level of hunting in 2016 puts it at the lowest level in at least the past 25 years.” The percent of the population that hunts varies by region—highest in the East South-Central region (8%) versus 2% in the Pacific and New England areas but shows that only a small minority of the general population are hunters. In contrast, percentages of wildlife watchers ranged from 26 percent in the West South-Central region to 36 percent in the New England region. Note that the survey used a “strict definition of wildlife watching—it only included those who took “special interest” in wildlife around their homes or take a trip for the “primary purpose” of wildlife watching and did not include “incidental viewing.” A 2019 Colorado State national survey found similar results—declines in interest of future hunting (16%) compared with 52% who planned to watch wildlife—indeed, wildlife watching was the only outdoors activity that had increases from a previous 2004 study.^{xvii}

Significant expenditures are made by hunters which is a major argument made by hunters as to why their policy preferences should dominate state wildlife management policies—the USFWS 2016 survey found that total expenditures by hunters was \$25.2 Billion but was far exceeded by the \$75.9 Billion by wildlife watchers. Alaska’s Office of Management and Budget found that in 2011, \$.5 billion was the net benefit from hunting but wildlife watching brought in a net benefit of \$2.5 Billion.^{xviii} Many hunters value public lands but while 13 percent of hunters hunted only on public land, the vast majority of hunting was done on private lands (79 percent of all hunting days). The highest hunting participation rates were for people with incomes between \$40,000 and \$100,000 while wildlife watching rates were highest for people with incomes of \$100,000 or more. However, the hunting participation rate for people with incomes lower than \$40,000 income were low and the rates for minorities (both Hispanic and African American) were very low. Wildlife watching is popular with males as well as females. Indeed, a notable change in the

2016 survey was that wildlife watching participation rate was higher for males than females. The decline in hunting is not new—the report has an appendix in which it shows the participation rate for hunting dropped from 11.2% in 1960 to 8.4% in 1985. (Note: USFWS surveys changed methodology beginning in 1991 so it’s not possible to directly compare these earlier surveys with the most recent one). There is strong reason to believe that the drop in hunting has not only continued since 2016 but hastened based on the Wildlife Management Institute’s (WMI) (a pro-hunting research group) analysis of excise taxes on guns and ammunition that showed a 17 percent decline in 2018 excise revenues from 2017.^{xix}

Indeed, the sharpness of the drop in Pittman-Robertson revenues confirmed fears of the WMI based on previous drops in hunting licenses and caused it to state the following alarm:

Those that consider trend data and consider the information provided by the latest National Survey results and the age demographic information showing up in our license sales data have been predicting these reductions for even longer. Now these predictions are showing up in our funding; the basic underpinning of the North American Model (its funding foundation) is in trouble.^{xx}

It is also notable that these consistent declines have occurred despite the fact that state wildlife management agencies are expending significant percentages of their budgets and staff hours on recruitment and retention of hunters including the introduction of many new kinds of licenses. In Utah, for example, the number of hunting licenses dropped from 114,000 in 1986 to 16,000 in 2013.^{xxi} The State’s Division of Wildlife Resources purchased thousands of partridge chicks to give to families so their children would shoot them with the hope they would become hunters.^{xxii} During 2018, I visited the websites and studied reports of all 50 state wildlife management agencies and a majority of them were increasing their activities concerning hunter recruitment and retention. Indeed, the attention and resources devoted to these activities generally exceeded resources expenditures on non-game species. These declines in excise and license revenues from hunting are having significant impact on the budgets of state wildlife agencies. For example, during 2017, Wisconsin cut back personnel and expenditures on habitat management, Colorado cut programs dealing with invasive species, and Vermont cited lack of revenues to support their programs as a result of decreasing funds from hunters.^{xxiii} The state and Federal monies derived from licenses and taxes on hunters and their equipment have been the major claim behind hunting’s contribution to wildlife conservation and the highly-praised “North American Model of Wildlife Conservation” and likewise the argument that species like grizzlies need to be hunted to increase the tolerance of hunters (and ranchers-farmers) for the species.^{xxiv} To summarize, there has been a large and steady decrease in the number of hunters and the revenues derived from their hunting have caused a significant drop in state wildlife department funding. By way of contrast, the percent of people who watch wildlife and their expenditures on these watching activities have consistently increased.

Numbers Down but Hunter Influence Skyrocketing

The major decline in the numbers of hunters described might lead one to conclude that the influence of hunters on wildlife management policy would be threatened and that the rise of nonconsumptive wildlife watching would result in policies favoring the watching only including

traditional favorites like birds but also “charismatic species” such as wolves and grizzlies. The restoration of the gray wolf to some western states and protection of wolves and grizzlies by the Endangered Species Act has occurred over the past generation so there have been some advances though these were largely implemented by the Federal government based on the Federal Endangered Species Act passed in 1973. There are some examples of where the small and diminishing numbers of hunters has shown political vulnerability. These instances primarily are where initiatives such as banning of trapping or killing of species such as mountain lions (e.g., California measure passed in 1980) have been put on the ballot. Examples include the Alaskan ban on hunting from airplanes cited above, and a 1971 dove hunt ban in Wisconsin (later reversed). Wildlife management professionals have disparaged these bans as “ballot box biology” and argue that management should remain in their professional hands.^{xxv} By keeping decisions off ballots, the decisions are made by wildlife professionals who pay not only attention to science but the major interest groups that exert continuous pressure on them: hunters, anglers, farmers, and ranchers. The general public’s focus on wildlife issues tends to be fleeting, driven by idealistic interest, not consumptive self-interests that are continuous and viewed by them as essential to their well-being. More recently, there has been a sustained attack by Republicans on the Endangered Species Act and attempts to roll back protections for wolves and other species. Despite their decreasing numbers, hunting groups have not only kept their influence but their influence, if anything, has grown compared to the vast majority who are more interested in watching rather than consuming wildlife as we will explore below.

