



MINNESOTA BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS & ANGLERS

The sportsmen's voice for our wild public lands, waters and wildlife

To: Sen. Paul Utke & Rep. Steve Green,
Cc: Sen. Paul Gazelka, Majority Leader; Sen. Thomas Bakk, Minority Leader; Rep. Joyce Peppin, Majority Leader; Rep. Melissa Hortman, Minority Leader; Rep. Dan Fabian
Subj: HF 143 & SF 372, Counties no net gain of state lands policy authorization

March 6, 2017

Dear Sen. Utke and Rep. Green,

We are writing as co-chairman of the Minnesota Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA) regarding **HF 143 & SF 372**, counties no net gain of state lands policy authorization.

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers is the sportsmen's voice for our wild public lands, waters and wildlife. We seek to ensure North America's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing in a natural setting through education and work on behalf of fish, wildlife and wild places. With more than 200,000 members and supporters and chapters in 25 states and British Columbia, BHA is attracting support from sportsmen and women across the continent.¹

We are concerned about **HF 143 & SF 372**, and have summarized our concerns below, in an "Executive Summary (Key Points)" followed by a lengthier "Position Statement" and "Additional Information." Please take our comments into consideration and include them in the public record regarding this issue.

Thank you for your public service and consideration.

Sincerely,

David A. Lien²
Co-Chair, Minnesota
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The Sportsman's Voice for Our Wild Public Lands, Waters and Wildlife
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¹ Formed around an Oregon campfire in 2004, BHA is the sportsmen's voice for our nation's wild public lands, waters and wildlife. With members in all 50 states and Canada, including 25 state-based chapters and a chapter in British Columbia, BHA brings an authentic, informed, boots-on-the-ground voice to the conservation of public lands.

² David Lien is a Grand Rapids (Minn.) native, former U.S. Air Force officer, NRA Life Member, and co-chairman of the Minnesota Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (www.backcountryhunters.org). He's the author of "Hunting for Experience II: Tales of Hunting & Habitat Conservation" and during 2014 was recognized by Field & Stream as a "Hero of Conservation."



Erik Jensen
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“Of all the questions which can come before this nation, short of the actual preservation of its existence in a great war, there is none which compares in importance with the great central task of leaving this land even a better land for our descendants than it is for us.” –Theodore Roosevelt³

Executive Summary (Key Points)

The Minnesota chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers oppose **HF 143 & SF 372**, counties no net gain of state lands policy authorization, based (in part) on the following key points/facts:

Public Lands Hunters

- There are roughly 51 million acres of land in Minnesota. About 25% of the land is in government ownership while 75% of Minnesota’s hunting land mass is in private ownership.⁴
- Our entire North American Model of Wildlife Conservation depends on hunters being able to hunt—and they do that, more than anywhere else, on public land.
- The annual survey of hunting and fishing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service finds that the vast majority of hunters pursue game on public lands.
- Polling from after the 2016 election showed that 78 percent of Americans oppose efforts to privatize or sell public lands, including 64 percent of Trump voters.⁵

Public Lands Hunting Facts & Threats

- The most powerful anti-hunting movement in the U.S. is the loss of places to hunt and shoot.⁶
- We lose two million acres of open space each year to housing tracts, shopping malls, roads, logging, oil and gas development, and coal and hardrock mining. Every day, that’s 6,000 acres of a finite resource.⁷
- Today, Minnesota has less than 4 percent of its original old-growth forest remaining.⁸ And less than 1% of Minnesota’s native prairie habitat remains.⁹

³ <https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/historyculture/theodore-roosevelt-quotes.htm>

⁴ Wayne Enger. “H.U.N.T. Your Way to Private Land Deer Management.” *Whitetales*: Summer 2008, p. 42.

⁵ The Wilderness Society (TWS). “New bill would sell off 3 million acres of public lands.” *TWS*: 1/26/17.

⁶ Hal Herring. “We Need Our Public Lands, Now More Than Ever.” *Field & Stream*: 2/14/14.

⁷ Mike Matz. *Your Wilderness*: June 2010.

⁸ John Myers. “Nature Conservancy buys virgin North Shore tract preserved by adventurer Will Steger.” *Forum News Service*: 11/1/16.

⁹ Kris Larson, Minnesota Land Trust executive director. “Minnesota’s Treasures, Preserved Forever.” *Minnesota Land Trust Mid-Year Review*: May 2015.

