

*Wildlife and Hunting Heritage  
Conservation Council*

November 1, 2010

The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

On behalf of the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council, I am writing to provide suggestions on how the America's Great Outdoors (AGO) initiative can better address hunting and conservation priorities of the hunting conservation community. The listening sessions you held across the country were well-received by sportsmen and women – in particular, the special AGO listening session conducted with the American Wildlife Conservation Partners this past August. As Chairman of the Council I am pleased to provide specific recommendations, resulting from the AGO briefing and subsequent discussion during our inaugural meeting this past October. Thank you for both your leadership on these issues and for your willingness to allow the Council to provide input. This letter has also been submitted to Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar.

As you complete work on the AGO report and develop your FY 2012 budget recommendations, the Council recommends that you include sufficient resources to support the work of the federal land management agencies to implement conservation, outdoor recreation, and educational programs. In addition, we ask that you consider the important conservation work conducted by state fish and wildlife agencies when planning and budgeting for stateside Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) funding. An issue of overriding interest to hunters is access to both private and public lands. Therefore, it is critical to support full funding (\$900 million per year) for LWCF. As you are aware, full funding of LWCF expressed in current dollars is approximately \$3.2 billion based on the \$900 million authorization established in 1977. We further urge you to include at least 1.5% of LWCF funding or an annual minimum of \$10 million to improve public access to existing “landlocked” public land. Providing increased opportunities for hunting, fishing, and nature-based recreation on these lands – in “making public lands public” – should be emphasized in LWCF.

The administration's continuing support is also crucial for the 2008 Farm Bill's Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentives Program – a program that provides \$50 million to enhance hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation and habitat improvement on private lands. The high level of state and tribal interest in this program precluded the funding of all eligible applications from the initial request for applications. Therefore, the Council recommends that the administration consider providing an additional \$10 million per year for this program.

The Council believes that AGO should especially promote the conservation of landscapes that are crucial to wildlife and that are enhanced by effective partnerships

CHAIRMAN

**John Tomke**  
Ducks Unlimited

VICE CHAIRMAN

**Christine Thomas**  
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

MEMBERS

**M. David Allen**  
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

**Jeffrey S. Crane**  
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

**Robert R. Fithian**  
Alaska Professional Hunters  
Association, Inc.

**John E. Frampton**  
South Carolina Department of Natural  
Resources

**Thomas Franklin**  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation  
Partnership

**Ron Heward**  
Heward 7E Ranch

**Robert Manes**  
The Nature Conservancy

**Baasewe Frederick D. Maulson**  
Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife  
Commission

**Tommy Millner**  
Cabela's

**Robert Model**  
Boone and Crockett Club

**Joanna Prukop**  
Freedom to Roam

**Stephen L. Sanetti**  
National Shooting Sports Foundation

**Larry Schweiger**  
National Wildlife Federation

**George C. Thornton**  
National Wild Turkey Federation

**Howard K. Vincent**  
Pheasants Forever

**Steve Williams**  
Wildlife Management Institute

EX OFFICIO REPRESENTATION

*Bureau of Land Management  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Farm Service Agency  
U.S. Forest Service  
Natural Resources Conservation Service*

Council Coordinator

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Division of Program & Partnership  
Support  
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS EA-3103  
Arlington, VA 22203  
P 703 358-2639  
F 703 358-2548

with state agencies, non-governmental organizations, tribes, farmers, ranchers, and forest managers.

We believe that AGO can help increase the number of hunters and anglers in this country. Children today spend half as much time outdoors as children did 20 years ago. This has immediate, adverse health impacts, including increased obesity among children. American youth who hunt and fish are more likely to spend time outdoors getting needed exercise and are more knowledgeable about nature. Young hunters and anglers are likely to grow up supporting federal, state, tribal, and non-governmental conservation efforts. The federal and state land management agencies, as well as the Department of Education, must have adequate and consistent funding to introduce American youth to the responsible pursuit and many benefits of wholesome nature-related physical activities like hunting.

We also recommend that private landowners receive permanent tax incentives for conservation of their land. In particular, we encourage you to support expansion of tax incentives for donations of conservation easements. This will help alleviate habitat fragmentation, sale and loss of family-owned farms, ranches and forests by deferring this tax on lands that provide valuable wildlife habitat and related recreation.

The enormous economic, job-related, public health contributions and outdoor recreational opportunities that the hunting community provides to our citizens should be sustained for the future benefit of all Americans. We recommend that you carefully consider the Native American philosophy of thinking not just about the next generation but about the *seventh generation to come* when providing for the myriad conservation, recreational, and public health benefits of hunting and other conservation-related outdoor activities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Tomke". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

John Tomke  
Chair

Cc: Robert Bonnie (USDA)  
Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council Members