Interest Groups and Concentrated Costs

One major characteristic for all conservation programs is that their goals of preserving species and habitat provide broad, non-consumptive benefits for citizens. These citizens can benefit from visiting and viewing parks, monuments, and national forests and the total expenditures from these trips are huge and economically important. They also get a general sense of satisfaction from the altruistic knowledge they are preserving land and species. Some groups (e.g., outfitters and businesses near highly visited areas) have major economic self-interest in supporting conservation. But, overall, for most individuals, the benefits are non-economic and do not dominate their lives. The matter is quite different for industries whose interests often stand to lose from conservation such as oil-gas-coal industries, public lands ranching, and logging. Moreover, their interests in these issues tend to be a much higher priority to them because costs from conservation interests tend to be “concentrated” on a small set of groups and individuals.^{xxvi} Consequently, persons within these industries form groups to protect and promote their interests. From the beginning of our country, groups pursuing their interests have been recognized as a key aspect of our governmental processes and a key goal of James Madison was to keep any single interest group from dominating by diffusing power through Federalism (powers held by states as well as the Federal government) and institutions (division of powers among executive, legislative, and judicial branches). At the State level, however, hunter-rancher-farmer coalitions dominate many state wildlife commissions that advise the departments that “manage wildlife,” so much so that in several states “Game” remains part of the department’s name though several have renamed their agency to avoid use of this term. For example, when visited in 2018, Arizona’s Game and Fish Department had 5 members, 4 of them identified as hunters, 1 as a rancher, and one with 1 with wildlife conservation. The then director, Larry Voyles, was

described on the Department website as “a lifelong hunter.” It is not surprising then that Voyles led “Arizona’s hard line against expanding Mexican gray wolf territory such as keeping them or away from the Grand Canyon” and has been strongly supported by Arizona’s Game and Fish Commission.^{xxvii} In Arizona, a 1987 survey of public attitudes showed support by a strong majority (77 percent) of the public for reintroduction of the Mexican wolf, but the game agency requested that a plan to bring back the wolves “be put on the backburner for several years.”^{xxviii} By 2012, California was one of only 12 states that used “Game” in their name but they changed the name to California Fish and Wildlife to show that the Department’s mission was broader than just hunting but included “protection of non-game wildlife.”^{xxix} However, California hunters were “leery of this change.”^{xxx}

In addition to hunters, ranchers and farmers also play a key role in dominating state wildlife policies. Arizona has a “Livestock Loss Board” specifically to compensate landowners, lessees or livestock operators for wolf depredation on livestock.” Although they are becoming increasingly small as a percent of the U.S. population, trophy hunters are especially prominent on state wildlife advisory bodies. In 2018, Idaho’s Fish and Game Commission had 6 members listed, all of whom were hunters and 2 of whom were identified as NRA and Safari Club members. Criteria for membership in State “game management” commissions vary greatly—most often have a regional basis, sometimes require a balance between Republicans and Democrats, and sometimes require specific backgrounds in areas related to wildlife and farming such as outfitting, hunting, or trapping. For example, Louisiana’s Wildlife and Fisheries Commission’s requires “three of the seven members are to be representatives of the commercial fishing and fur industries from the coastal parishes, and four members are “other than representatives of the commercial fishing and fur industries” from the state at-large. Louisiana also has special task forces for crab, finfish, oyster, shrimp, alligator and fur. The State’s Alligator Advisory Council has 9 members, 3 who are landowners, 3 farmers, and 3 alligator hunters. Wisconsin’s Natural Resources Board has the following requirements:

Wisconsin Act 149 states that beginning May 1, 2017, at least 1 Board member must have an agricultural background and at least 3 Board members must have held a hunting, fishing, or trapping license in at least 7 of the 10 years before the year of nomination except if an individual served on active duty in the U.S. armed forces or national guard...^{xxxi}

The majority of the public’s engagement with a state wildlife management department tends to be intermittent and casual—a visit to a park perhaps? A 2004 survey of Idaho residents found that 68 percent HAD NOT PARTICIPATED IN ANY ACTIVITY of Idaho Fish & Game Department and the participation rate of active hunters was more than 5 times that of nonhunters.^{xxxii} Consequently, a small group of individuals, if they attend state wildlife department meetings and exert continuous pressure, can have a major impact on state wildlife management agencies. For example, in Montana, houndsmen played a significant role in the Montana’s Fish, Wildlife and Parks Department discussion of whether to increase the quota for mountain lion harvest because the houndsmen association contended that “population is currently

exceeding social tolerance of landowners and big game hunters.”^{xxxiii} Similarly, the Wyoming Fish & Game

Department met with the Wyoming Houndsmen Association, Wyoming Federation of Houndsmen, and Wyoming Outfitters and Guides concerning mountain lion and wolf management and also assisted with several Mule Deer Initiative concerning the impacts of predators on ungulates.^{xxxiv} Thus, while wildlife management departments have potentially broader concerns such as non-game species and non-consumptive uses of wildlife, the vast majority of their outreach efforts and day-to-day activities are highly dominated by their traditional constituencies including hunters, anglers, and hunting-related businesses such as outfitters and guides.

The relationship between Federal and state wildlife management agencies is central to some important and controversial issues such as management of predators like wolves. Many western states such as Idaho and Wyoming discussed above have strong constituencies of farmers, ranchers, and hunters who want to minimize the number of wolves (and grizzlies). Up until now, the Endangered Species Act and the threat of the imposition of listing under it have been the chief constraint on killing wolves. For example, Wyoming’s 2017 Wolf Monitoring and Management Report states that the 2017 goal was to reduce the wolf population from 210 to 160 and 14 breeding pairs. The selection of this goal was no accident—the Report states that their purpose is to “*ensure the wolf population remains above minimum delisting criteria*” under the *Endangered Species Act*.^{xxxv} Furthermore, in May of 2019, the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission has opted not to hold a grizzly bear hunt this year because “*hunters who killed bears could face federal prosecution*.”^{xxxvi} Many Congressional representatives from the West are now pushing to weaken the Endangered Species Act to take away protections from predators like wolves and grizzlies as well as to hand over to states the authority to make decisions. If this is done, fear of relisting under the ESA or prosecution under it would no longer be a constraint for states.