-In Hubbard and Cass Counties, the DNR estimates about 42 square miles of pine forest have been cleared or are at elevated risk of being cleared and converted to croplands.¹⁰

-In St. Louis County, tens of thousands of acres of forest habitat has been sold. This divestiture continues as Potlatch has sold or is in the process of selling over 175 parcels in the county.¹¹

-In December 2004, Boise Cascade alone sold 2.2 million acres across the country. More than ten percent of that land—309,000 acres—was in Minnesota, most of it in Itasca, Koochiching, and surrounding counties.¹²

Public Lands Economics

-Independent estimates show that the outdoor recreation industry contributes approximately \$646 billion to U.S. gross domestic product and supports 6.1 million jobs.¹³ For comparison purposes, that figure would make the outdoors industry about 10 times bigger than the coal industry.¹⁴

-In Minnesota, those estimates show the economic value of outdoor recreation generating \$11.6 billion in consumer spending, \$3.4 billion in wages and salaries, \$815 million in state and local tax revenue, and supporting 118,000 jobs.¹⁵

-According to the latest national survey, Minnesota hunters spend \$733 million annually with a ripple effect of \$1.3 billion and Minnesota anglers spend \$2.4 billion annually with a ripple effect of \$4.2 billion annually.¹⁶

-The DNR says deer hunters alone generate some \$260 million in retail sales and pumps \$458 million into the state's economy.¹⁷

-A University of Minnesota report quantified the economic benefits of public lands. One of the report's main findings: for every dollar spent to conserve natural areas, there is return of between \$1.70 and \$4.40.¹⁸

Position Statement

As you may be aware, it was a veteran (and Republican), Theodore Roosevelt, who is responsible for much of the great public lands inheritance and heritage that Americans enjoy today. In 1887, Roosevelt founded the Boone and Crockett Club with fellow sportsmen. As explained by *American Hunter* contributor Mike Fuljenz, this group later became Roosevelt's brain trust of "hunter-conservationists" during his presidential crusade to preserve habitat for elk, deer, buffalo, and other species among America's vast wild places and wide open spaces.¹⁹

To Roosevelt, no one was better suited to lead this crusade than America's hunters—those who spent time in the wilds and respected the wildlife like few others.²⁰ Roosevelt's work as a "conservation president" was one of many initiatives through which he left lasting imprints on

¹⁰ Craig Engwall, Minnesota Deer Hunters Association (MDHA) executive director. "MDHA Preserves Habitat, Provides New Hunting Opportunities." *Whitetails*: Winter 2017, p. 20.

¹¹ Craig Engwall, Minnesota Deer Hunters Association (MDHA) executive director. "MDHA Preserves Habitat, Provides New Hunting Opportunities." *Whitetails*: Winter 2017, p. 20.

¹² Minnesota Deer Hunters Association (MDHA). "Minnesota Forest Legacy Partnership." *Whitetails*: Summer 2006, p.12

¹³ Mark Norquist, board member for the Minnesota Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers and a member of Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters. "Finally, we'll know the true economic benefits of outdoor recreation." Minneapolis-St. Paul (Minn.) *Star Tribune*: 12/12/16.

¹⁴ Valerie Volcovici and Annie Knox. "Sportsmen fight Trump energy plans alongside environmental left." *Reuters*: 2/17/17.

¹⁵ Mark Norquist, board member for the Minnesota Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers and a member of Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters. "Finally, we'll know the true economic benefits of outdoor recreation." Minneapolis-St. Paul (Minn.) *Star Tribune*: 12/12/16.

¹⁶ Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). "Fish and Wildlife 'Budget in Brief.'" *DNR*: 2017.

<http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/legislativeinfo/policy-budget-factsheets/2017/budget-faw.pdf>

¹⁷ WDAY TV. "Minnesota Deer Hunting Means 'Big Business.'" *WDAY*: 11/12/11.

¹⁸ Joe Albert. "Public land benefits, explained." *Outdoor News*: 1/14/11, p. 26.

¹⁹ Mike Fuljenz. "President Theodore Roosevelt." *American Hunter*: December 2010, p. 30.

