

by Jeff Crane

Hunting + Fishing = Biodiversity-Amplifying the voices and impacts of American sportsmen and women through '30 by 30' policy initiatives



The White House has signed on to the global conservation goal of protecting 30% of our lands and waters by 2030. Hunters and anglers have a key role to play.

If you are reading this, the odds are that you hunt or fish or understand the conservation contributions of those activities—or you may be interested in learning more about wildlife conservation in general. For those of us who are hunters and anglers, the feeling of the soft forest floor under our boots or the sudden tug on a fishing rod as the sun glimmers on the water is irreplaceable. These pursuits not only fuel our passion, and sometimes also livelihoods, but they also drive the conservation of our nation's natural resources.

Conservation in the United States is increasingly becoming a top priority among policymakers at the state and federal levels as more energy than ever is being focused on the care of our nation's wildlife. This spotlight on conservation is great, but we must ensure that sportsmen and women—America's

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original conservationists—continue to play a prominent role in any initiative that seeks to conserve our natural resources.

You may already be aware of the contributions that hunters and anglers make to conservation in the US through the American System of Conservation Funding (ASCF), a user-pays, public-benefits program. If not, here's a brief overview:

By and large, the funding used by US state fish and wildlife management agencies to support conservation work, including wildlife habitat restoration and species (game and non-game) reintroduction, comes from hunting and angling license sales and excise taxes on ammunition, firearms, fishing tackle, boat fuel and other materials used by hunters and anglers. These taxes are self-imposed, essentially, as sportsmen and women understand and appreciate the value of this system and the role that they play in conservation. Each year, hunting and fishing activities generate nearly \$3.3 billion for state-based conservation through the ASCF. Since 1939, when it began, this has contributed nearly \$71 billion for the management, acquisition and conservation of roughly 81.5 million acres of land and water.

Recently, our state and federal policymakers have begun to focus on the 30 by 30 Initiative, the global goal of protecting 30% of our planet's lands and waters by the year 2030. This promotes, in fact requires, national and regional conservation strategies for habitat protection and restoration in order to enhance biodiversity, a goal of the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity and the US Administration. In January, President Biden issued an Executive Order with a goal of placing 30% of America's lands and waters under protection by the year 2030. To date this year, state lawmakers have introduced similar legislation in South Carolina, Michigan, Nevada, New York and California.

Clearly, this is an ambitious goal. But the growing interest in legislation to support the 30 by 30 Initiative presents a great opportunity to highlight and strengthen conservation efforts in the US.

In its guidelines, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's World Commission on Protected Areas identifies a "protected area" as a "clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values."

Protecting an area can take many forms, from a hands-off approach that strictly limits human visitation to managing an ecosystem in concert with cultural and socioeconomic needs. As 30 by 30 proposals are considered at the local, state and federal levels, it is critical that lawmakers recognize existing active management practices while working to identify additional conservation needs through an objective, science-driven stakeholder-engaged process.

Doing so will maximize the effectiveness of conservation work ultimately to enhance biodiversity where it is needed most while also considering human needs. This includes recognizing hunters and anglers, and the conservation efforts supported and executed by them, as a part of the solution to address the need for biodiversity.

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Any failure to define management approaches that constitute the protection of ecosystems under the 30 by 30 Initiative creates uncertainty for the hunting and fishing community and opens the door for those who seek to use the ambitious and honorable objectives of this initiative as an opportunity to limit access for sportsmen and women.

Further, poorly defined objectives can lead to preservation, not conservation, and a failure to meet the biodiversity goals of the initiative. Misguided or poorly defined objectives could lead to problems for private landowners, for local communities whose economies often rely on contributions by sportsmen and women, and for the natural-resource managers who rely on the ASCF for conservation programs that already further the 30 by 30 Initiative.

To ensure that this does not happen, 30 by 30 policies and proposals must recognize hunters, anglers and other sportsmen as a part of the solution in supporting and enhancing conservation priorities.

In October 2020, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, with other sporting conservation organizations, established the HuntFish 30×30 Coalition to amplify the voices of sportsmen and women and highlight the importance of engaging America's original conservationists in this worthwhile endeavor. Currently, the coalition consists of more than 50 conservation organizations that have committed to supporting this effort.

On the coalition's website, huntfish3030.com, the public can learn about the initiative and the role that sportsmen and women play in supporting biodiversity. Collectively, the member organizations are raising awareness about 30×30 and advocating for solutions that allow hunters and anglers to continue our conservation legacy.

The coalition has also established a petition for individuals to sign that further emphasizes the significance of hunting and fishing to 30×30 policy and encourages lawmakers to support the historic and ongoing contributions to conservation by sportsmen and women, and support policies that promote biodiversity while protecting access to our lands and waters.

Hunting and angling are a part of America's heritage that continues to fuel many economic activities and the conservation of our public-trust resources. Our hunters and anglers work passionately on behalf of all Americans to support restoration, maintenance and proper management of our diverse ecosystems—and to ensure that conservation continues to be top-of-mind for our lawmakers. Our commitment stems from a profound appreciation for the healthy habitats that provide our opportunities to hunt and fish. We also understand that these traditions are sustainable activities that ultimately support and promote biodiversity.

To stay up to date on the latest information surrounding the HuntFish 30×30 Initiative, visit the website often and please consider signing the petition to show your support for sportsmen and women as a vital part of the development and implementation of these critically important conservation objectives.

Jeff Crane, a frequent contributor to CFL, is President of the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, based in Washington, DC. He wrote "The US Congress Sporting Report Card" in the January 2021 issue.

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Banner image: The home page of the HuntFish 30×30 website.

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