A major direct reason for the disproportionate impact of hunter interests on wildlife management departments is the use of “voice”—hunter related groups express their opinions vocally, show up for meetings and information sessions concerning issues related to them (e.g., limitations on hunting). So, from a democratic government perspective, it can be argued that this is a legitimate form of influence—people who care more about an outcome and spend the time and energy required to have an impact probably deserve to have a greater impact than those whose interest is much less, *other things being equal*. The dominance of hunters at “information-gathering meetings” is notable. For example, when Wisconsin’s Department of Natural Resources conducted sessions open to the public concerning the holding of annual wolf hunt, they were packed by hunters resulting in a vote of 4482 to 772 in favor of wolf hunts.^{xxxvii} Likewise, while Utah general population surveys showed majority support for wolves, when its Department of Wildlife held a “series of scoping meetings in order to involve Utah residents in the management process, 719 of 897 attendees (80%) chose “do not allow wolves in Utah” as one of their top 3 management priorities.”^{xxxviii}

Although the willingness of such groups to attend and present their opinion can be viewed as legitimate form of democratic input, the nature of these meetings and of the hunter groups that show up also can dominate due to intimidation of those with opposing views. Indeed, there are many examples of people who are most concerned with conservation and disagree with practices such as overgrazing of public lands, advocacy of turtle exclusion devices, and defense of wolves being threatened with physical harm and even death.^{xxxix} Indeed, these same types of threats extended to employees of wildlife agencies including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). One person bragged about their ability to intimidate: “You can’t reason with ecofreaks but you sure can intimidate them.”^{xl} State wildlife departments use a variety of mechanisms to seek public input but hunters dominate meetings with their potentially intimidating physical presence of these hunters who often bring guns to meetings or have them in their vehicles outside the meetings and are threatening to persons with opposing viewpoints. Because hunter-rancher groups tend to dominate meetings held by wildlife agencies and their views outweigh surveys that measure broader, overall public attitudes. This impact is clearly illustrated by a statement made by Ed Bangs, a USFWS official who works on wolf and grizzly bears: “Don’t piss off 200,000 people with guns...”^{xli} So powerful and threatening is the huntergun lobby that Audubon’s Ted Williams reported that a scientist who shared data with him [about the harmful effects of lead shot] asked for anonymity because he feared retribution.^{xlii} Armed militias have become engaged in armed occupations over conservation issues such as Oregon’s Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. Likewise, at Bundy’s ranch in Nevada (which involved dispute over the protection of the desert tortoise), heavily armed Bundy supporters forced the BLM to back down and the senior Bundy said later that “they don’t have the guts enough to try to start that again for a few years” and one of his sons said “We ran them out of here...”^{xliii} There is evidence that Bundy is right—GAO has found BLM has been failing to enforce rules against illegal grazing since the Bundy standoff and they fired a long-time employee who complained about it.^{xliv} Although those hunters willing to use threats are only a small portion of all hunters, the fear and intimidation they cause should not be underestimated as a factor that influences wildlife management policies and affects all of those who have to have face-to-face encounters with them, especially wildlife management employees.

Funding State Welfare Agencies: Game, Game, Game

Another important reason is institutional: the funding system for wildlife management agencies heavily depends on fees from fishing and hunting licenses at the state level and, at the Federal, excise taxes on the sale of ammunition and guns. The Pittman-Robertson Act imposes a 11 percent excise tax on sporting arms, ammunition, archery equipment and arrows. Allocations to states are based on a formula that includes the land area and the number of its license holders.^{xlv} The Dingell-Johnson Act put a 10 percent excise tax on certain items of sport fishing tackle, 3percent excise tax on fish finders and electric trolling motors, import duties on fishing tackle, yachts and pleasure craft, and motorboat fuel tax revenues and required that the funds be spent on the “administration of the state fish department.”^{xlvi} Thus both Acts aim at supporting game species sought by hunters and anglers. These taxes provide funds to states for wildlife management and their habitat, but states must pay 25 percent of the costs. Most states obtain their share through fees on hunting-fishing licenses. Thus, hunters and anglers have a double

reason to feel that they should have a major say in their wildlife management agencies, the Federal excise tax on guns-ammo and state fees for hunting-fishing licenses.

However, some question the accepted wisdom that hunting provides the majority of funds for non-game wildlife conservation. An analysis by Smith and Molde examined the budgets of wildlife programs including habitat acquisition and found that only about 5 percent of their costs were supported by hunters and their activities.^{xlvii} When they studied the 10 largest conservation organizations, they found that the vast majority of their funds (over 87 percent) come from the non-hunting public.^{xlviii}

In 1980, The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act of 1980 Act or “Nongame Act” was passed by Congress to “support the 83 percent of species” that were neglected by the two other laws that provide funding for state wildlife agencies. However, there was no funding of the Nongame Act until 2001. Originally, the plan was to impose an excise tax of 11 percent of bird seed and feeders but this was dropped due to opposition from the industry.^{xlix} Beginning in 2001, the program did receive some funding though tiny compared to Dingell-Johnson and Pittman-Robertson, nevertheless in order to receive the funds, states are required to do an annual State Wildlife Action Plan that analyzes what species are threatened and what measures will be taken to preserve them. Thus, the Nongame Act does help to direct some attention to nongame species but even state wildlife departments such as West Virginia’s 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan recognize that its funding is inadequate:

In West Virginia, game species make up less than 5% of all animal species. While many of the state’s nongame species have received substantial benefits from habitat conservation and restoration directed at game species, their needs have not been fully met. *Conservation efforts for these species have in large part been opportunistic and crisis-driven, limited by a lack of funding and by a lack of strategic approaches to species and habitat conservation.* [Emphasis added]¹

Similarly, Virginia’s 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan concluded pessimistically because their meager resources compared to the impact of humans and development as follows:

From a statewide level, reviewing conservation needs in this Action Plan may be discouraging as hundreds of species are identified as being of greatest conservation need. Many species populations are already critically impaired, and their long-term survival is in doubt. Management concerns over the loss or degradation of Virginia’s aquatic, wetland, terrestrial, subterranean, and coastal habitats, which will likely be compounded by the potential impacts of climate change, land subsidence, invasive species, and sea level rise, are not inconsequential. If we fail to address these issues, more species could be legally classified as endangered, which could have profound impacts for people, businesses, and communities, as well as wildlife.^{li}

In FY2012, Dingell-Johnson provided over 349 million to states, Pittman-Robertson 247 Million, and the non-game State Wildlife Grant program 47 Million.^{lii} It is not surprising that it has been

estimated that approximately 97 percent of state wildlife management dollars were devoted to 3 percent of species-namely game land animals and fish.^{liii}