²⁰ Mike Fuljenz. "President Theodore Roosevelt." *American Hunter*: December 2010, p. 30.

the nation. However, today TR's public lands legacy is being put at risk. As you likely know, in late January U.S. Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) introduced a bill (H.R. 621) to sell millions of acres of public lands, drawing the ire and rapid response of hunters and anglers.²¹

Within days of introducing the bill, Chaffetz had a change of heart. Posing on Instagram with a backdrop of a woodland scene, holding his hunting dog and gun, Chaffetz said he would pull the plug on the measure.²² As explained by the *Redding Record Searchlight's* editors (in "Don't transfer the land, fix the failures," 1/11/17): "Sportsmen's groups ... oppose transfers. One of those most vocal is the Backcountry Hunters & Anglers—and Donald Trump, Jr. happens to be a member."²³

"I don't just hunt once a year to talk about it at a cocktail party," Trump Jr. told Bowsite.com. "It's really part of my life." "Hunting, fishing, the outdoors has been good to me," he said. "It's been good to my brother. We're both very avid guys ... [and] I want to make sure that it's around for the next generation, and the next generation following that."²⁴ "Hunting and fishing, when motivated by the idea of conserving our wildlife and fishery resources, are not things to be ashamed of ... [we] make sure that the habitat and the animals that populate that habitat are as healthy as possible," Trump Jr. says.²⁵

That said, we are concerned about **HF 143 & SF 372** (i.e., counties no net gain of state lands policy authorization). We understand that this proposed legislation would require the following: If the DNR purchases land with Legacy Amendment funds within the county, the DNR must then sell an equal amount of public land.²⁶ *We ask you to reconsider your support of this legislation* for the reasons outlined below, and hope you will do the same for any similar legislation pending in the state legislature.

Public Lands Hunters

America's tradition of allowing public lands access for hunting, angling and other recreation is the epitome of our unique and successful North American Model of natural resource/wildlife management. And for most of us public lands are the only lands we will ever own. As a result, across the U.S., Americans decisively reject the idea of selling off public lands: Polling from after the 2016 election showed that 78 percent of Americans oppose efforts to privatize or sell public lands, including 64 percent of Trump voters.²⁷

"It's very important to realize that these land acquisition programs that are there—the DNR isn't driving this," [Bob] Meier [DNR assistant commissioner] said. "It's not (DNR) Commissioner (Tom) Landwehr saying, 'Mr. Meier, go to the Legislature and get me \$10 million more to buy some land.' It's citizens and your constituents out there who want this, who voted for the constitutional amendment, who recreate and participate on these lands in many, many different ways. They're the ones telling us to do this, driving our mission."²⁸

²¹ Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA). "Following Pressure from Sportsmen, Bud Public Lands Bill Abandoned." *BHA*: 2/2/17.

²² Kirstin Downey. "Hunters And Fishermen Score A Quick Kill Of Public Lands Bill." *Honolulu Civil Beat*: 2/6/17.

²³ Editorial Board. "Don't transfer the land, fix the failures." *Redding Record Searchlight*: 1/11/17.

²⁴ Matea Gold and Juliet Eilperin. "Conservationists look to Donald Trump Jr. as their champion in new White House." *The Washington Post*: 1/11/17.

²⁵ Frank Minter. "How Donald Trump's Sons Became Hunters." *Outdoor Life*: 10/21/16.

²⁶ Steve Lindow. "Stop the attack on state's public lands." *Outdoor News*: 2/17/17.

²⁷ The Wilderness Society (TWS). "New bill would sell off 3 million acres of public lands." *TWS*: 1/26/17.

²⁸ Joe Albert. "Public lands under microscope at state's Capitol." *Outdoor News*: 2/10/17, p. 6.

Some of the western and southern counties the DNR is targeting have land bases made up of 1 or 2 percent public land, said Pat Rivers, deputy director of the DNR Fish and Wildlife Division. “We’re concentrating our acquisitions in the prairie—in those counties that don’t have a lot of public land,” Rivers said.²⁹ As Mr. Meier and Mr. Rivers imply, Minnesotans are increasingly concerned about losing access to public lands. The DNR’s constituents include 1.5 million anglers, 1.4 million boaters, 1.4 million state park users, 600,000 hunters, 260,000 ATV riders and 250,000 snowmobilers.³⁰

There are roughly 51 million acres of land in Minnesota. About 25% of the land is in government ownership while 75% of Minnesota’s hunting land mass is in private ownership.³¹ As explained by Diana Rupp, *Sports Afield* Editor in Chief: “Our entire North American Model of Wildlife Conservation depends on hunters being able to hunt—and they do that, more than anywhere else, on public land.”³² The annual survey of hunting and fishing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service finds that the vast majority of hunters pursue game on public lands.

These public lands are what separate our nation, and state, from the rest of the world.³³ We have places for regular, hard-working Minnesotans to hike, camp, canoe, watch wildlife, fish, and hunt game. Our wildlife belongs to the public; this was established early by our founding fathers. You can’t just jump in the truck and go hunting in most of Europe. For all practical purposes, it still is the King’s land over there and it is not available to the general public. And our nation is, unfortunately, a bit like that.³⁴

Frankly, most of the eastern and southern United States have relatively little public land. Basically, if you want to hunt in much of Georgia, Mississippi, or 97% of Texas, for example, you will have to pay a fee or lease the land. Increasingly, no matter where you stand on the economic ladder, you have to have a lease or pay a fee or you cannot hunt.³⁵ As *Outdoor News* contributor Joe Albert said: “Fisherman, hunters, and others who recreate out of doors tend to appreciate their ability to get onto millions of acres of land without having to ask permission from a landowner.”³⁶

Groups like the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association (MDHA) are also concerned about losing access to public lands: “So, does Minnesota have too much public land? MDHA thinks everyone, hunters and non-hunters included, will agree there is a great need for public lands that are accessible to all Minnesotans, whether for hunting, berry picking, bird watching, camping, or any outdoor activity ... Public lands not only add to our economy, but also enhance our quality of life. While the how, what, and where of establishing or maintaining public lands may require discussion and maybe some compromising, before you support political edicts banning the expansion of public land in our great state, look at the facts.”³⁷

Public Lands Hunting Facts & Threats

²⁹ Joe Albert. “A look at public land types in Minnesota.” *Outdoor News*: 2.17/17, p. 18.

³⁰ Doug Smith. “New Minn. DNR chief sees tests ahead.” [Minneapolis-St. Paul] *Star Tribune*: 1/6/11.

³¹ Wayne Enger. “H.U.N.T. Your Way to Private Land Deer Management.” *Whitetales*: Summer 2008, p. 42.

³² Diana Rupp. “This Land Is Our Land: Turning over federal lands to the states would be a huge blow to hunting and the funding that supports wildlife conservation.” *Sports Afield*: May 2016.

³³ Minnesota Deer Hunters Association (MDHA). “Does Minnesota Have Too Much Public Land?” *Whitetales*: Winter 2011, p. 23.

³⁴ Minnesota Deer Hunters Association (MDHA). “Does Minnesota Have Too Much Public Land?” *Whitetales*: Winter 2011, p. 23.

³⁵ Minnesota Deer Hunters Association (MDHA). “Does Minnesota Have Too Much Public Land?” *Whitetales*: Winter 2011, p. 23.

³⁶ Joe Albert. “A look at public land types in Minnesota.” *Outdoor News*: 2.17/17, p. 18.

³⁷ Minnesota Deer Hunters Association (MDHA). “Does Minnesota Have Too Much Public Land?” *Whitetales*: Winter 2011, p. 23.

As explained by *Field & Stream* contributor Hal Herring, the most powerful and effective anti-hunting movement in the United States is not PETA or the Humane Society. It is not headquartered in any bustling metropolis; it has no representatives in Hollywood. The most powerful anti-hunting movement in the U.S. is the loss of places to hunt and shoot.³⁸

As former Interior Secretary Ken Salazar noted, we relinquish two million acres of open space each year to housing tracts, shopping malls, roads, logging, oil and gas development, and coal and hardrock mining. Every day, that's 6,000 acres of a finite resource—gone.³⁹ Today, Minnesota has less than 4 percent of its original old-growth forest remaining.⁴⁰ And less than 1% of Minnesota's native prairie habitat remains.⁴¹

In Hubbard and Cass Counties, for example, the DNR estimates about 42 square miles of pine forest have been cleared or are at elevated risk of being cleared and converted to croplands. Forest habitat is threatened in other areas of the northern forest as well. In St. Louis County, tens of thousands of acres of forest habitat has been sold. This divestiture continues as Potlatch has sold or is in the process of selling over 175 parcels in the county.⁴²

In December 2004, Boise Cascade alone sold 2.2 million acres across the country. More than ten percent of that land—309,000 acres—was in Minnesota, most of it in Itasca, Koochiching, and surrounding counties.⁴³ Former MDHA executive director, Mark Johnson, wrote about this trend in *Whitetales* magazine back in 2007, and the concern about loss of access is ongoing.