Some states are trying to broaden financial support beyond hunter-anglers from this licensedependent model by adding a small tax in order to support agency activities. For example, Missouri innovated a 1/8 of a percent Conservation Sales Tax in 1974. Arkansas, its neighbor, tried to establish a similar tax but it failed to pass in 1984 and 1986 attempts. They finally won the tax in 1996 but it was a close--winning 50.6% of the vote. Of course, this does not mean that the revenues from such general taxes will be devoted to non-game related activities. Indeed, the report on the impacts of the Arkansas fee states that the tax was used to keep sporting licenses fees at their 1989 levels and a good portion of funds have been used to improve access of hunters and for hunter education programs.^{liv} There is evidence that many hunters oppose the broadening of funding for wildlife conservation because they fear that this would weaken their dominance over state wildlife management agencies. The Wildlife Management Institute (a pro hunting research organization) described a proposed “wolf management stamp” in Montana that would cost 1 dollar more than a license to kill a wolf and whose revenues would be devoted to activities preventing or minimizing conflicts between humans and wolves. This proposed stamp generated a “polarized debate” with “hunters who opposed the stamp expressing concern that this could give pro-wolf interests greater influence over MFWP's management of wolves, to the perceived detriment of prey populations and hunting opportunity.”^{lv} The Wildlife Management Institute reported similarly that a 2012 meeting in Idaho to discuss possible broadening of funding for meeting the bigger demands on the state wildlife agency was withdrawn because of the negative reaction of hunters due to fear of losing influence over the State’s Fish and Game Department.^{lvi} In short, many hunters respond to demands from conservationists for protection of non-game species that they bear the burden of funding wildlife management agencies and thus their views should prevail. Actually, many hunters want to keep their dominance of funding for their state wildlife agencies and oppose broadening the funding for fear of losing control over them.

It is instructive to look at public attitudes towards funding for wildlife conservation. A national survey on public attitudes towards these issues was undertaken by the USFWS in 1978-79 and implemented by Yale Professor, Stephen R. Kellert. Its results are based on over 3100 personal interviews of a national sample of U.S. population.^{lvii} The survey was conducted in 1978-79 when hunters constituted a much larger proportion of the population and the nation was much rural than today and thus much friendlier to hunting. When asked what “additional funding sources should be used to pay the costs for wildlife conservation, 57% agreed that general tax revenues should be used (8.3% Strongly) vs. 38% disagree (7.1% Strongly). Support for other sources included tax on fur clothing made from wild animals (82% agree), entrance fees to wildlife refuges and public wildlife areas (75% agree), sales tax on off road vehicles (71%), and sales tax on backpacking and camping equipment (57%). The willingness of subgroups to support such taxes on their activities involving wildlife varied. For example, 70% of trappers agreed with taxes on furs as did 58% of off-road vehicle users on ORVs taxes while only 51% of birders and 49% of backpackers agreed on taxes on birdwatching equipment and backpacking equipment respectively. A 2019 survey by Colorado State University researchers also found

strong support for public tax funding for state wildlife agencies—54% of their sample favored equal amount of revenues from hunting and taxes compared to only 28% who favored emphasis on hunting revenue sources (17% favored more emphasis on public tax funding.) In short, there is strong evidence of public support for use of general taxes at both state and Federal levels to conserve wildlife but so far, actions to implement this has been spotty and scattered in a few states.

The Recreation Industry recently has become a major defender of public lands and has boasted about over 290 million visits to West public lands associated with huge expenditures that boosted local economies.^{lviii} The majority of these recreation expenditures are made by people who want to watch wildlife rather than hunt or catch it but, as we have seen above, most of state and Federal wildlife expenditures are aimed at the small percent of land and water species that hunters and anglers pursue. The best example of the Recreation's Industry's desire to help conservation and influence politics is the relocation of the Outdoor Recreation Outdoor Retailer show from Salt Lake City to Denver in 2018 to protest the Trump Administration's cutbacks in Utah monuments.^{lix} However, their support for taxes on recreation equipment and products to support wildlife conservation has been weak. In particular, during the legislative discussion concerning the Non-Game Act, Congress considered an excise tax on non-consumptive activities such as birdfeeders, but this proposal failed because of "the political power of the recreational equipment industry."^{lx}

Ranchers: Small Numbers but Political Dominance of Public Lands

Ranchers in western states have had a profound and consistent impact on wildlife management policy. The degree of domination is similar to hunter domination of state wildlife agencies in that the population of ranchers is small and has become much smaller not only as a portion of the population but because their economic importance has diminished in these states and is small compared to wildlife tourism. For example, in Wyoming known as "The Cowboy State," only 2 percent of its economy is due to agriculture compared with 14 per cent for Yellowstone tourism.^{lxi} In Montana, 60 percent of its jobs are in the service sector and counties with public lands have led the state's economic growth by far.^{lxii} The actual number of ranchers who graze on public lands is quite small—23,000 in 16 western states. The number of Federal public lands "permittee" ranchers in Wyoming is smaller than the "membership of environmental organizations like the Wyoming Wildlife Federation."^{lxiii} In Nevada, home of the Bundys, for example, only 880 permittees graze livestock on federal lands. In Wyoming-- the "Cowboy State"--there are only 1,607 "cowboy" permittees.^{lxiv} Moreover, there is evidence that the general public disapproves of the practices of public lands ranchers. One major national survey devoted to attitudes of U.S. citizens towards public lands ranching (based on 2000 respondents) showed that strong majorities of the public believe that endangered species protections should not be set aside to help ranchers, that most believe that public grazing fees should be raised, and half of the respondents had "little confidence in stock growers."^{lxv} The same demographics that are leading to a drop in hunters also are making public lands ranchers less economically important. The 2000 census showed that overall the West is nearly as urban as the East with about three-quarters of the population living in urban areas and environmentalists hope that these shifts will decrease the

power of ranchers.^{lxvi} Additionally, since 2016, Gallup surveys show that substantially a larger percentage of U.S. public believes that “protection of the environment should be given priority even at the expense of curbing economic growth”—65% in March of 2019 compared with only 30% that favored economic growth.^{lxvii} In short, it would appear that based on demographics, economics, and polls of the general public that the political influence of ranchers, like hunters, should be steadily weakening.