“Without a doubt, Minnesota's north woods are being gobbled up at an ever increasing rate. The hundreds of thousands of industrial acres that were once pristine habitat are now being parceled off and sold, leased or logged with little concern for future public use or wildlife concerns ... due to this trend toward immediate profit and the resulting changes in land use management, it is apparent to me that some of the oldest and most sensitive areas of the north woods are imperiled. These areas, many of which are natural refuges for deer in extreme winter cold and moose in intense summer heat, are critical for the future health of Minnesota's natural resources.”⁴⁴

Public Lands Economics

Composed of a bunch of mom-and-pop businesses, rather than three or four huge conglomerates, the outdoor recreation industry tends to fly under the radar but actually accounts for a substantially larger share of the American economy than energy or mineral extraction.⁴⁵ Independent estimates show that the outdoor recreation industry contributes approximately \$646 billion to U.S. gross domestic product and supports 6.1 million jobs.⁴⁶ For comparison purposes, that figure would make the outdoors industry about 10 times bigger than the coal industry.⁴⁷

³⁸ Hal Herring. “We Need Our Public Lands, Now More Than Ever.” *Field & Stream*: 2/14/14.

³⁹ Mike Matz. *Your Wilderness*: June 2010.

⁴⁰ John Myers. “Nature Conservancy buys virgin North Shore tract preserved by adventurer Will Steger.” *Forum News Service*: 11/1/16.

⁴¹ Kris Larson, Minnesota Land Trust executive director. “Minnesota's Treasures, Preserved Forever.” *Minnesota Land Trust Mid-Year Review*: May 2015.

⁴² Craig Engwall, Minnesota Deer Hunters Association (MDHA) executive director. “MDHA Preserves Habitat, Provides New Hunting Opportunities.” *Whitetales*: Winter 2017, p. 20.

⁴³ Minnesota Deer Hunters Association (MDHA). “Minnesota Forest Legacy Partnership.” *Whitetales*: Summer 2006, p.12

⁴⁴ Mark Johnson, MDHA Executive Director. “Change-How will we react?” *Whitetales*: Summer 2007, p. 3.

⁴⁵ Wes Siler. “Why Hikers Need Hunters and Vice Versa.” *Outside*: 2/7/17.

⁴⁶ Mark Norquist, board member for the Minnesota Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers and a member of Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters. “Finally, we'll know the true economic benefits of outdoor recreation.” *Minneapolis-St. Paul (Minn.) Star Tribune*: 12/12/16.

⁴⁷ Valerie Volcovici and Annie Knox. “Sportsmen fight Trump energy plans alongside environmental left.” *Reuters*: 2/17/17.

In Minnesota, those estimates show the economic value of outdoor recreation generating \$11.6 billion in consumer spending, \$3.4 billion in wages and salaries, \$815 million in state and local tax revenue, and supporting 118,000 jobs.⁴⁸ According to the latest national survey, Minnesota hunters spend \$733 million annually with a ripple effect of \$1.3 billion and Minnesota anglers spend \$2.4 billion annually with a ripple effect of \$4.2 billion annually.⁴⁹

The DNR says deer hunters alone generate some \$260 million in retail sales and pumps \$458 million into the state's economy. Compare that to the 12-day state fair, which is good for about \$185 million Twin Cities economy.⁵⁰ Other states see similar impressive outdoor recreation-related economic benefits. In Utah—where much of the national anti-public lands efforts are originating these days (i.e., H.R. 621)—in contrast to the \$13 billion in annual spending and the hundreds of thousands of jobs created by outdoor recreation and hunting, the state produces only \$2.4 billion in oil and gas per year, and that industry employs fewer than 7,000 people there.⁵¹

As Montana's Governor, Steve Bullock, said so poignantly: "This ain't about politics. Whether you're a Democrat, or Republican, or Libertarian, or vegetarian, these lands belong to you. They're our heritage. They're our economy. They're our quality of life."⁵² He adds: "Our public lands also happen to be good business. Employees and employers alike want to live and work close to where they can play."⁵³

Back here in Minnesota, as explained by *Northern Wilds* editor/publisher Shawn Perich: "In Cook County, our public land holdings include part of the BWCAW, several state parks, a national monument, and timber-producing forests. They are crisscrossed with hiking, ski and snowmobile trails, not to mention the public access to dozens of fishing lakes. These lands and their many uses are directly linked to the tourism and timbering sectors of our county workforce. Public sector employment is bolstered by state and park jobs that pay good wages with benefits. While we live in a remote corner of the state ... playing to the strength of our public lands base has allowed us to build a ... healthy economy."⁵⁴

In fact, a University of Minnesota report called, "Return on Investment in Conservation: An Economic Analysis of Ecosystem Services from Land Acquisitions by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources," quantified the economic benefits of public lands. One of the report's main findings: for every dollar spent to conserve natural areas, there is return of between \$1.70 and \$4.40.⁵⁵

As Shawn Perich explains: "What about the often-heard argument the state already owns more land than it can afford to manage? It's baloney ... What those who make the argument about the cost of land management fail to consider is the financial benefits to the state derived from public lands—which range from lucrative mineral leases to the economic impact of the state's 500,000 licensed hunters."⁵⁶

⁴⁸ Mark Norquist, board member for the Minnesota Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers and a member of Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters. "Finally, we'll know the true economic benefits of outdoor recreation." Minneapolis-St. Paul (Minn.) *Star Tribune*: 12/12/16.

⁴⁹ Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). "Fish and Wildlife 'Budget in Brief.'" *DNR*: 2017. <http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/legislativeinfo/policy-budget-factsheets/2017/budget-faw.pdf>

⁵⁰ WDAY TV. "Minnesota Deer Hunting Means 'Big Business.'" *WDAY*: 11/12/11.

⁵¹ Wes Siler. "Why Hikers Need Hunters and Vice Versa." *Outside*: 2/7/17.

⁵² Wes Siler. "Why Hikers Need Hunters and Vice Versa." *Outside*: 2/7/17.

⁵³ Benjamin Spillman. "Poll: Trump and non-Trump voters agree on public lands." *Reno Gazette-Journal*: 1/31/17.

⁵⁴ Shawn Perich. "Let's keep lawmakers out of the real estate business." *Outdoor News*: 2/11/11, p. 7.

⁵⁵ Joe Albert. "Public land benefits, explained." *Outdoor News*: 1/14/11, p. 26.

⁵⁶ Shawn Perich. "Let's keep lawmakers out of the real estate business." *Outdoor News*: 2/11/11, p. 7.

Outdoor News managing editor Rob Drieslein adds: “The whining about the oh-so-sorry state of our ‘unmanaged’ public lands is an excuse, nothing more, to implement a long-standing wise-use agenda to stop public lands acquisition. Even if the state were sitting on a vast landscape of lousy public properties, which it’s not, here’s the obvious response: So what? Even the most poorly managed WMA with a ‘Hunting Allowed’ sign beats a posted ... ag field, strip mall, or housing development. Any day of the week.”⁵⁷

The Future

The continuation of the very things we love—hunting, fishing, wildlife, wild places—depends on Minnesota’s great public lands estate. The visionaries who gave us this great legacy of wildlands—hunters like Theodore Roosevelt and Aldo Leopold—realized something that is sometimes forgotten today: Without public lands and wild places for wildlife, there will be no place for sportsmen and women to hunt and fish.

And according to Shawn Perich: “It is hard to see how the state would be well-served by a ‘no net gain’ law to require land sales any time the state acquires more property. What land would we sell? Maybe state forest property that supplies raw materials for the timber industry? A wildlife area purchased with donations from a local Pheasants Forever chapter? Or what the heck, should we turn over one of our state parks to Disney?”⁵⁸

Gladly, as BHA board chairman Ryan Busse explains: “The incoming administration has pledged its unambiguous support of our lands and waters and keeping them public. American sportsmen applaud this firm position. We call for an end to the budgetary chicanery and misinformation ... Finally, we call on citizen patriots to defend this most American of ideals.”⁵⁹ But perhaps third-generation U.S. Army veteran, Garrett Reppenhagen, sums up the importance of our public lands best:

“Like many other Americans, veterans count on our public lands for fishing, hiking, camping and hunting with our families—but these activities are especially crucial in vets’ physical and emotional healing from the stress of combat. For us, national parks, monuments and public lands aid our recovery and assimilation back into Stateside life ...”⁶⁰

“Just as the men and women in the armed services defend our American way of life every day, we all need to be vigilant in defending our national treasures. Legislation proposed in Congress would sell off public lands and roll back protections. In fact, other veterans and I traveled to Washington, D.C. ... to

⁵⁷ Rob Drieslein. “Outdoor Insights.” *Outdoor News*: 3/25/11, p. 3.