Despite these data, similar to the situation with hunters, the political influence of ranchers remains dominant in most western states and, at the Federal level, their influence is flourishing under the Trump Administration. They have been consistently able to resist change such as raising grazing fees. For example, National Cattlemen’s Association lobbied heavily against two Congressional Representatives after they tried to raise grazing fees, and both lost their seats in 1994.^{lxviii} During the Clinton Administration, Secretary of Interior Babbitt tried to mount a proposal to increase fees but gave up to the surprise of the National Cattlemen’s Association in part due to Clinton’s concern about Western electoral votes forthcoming in the 1996 election.^{lxix} Another example concerns environmentally oriented Rep. Mo Udall of Arizona who abandoned his proposal to raise grazing fees in the early 1980s because “he felt the heat [from rancher supporters].”^{lxx}

Much of the strength of the ranchers’ political clout is built on the myth about the American Cowboy—the heroic independent symbol of the West. Politicians such as Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush cultivated this myth by wearing cowboy hats and riding horses.^{lxxi} Studies have shown that far from being independent, public ranchers receive far more benefits from the government than they pay in low grazing fees.^{lxxii} Ranch managers and ranch hands now drive vehicles and use cell phones.^{lxxiii} Only 3 percent of Federal permittees control 40% of Federal grazing lands and only 10% are held by small ranchers with less than 100 cattle. The largest public ranchers are wealthy individuals or corporations. Their political strength despite their small numbers and economic importance is no accident. They have a vested interest in obtaining office (whether local, state, or Federal) to maintain their power over public lands and the agencies that run them—BLM and Forest Service.^{lxxiv} Indeed, their influence is so strong in BLM that support for livestock is a necessity to gain promotions in these agencies.^{lxxv} Only a minority of permittees have been in the business for more than a generation.^{lxxvi} For many, ranching is now often a hobby or a tax write-off. Nearly all of them depend on other, non-ranch income to support themselves.^{lxxvii}

Interest groups representing their interests constantly pressure agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, and National Parks agencies. The combination of influence over congressional committees and Interior agencies helped to create what political scientists called “sub-governments” in which rancher interests exert monopoly control over issues concerning themselves. The major reason for this domination at the Federal level is that Western representatives and senators flock to House and Senate Committees that oversee these agencies which are not such a high priority for representatives from other areas.^{lxxviii} Many ranchers run and win Federal and state offices with the goal of protecting the rights and privileges of public lands ranchers such as former Senators Paul Laxalt (Arizona), Alan Simpson (Wyoming), and Larry Craig (Idaho). Another example is current Idaho Governor, Brad Little, whose grandfather

was known as the Idaho “Sheep King”, whose father was an Idaho State Senator, and who still heads his family’s farming and cattle operation.^{lxxix} At the state level, they not only run for office but are common members of state wildlife commissions plus pressure state wildlife management agencies to ensure their priorities prevail when their interests collide with environmental goals. Rancher-related organizations such as those associated with cattlemen and sheep ranchers donate large sums of money to state and Federal candidates friendly to their interests.

Variation Among State Wildlife Departments

In the above paragraphs, I have depicted state wildlife management agencies as organizations that are affected by common forces dominated in most states by hunters-rancher-farmer constituencies. However, the influence of these constituencies varies and struggles over conservation issues can differ depending on peculiar circumstances and politics of the states. States vary according to the importance of hunting and fishing to their state economies with some states known for hunting (e.g., Colorado, Wyoming) and others for fishing (e.g., Gulf and Atlantic coastal states such as Florida and Louisiana). Another basic factor is the importance of resident versus non-resident hunting (and fishing). States understandably impose higher fees for non-resident licenses. For example, Colorado’s resident license fees are only increased “periodically” and thus revenues from them have fallen significantly compared to inflation while non-resident license fees are tied to the consumer price index thus keeping pace with inflation. This helps to explain why for some states like Colorado, hunting is an “export” industry meaning that out-of-state hunters bring in substantial revenues to state wildlife departments.^{lxxx} Using the 2017 USFWS reports, I sorted states based on the percent of total hunting license revenues that are contributed by out-of-state hunters & below in Table 1 are the 15 states in which out-ofstaters contributed more than 50 percent of hunter license revenue:

Table 1: Non-Resident Hunting License Revenue Compared to Total Revenue in 2017

State	Total License Revenue 2017	Non-Resident Revenue 2017	Percent from NonResidents 2017
CO	54,784,656	42,185,705	0.77
WY	24,628,769	18,357,932	0.75
MT	30,451,903	21,470,033	0.71
MS	12,225,495	8,279,126	0.68
SD	21,055,005	13,939,990	0.66
NM	15,901,542	10,524,625	0.66
KS	18,995,452	12,461,223	0.66

ND	11,555,067	7,201,410	0.62
AK	8,540,589	5,077,293	0.59
ID	23,620,977	13,999,586	0.59
AR	16,919,165	9,133,672	0.54
WV	9,488,300	4,930,454	0.52
AL	12,210,093	6,259,852	0.51
GA	13,420,062	6,837,636	0.51

Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Hunting License Data, 2017.

<https://wsfrprograms.fws.gov/Subpages/LicenseInfo/Natl%20Hunting%20License%20Report%202017.pdf>

There is a similar situation with respect to fishing with especially some coastal states having great emphasis on revenues from out-of-state anglers. In states like Alaska, non-resident fishing licenses are a major source of revenues but there has been an overall decline since 2008 which led Alaska’s OMB to comment that “The contemporary challenge for the division is to return non-resident participation in sport fisheries to the 2008 participation threshold...”^{lxxxix}

Table 2: Alaska Fishing Licenses, Resident vs. Nonresident, By Year

Year	Resident	Nonresident	Total License Issued
2017	162,513	298,151	460,664
	-20.11%	-0.90%	-8.65%
2016	203,413	300,862	504,275
	6.85%	4.14%	5.21%
2015	190,366	288,915	479,281
	0.44%	5.62%	3.50%
2014	189,540	273,535	463,075
	1.08%	2.73%	2.05%
2013	187,507	266,271	453,778
	2.06%	4.96%	3.74%

2012	183,725 -3.38%	253,694 -1.99%	437,419 -2.58%
2011	190,148 1.80%	258,840 1.33%	448,988 1.53%
2010	186,777 -4.05%	255,432 1.19%	442,209 -1.09%
2009	194,658 4.48%	252,427 -15.88%	447,085 -8.08%
2008	186,311	300,094	486,405

Source:

<https://www.omb.alaska.gov/html/performance/details.html?p=63#td9256>

Thus, state wildlife agencies have been caught in a dilemma. Overall, there has been a long-term secular decline in the number of hunters and high license fees could further reduce the number of resident hunters. They try to make-up for these losses by imposing larger fees on non-resident hunters and anglers for whom fee increases may not matter so much. But, given the fact that licenses, both hunting and angling, are the source of the majority of agency funding, the longterm future of wildlife management funding based on hunting fees is in doubt. Up until now, the major policy response and expenditure of funds has been to recruit more hunters through hunter education programs especially aimed at the young. However, with the change of society from rural to urban, these attempts have met with limited success. Idaho Fish & Game researchers interviewed parents and youths as to what IFG could do to recruit more hunters, they summarized their results as follows:

When asked what IDFG could do to help make it easier or more likely to go hunting, *by far* the most common response—from both children and parents—was that there was *nothing* IDFG could do.^{lxxxii}

Yet, despite much evidence that recruitment is not going to solve the crisis in state wildlife management department funding, they continue to emphasize this “solution” far more than others in terms of resources devoted to it. On July 16, 2019 a bi-partisan bill is being proposed in the Senate that will allow state wildlife agencies to use some funding accrued through the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act for outreach and marketing efforts and it is supported by Democrats like Martin Heinrich and Joe Manchin. There is still no realization that the entire “Recruit more hunters” efforts are doomed and wasting resources that could be spent on habitat and endangered species.^{lxxxiii}

As I have documented, some states have attempted with some success to raise moneys from other sources such as general taxes and stamps devoted to both consumptive themes (e.g., Duck hunting stamps) and non-consumptive “tax donations” (e.g., Chickadee checkoff in Iowa).^{lxxxiv}

However, these voluntary “checkoff” sources have generally contributed only a small percent of funding for these agencies. Over the long-term, it is likely that only a more general mandatory tax (e.g., on sales or income) sources must be employed if these agencies are to survive. These facts are not new—Others have written extensively on these challenges and many wildlife departments have adopted small steps towards trying to be more inclusive but hunting-angling interests still are strongly dominant over most departments and have resisted needed changes.^{lxxxv}

State Politics and Ballot Initiatives over Wildlife Issues

States vary in their policies towards wildlife especially concerning issues involved with hunting and trapping. There have been many cases in which animal rights groups have battled hunters and trappers over a variety of animals not only concerning the most controversial (wolves and grizzlies) but many others such as deer, beavers, and bobcats. When an issue becomes a hot debate discussed in major media, the outcome is not so predictable as when the decision is made by the state wildlife management agencies. In the latter case, they tend to be favorable to the interests of the clientele that pay closest attention to them: hunters (including trappers) and anglers. But, as we have seen above, the proportion of hunters in most states is small and thus restrictions on hunting and trapping have passed in several cases. Duda, Jones, & Criscione analyzed ballot initiatives and referenda concerning sportsmen issues from 1980 (when the first initiative occurred) and 2008.^{lxxxvi} These votes occur most often in the 21 states that allow an initiative process and often involve issues concerning trapping with leghold traps, baiting, hunting with dogs, and other ethical issues. Over sixty percent of the initiatives took place in just six states: Oregon, California, Colorado, North Dakota, Arizona and Washington.^{lxxxvii} Wayne Pacelle found that beginning in 1990, there was a high rate of success of initiatives dealing with the taking of wildlife with animal rights groups winning in 10 of 13 cases.^{lxxxviii} Due to the increased success of these initiatives, “The Ballot Initiatives Coalition” formed in 1998 to fight restrictions on hunting-trapping with a large number of organizations including the NRA, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Safari Club International, and National Trappers Asso.^{lxxxix} Duda et al. analyzed which “sportsmen issues” are especially vulnerable to initiatives and find that they are the ones that violate the ethic of the “fair chase” such as the use of baiting, dogs, high-tech gear, and especially “fenced hunting.”^{xc} It is important to note that many conservationists and environmentalists and their organizations (e.g., Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation) support managed hunting as long as species are protected from being threatened. By way of contrast, animal rights groups want to protect individual wildlife even if their species is not threatened. Indeed, it has been the case that coalitions sometimes have been formed between conservationists and hunting organizations on some issues such as protection of public lands from industry use.^{xci}

Indiana Vs. Illinois on Bobcat Hunting Season: Case Study

It is not always easy to predict which group will win out when hunting interests conflict with those desiring to protect wildlife. An interesting case demonstrating this concerns attempts to permit bobcat hunting in Indiana and Illinois during the 2016-2019 period. The two states are adjacent with Indiana generally being considered more conservative compared to Illinois. In both states, hunter-trapper groups argued that bobcat populations had become so numerous that it was desirable to reinstitute a hunting season for them. For example, one Indiana resident, Charles Anders, who

had been “National President of the Fur Takers of America” described an “explosion of bobcats” that will kill domestic animals “for nothing.”^{xcii} In Illinois, the Department of Natural Resources put on them on their threatened list in 1977 but removed in 1999 due to increases in population with bow hunters reporting a “ten-fold increase in sightings.”^{xciii}

In Indiana on May 15, 2018, the state Natural Resources Department director, Cameron Clark, announced a *decision not to allow bobcat hunting* as follows:

As we all know, that is a rather sensitive topic to a number of people and we have heard from you and appreciate the interest and always appreciate people getting involved in the process," Clark said of his motion to withdraw the rule on bobcat hunting. "We feel we need to work more with our constituencies on sensitive issues like this." These motions passed unanimously, with a voice vote, by the nine of 12 commission members present at the meeting held at Fort Harrison State Park.^{xciv}

The state was lobbied by both sides on the bobcat issue. The following anti-bobcat hunt appeal was made by The Animal Welfare Institute:

Allowing the killing of bobcats could severely jeopardize Indiana's fragile bobcat population. It is risky and irresponsible to reinstate a hunting and trapping season when it has been shown in the past that the bobcat population cannot sustain such abuse. Furthermore, the proposed rule would allow the use of barbaric, antiquated devices like steel-jaw leghold traps, Conibear traps, or strangling snares.^{xcv}

A subsequent attempt to legislate an Indiana state law to allow bobcat hunting in 2019 failed in the State legislature. Ironically, the reason for its failure was opposition from not only animal welfare advocates but also many hunters who oppose state legislative laws on wildlife management decisions that they believe should be made only by the State DNR. Another example of such hunter opposition to state laws on wildlife management had also occurred earlier in Indiana with an attempt to outlaw fenced deer hunting that many believe leads to chronic wasting disease for the same reason—opposition to the legislature making wildlife management decisions which many hunters believe should be made by state wildlife management officials.^{xcvi}