⁵⁸ Shawn Perich. “Let’s keep lawmakers out of the real estate business.” *Outdoor News*: 2/11/11, p. 7.

⁵⁹ Ryan Busse, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers board chairman. “The House Places No Value on an America Treasure—Its Public Lands.” *The New York Times*: 1/17/17.

⁶⁰ Garrett Reppenhagen, third-generation Army veteran (served as a sniper in Iraq and with peacekeeping forces in Kosovo. Now Rocky Mountain Coordinator for Vet Voice Foundation). “In our sights: Browns Canyon.” *Colorado Springs Independent*: 12/25/13. Also see: <http://www.vetvoicefoundation.org/press/reppenhagen-a-veteran-fights-for-public-lands>

remind the White House and Congress of our shared responsibility as stewards of our public lands.”⁶¹

As co-chairman of the Minnesota Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, we have been privileged to hunt and fish with veterans who are BHA members. We are a grassroots group of sportsmen and women who are united by a passion to protect and conserve the public lands, forests, mountains, prairies, streams, and lakes that support our hunting and angling traditions.

This truism compels us to ask for your leadership in protecting and perpetuating our incredible public lands heritage. As former State Senator Bob Lessard said: “A duck, a deer, or a fish does not take a political side, Republican, Democrat or Independent, and I’ll support the individual who supports us.”⁶² Denis Quarberg, MDHA president, adds: “‘Habitat’ is not Democrat or Republican.”⁶³

BHA’s Commitment

In late January, as previously mentioned, U.S. Rep. Jason Chaffetz (a Republican from Utah), introduced legislation to sell 3.3 million acres of federal land in 10 Western states. Land Tawney, BHA president and CEO, was ready. “People have been trying to steal it since [President Theodore] Roosevelt put it aside,” Tawney said. Just days later, Chaffetz withdrew his bill (H.R. 621).⁶⁴

“In my 17 years of working on this stuff, I’ve never seen anyone introduce a bill and then a week later pull it back,” said Tawney, who has led the Missoula, Mont.-based organization since 2013. “The response to the Chaffetz bill was swift and unapologetic ... I hope that issue goes away.” With the backing of BHA’s 10,000 members, Tawney’s voice was among the loudest in opposition to Chaffetz’s bill. And that’s a BHA tradition. Since the group formed around a campfire in 2004 in Oregon, defending public lands has been the group’s mission.⁶⁵

Said Tawney: “We’re a conservation group of hunters ... At the end of the day we want to make sure you have access to your public land, and that there is fish and wildlife habitat when you get there.” Unlike many groups that are species-specific—even though their work benefits a wide variety of game and nongame species—BHA has grown based on its core philosophy of advocating on behalf of public lands.⁶⁶ “The majority of hunters hunt on public land; it’s the great equalizer,” he said.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Garrett Reppenhagen, third-generation Army veteran (served as a sniper in Iraq and with peacekeeping forces in Kosovo. Now Rocky Mountain Coordinator for Vet Voice Foundation). “In our sights: Browns Canyon.” *Colorado Springs Independent*: 12/25/13. Also see: <http://www.vetvoicefoundation.org/press/reppenhagen-a-veteran-fights-for-public-lands>

⁶² Bob Lessard. “Dedicated funding history from Bob Lessard.” *Outdoor News*: 6/7/13, p. 28.

⁶³ Denis Quarberg, MDHA president. “From the President’s Stand: What Are MDHA’s Challenges?” *Whitetales*: Winter 2017, p. 4.

⁶⁴ Joe Albert. “Backcountry Hunters & Anglers gladly takes advocacy label, too (National group, with a Minnesota chapter, puts land protection at its center.” *Minneapolis-St. Paul (Minn.) Star-Tribune*: 3/2/17.

⁶⁵ Joe Albert. “Backcountry Hunters & Anglers gladly takes advocacy label, too (National group, with a Minnesota chapter, puts land protection at its center.” *Minneapolis-St. Paul (Minn.) Star-Tribune*: 3/2/17.

⁶⁶ Joe Albert. “Backcountry Hunters & Anglers gladly takes advocacy label, too (National group, with a Minnesota chapter, puts land protection at its center.” *Minneapolis-St. Paul (Minn.) Star-Tribune*: 3/2/17.

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