The Illinois legislature was also lobbied by both sides on proposed legislation to institute a bobcat hunting season. The director of the Humane Society of U.S., Kristen Strawbridge, issued the following statement:

Bobcats aren't overpopulating our state and they're not causing any conflicts with humans, livestock or other wildlife, so why are lawmakers working to open a hunting season on them? Let's make one thing clear: Nobody is eating bobcat meat. This iconic species is killed only for a trophy or for fur. Bobcats have beautiful reddish-brown, spotted coats — but their beauty is actually their downfall, as their pelts are prized by fur buyers on global markets. Commercializing an entire species like this deprives everyone else from enjoying the animal, all for the benefit of greedy profiteers.^{xcvii}

Note that she emphasizes that the bobcat is hunted as a trophy—not for meat—which survey research above shows is not popular with the general public. She goes on to discuss the use of leghold traps—another aspect that the general public does not view with favor. An interview with one prospective hunter verified the importance of the bobcat's pelt:^{xcviii}

They are a very beautiful animal. That's part of why I'm considering a trapper education class, so I don't mess up the hide.”

The Illinois Sierra Club also wrote to its members to oppose the new law:

Full testimony by ecologists was never considered...the proposed season overlaps portions of the bobcat breeding season, putting both bobcats with kittens and pregnant bobcats at risk.^{xcix}

In 2014, a bobcat hunting bill was passed by the legislature but was vetoed by then Democratic governor, Pat Quinn. In 2016, the bill was passed and then signed by then Republican governor Bruce Rauner. Some bobcat enthusiasts tried to undermine the effects of the new law by purchasing permits through the lottery though Illinois DNR says that only happens in about 2 percent of the cases.^c

Why did bobcat hunting fail in Indiana but pass in Illinois? This is one case in which partisan politics did matter with a Democratic governor vetoing the legislation while a Republican signed it. It is also related to regionalism—Democratic political strength is centered in Chicago while Republicans are strong in rural southern Illinois where the strongest legislative supporters of the bill resided. I studied the membership of the Indiana Natural Resources Commission that had 9 voting members at the time I visited the site. Unlike many states, only the chair of the committee mentioned being a relationship to hunting (“avid sportsman” was description used). Illinois has an “Endangered Species Protection Board” composed of 8 voting members (at the time I visited the site) that is highly dominated by 7 academicians involved in research for universities or other institutions (e.g., Illinois State Museum) with none of the members highlighting hunting interests. Thus, the two states advisory commissions to the state Department of Natural Resources are not like many states that are highly dominated by members with strong hunting, angling, ranching, and farming interests. This may partially reflect the fact that in neither state is hunting a major “industry” that attracts non-resident hunters—Illinois and Indiana ranked 18th and 39th respectively in percent of license revenue from non-residents in 2016.

However, a key difference between the two states was the director of their Departments of Natural Resources. Cameron Carter the Indiana Director had served as the state DNR's legal counsel before being appointed by Gov. Pence but his resume does not emphasize hunting interests. Wayne Rosenthal who headed Illinois DNR under Gov. Rauner was formerly a State Representative from Morrisonville, IL (in southern Illinois) who had sponsored the bobcat legislation that the Democratic Governor vetoed. Rosenthal has a strong background of hunting and thus was a strong supporter of the new bobcat bill, declaring the new law "a good sign of their recovery."^{ci}

This case study serves to illustrate the complexity of state wildlife management agency politics. Interest groups are active on both sides (animal welfare and wildlife conservation versus hunting/trapping) in trying to influence the decisions that affect "charismatic" wildlife. In this case, the influence of hunters was limited on the advisory commissions unlike many states. But institutional factors, in this case namely the agency director, played a key role. Partisan political party played a role in this debate over this issue, though the chief division appears to be more regional with urban areas siding with animal welfare side and rural interests with hunting/trapping. This rural/urban divide is clear in many other states where there have been votes over bans of hunting/trapping such as Colorado and Oregon. A study by Idaho Fish & Game Department showed a clear relationship between population size and support for the Endangered Species Act with farm areas being much less supportive.^{cii} In the state of Washington, ranchers have been active in demanding "lethal removal" of wolves. Director Susewind had resisted for some time but finally decided to allow the delisting because the "department is confident that Washington's wolf population is on a path leading to successful recovery."^{ciii} However, more than 100 scientists signed a letter opposing the delisting.^{civ} Debates over issues like wolves and bobcat hunting never truly end—indeed, as noted above, hunter-trapper interests attempted to pass laws to overturn Indiana's decision and there are many cases where ballots on wildlife welfare issues (e.g., killing and trapping mountain lions and bears) have been reversed.

Conclusion:

This paper has shown that general public opinion has limited impact on state decisions made by their wildlife management agencies (and governors and legislatures). Small but active interests dominate policies that affect their livelihoods (e.g., livestock) and passions (e.g., for hunting) that generally wins out over general public opinion that often is opposed to the positions of these small groups. This is not a new phenomenon but there is a developing crisis as a result of it. Funding for wildlife habitat and conservation has been largely based on revenues from hunting and angling but declining populations of hunters has led to long-term secular declines in these revenues. There have been some small efforts at the state level to compensate for this decline, but these have not been nearly sufficient to meet the needs for wildlife conservation. I have also shown that the actions of states and their wildlife management agencies deserve serious study as they have a major impact on preservation of biodiversity and public lands.

When will, if ever, this dominance by public lands ranchers and anti-predator hunters change? There is no clear answer. Unfortunately, the previous era in which preservation of species became national top priorities leading to legislative and administrative changes in Interior Department was in the 1960s-1970s and related to threats of extinction of charismatic species such as the golden eagle and also the expansion of voting rights to 18-year-olds that led Nixon to

support the strongly worded Endangered Species Act because of his assumption that youth would be highly committed to environmental causes.^{cv} Since Nixon's time, preservation of species and issues such as public range policies have remained largely frozen. The Obama Administration, like the Clinton Administration, sought to defuse battles with rancher-dominated states over predators by proposing to delist wolves as one of the first actions by the Obama's Secretary of Interior, Kenneth Salazar. An explicit assumption of USFWS officials involved in the gray wolf issue has been that allowing killing of wolves would "make them more acceptable" to the rancher-hunter constituencies but this hypothesis has not proven to be true.^{cvi}

Under the Trump Administration, the influence of public lands ranchers has skyrocketed. However, rancher influence has generally been bipartisan. Democratic candidates in western and other conservative states continue to toe the rancher lines as well as that of trophy hunters. For example, Democratic Senators Tester (Montana), Klobuchar (Minn.), and Baldwin (Wis.) all supported removal of wolves from Federal protections in response to small but potent constituencies of hunters and ranchers in their states.^{cvi} Recently, Trump pardoned two Oregon public lands ranchers, the Hammonds, for setting fire to public rangelands and BLM allowed them to graze again in order to prevent wildfires when actually research shows that grazing compacts and dries out soil, disrupting aquatic systems and thus is likely to contribute to fire risk.^{cvi} Susan Combs, Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management, and the Budget in Trump's Interior Department is a rancher noted for her opposition to the Endangered Species Act in Texas where she implemented policies to allow energy companies to regulate themselves in regard to actions that affected endangered species.^{cix}

In some cases, partisan politics have affected state policies. For example, there is concern about inbreeding of Mexican wolves due to the fact that removals of wolves had led to the predominance of wolves from one pack.^{cx} USFWS hoped to solve the problem by proposing a new rule that wolves would be able to roam a larger area and reintroductions to wolves would be made to New Mexico while previously reintroductions were limited to a small area of Arizona. New Mexico governor Democratic Bill Richardson was supportive of the recovery program.^{cx} However, New Mexico's Republican Governor, Susana Martinez, refused to go along with this proposal and "refused to renew the permit for a captive wolf facility" on Ted Turner's New Mexico ranch—a facility that is "regarded as crucial" for the overall recovery of Mexican wolves.^{cxii} The Mexican wolf experience also illustrates the importance of Federalism—states have the ability to frustrate Federal programs. It also shows that partisan issues can affect wildlife conservation policy.

When conservation-minded western state citizens run for and win state and Federal office on the basis of their stance in favor of wildlife conservation, then change will take place. There were some hopeful signs in the November 2018 election. For those U.S. citizens who care about wildlife conservation to effect change in agency priorities and funding mechanisms will require that they actively participate in everyday activities of these agencies, seek office at local, state and Federal levels to press these interests. The protection of public lands including monuments was a theme for some of some newly elected representatives such as Native American woman Debra Haaland from New Mexico.^{cxiii} In several other notable elections, candidates favoring

protection of public lands (versus those wanting, e.g., to hand over Federal lands to states), won victories such as Senators Tester in Montana, Henrich in New Mexico, and Rosen (Nevada), as well as Representatives O'Halleran (Arizona), Lee and Horsford (both in Nevada), Torres (New Mexico), McAdams (Utah), and Grisham (governor's race in New Mexico.)^{cxiv} The Tester win is noteworthy because he was endorsed by Patagonia but President Trump campaigned strongly to defeat him in a state he had handily won.^{cxv} These elections have already had some consequences such as in New Mexico where conservation-oriented measures have been enacted such as prohibition of coyote-hunting tournaments.^{cxvi} There have been winning coalitions formed for conservation when different groups agree including conservationists, hunters-anglers, and animal rights constituencies but reaching agreement among these groups is not easy. David Waller has related his experience as Director of Georgia's Game and Fish Division in 1991 where he tried to seek funding for non-game wildlife. He achieved passage of a state nongame wildlife auto tag but efforts to pass a Conservation and Reinvestment Act at the Federal level failed because they failed to gain conservation organization support due to their suspicions of environmental groups about hunter-rancher dominated state wildlife management agencies. He also was unable to convince hunters that "nongame initiatives would benefit them."^{cxvii}

Despite much evidence that the recent population growth of western states is dominated by nonhunters and non-ranchers, the politics of western states have yet to reflect these "New West" values. Why not? First of all, concentrated costs and benefits have been a stronger impetus to act such as run for office, attempt to influence politicians and wildlife managers, and vote on the basis solely on the basis of these interests than a general positive attitude towards the environment and conservation. Short term events such as the Exxon oil disaster can bring about short-term change but over the long term, economic self-interest have dominated altruism. A good example concerns grizzlies in the Yellowstone ecoregion. There have been studies to show that grizzlies bring in tremendous revenues that make them more valuable alive than dead.^{cxviii} Guides and outfitters state that their "tourism economy is based on bears."^{cxix} Loisa Willcox, an activist for grizzly conservation and author of an email news bulletin, *Grizzly Times*, identified the weakness of the hopes for the "New West" as follows:

Moreover, the new people moving to the mountains aren't as vocal or as engaged in the political process, leaving the microphone open for hunters, loggers and miners.^{cxx}

The situation is similar in Canada where some researchers characterized public support for wildlife conservation as a "mile wide" (94 percent) but only "an inch deep" in terms of engendering action.^{cxxi} The salience of conservation for the majority of the public who favor it has not been as strong as that for the small sectors that believe it harms their well-being. It is possible that this will change in the future as many wildlife species are increasingly threatened and wilderness becomes less and less common due to forces of development and agriculture. Thus, these species and "wilderness areas" will become rarer and thus more highly valued. Until that happens, we will continue to see decreased wildlife species and habitat.

Notes

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ⁱⁱ 2018 Conservation in the West Poll Released
<https://www.coloradocollege.edu/newsevents/newsroom/2018-conservation-in-the-west-pollreleased#.WmttdqinH=>

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- ^{xii} David Hart. (2005). "The Hocus Pocus of Ballot Box Biology." *National Rifle Association: Institute for Legislative Action.* 2005. <http://www.nrila.org/hunting/articles/the-hocus-pocusof-ballot-box-biology.aspx?s=ballot+box+biology&st=&ps> See also Daniel J. Decker, John F. Organ, Ann B. Forstchen, Michael V. Schiavone, & Angela K. Fuller. *Wildlife Management: Is it Science: Myth or Reality?* *The Wildlife Professional*, July/August 2008. 30-32.
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- ^{xiv} See Bruce Rocheleau, *Wildlife Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 80-89.
- ^{xv} *Ibid.*, pp. 25-53.
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