

Signed by Trump

Public Lands Bill Passes U.S. Senate and House

Imagine this, a bill is introduced in the U.S. Senate in early January and by the end of February it has passed both houses of Congress and has been sent to the President for his signature. Were it closer to the end of March I'd be thinking this is nothing more than an April Fool joke. It is not.

S.47, the Natural Resources Management Act had overwhelming bipartisan support, so much so that one member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee noted that this was the largest bipartisan package of public lands bills assembled in over a decade.

There is not much bipartisan anything in Albany or Washington these days, let alone something that doesn't result in the sporting community running for cover.

The Natural Resources Management Act is supported by the Outdoor Alliance, Outdoor Industry Association, The Conservation Alliance, American Sportfishing Association, Land Trust Alliance, National Wildlife Federation, Public Lands Foundation, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, The Nature Conservancy, West Virginia Rivers and dozens more.

With more than 130 bills in the package, it would be all but impossible to unlayer the onion here, but here's the gist of why the Act should be celebrated by every sportsman and woman from every state in the nation. If and when the bill is signed into law it will provide direction to all federal departments and agencies to facilitate the expansion and enhancement of hunting, fishing and recreational shooting opportunities on federal lands.

Another key element of the legislation codifies the "Open Until Closed" policy on federal lands. The "Open Until Closed" management policy will require public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service to be open for hunting, fishing and recreational shooting unless specifically closed for cause.

Ultimately it will protect hunting rights and increase hunting access on millions of acres of public land, similar to the protections which now exist for wildlife refuge lands.

S.47 amends the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937, informally known as the Pittman-Robertson (PR) Act, to allow certain funds to be used for shooting sports facilities. It also reduces the matching funds necessary to qualify for public shooting range development grants from 25 percent to 10 percent. It will also allow the permitting or leasing of public land for shooting and target ranges.

Additionally, it authorizes the transportation of archery equipment through National Park Service lands.

And, it includes the WILD Act, which strengthens wildlife conservation by reauthorizing sportsmen's wildlife conservation programs, assists in the management of invasive species and promotes anti-poaching programs.

For decades, anti-hunting organizations have pressed lawsuits challenging hunting on public land, making it necessary for federal agencies to jump through hoops to open public land to hunting, thus creating a system where one small procedural mistake can serve as a roadblock to hunting. The law will help create roadblocks to those lawsuits.

As I said, the Natural Resources Management Act is far-reaching and it isn't laser- focused on just hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities, it will also:

Add over 367 miles of rivers to the National Wild & Scenic Rivers System

Add over 2,600 miles of new trails to the National Trails System

Designate 694,000 acres of new recreation and conservation areas

Provide over 42,000 acres of new additions to the national park system

Create four new national monuments

Without hunters and anglers, our economy would be a lot smaller. \$76 billion smaller, in fact. That's how much they spend each year on their sporting activities. If a single corporation grossed as much as hunters and anglers spend, it would be among America's 20 largest, ahead of Target, Costco and AT&T. But hunters' and anglers' influence goes even further. They create an economic "ripple effect" of \$192 billion a year. They keep people working: not just in typical hunting and fishing jobs, but also in gas stations, retail, restaurants and hotels and motels throughout every state and congressional district of the USA.

New York Bill Would Ban Hunting Contests, Field Trials

New York City Assemblywoman Deborah Glick has introduced Assembly Bill A722 which would outlaw hunting contests and field trials. The bill has been sent to the Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee where a hearing will be scheduled.

Co-sponsored by a handful of other downstate legislators, the bill would deem it "unlawful for any person to organize, sponsor, conduct, promote, or participate in any contest, competition, tournament or derby where the objective of such contest or competition is to take wildlife."

No "same as" – or companion bill - has been introduced in the New York State Senate.

Current Environmental Conservation Law (ECL) law allows for hunting competitions, such as coyote hunting contests, to take place in the state. A722 would reverse that.

The claim that in animal killing competitions, individuals compete to kill the most animals is not true. It is illegal to conduct such a contest in New York. It is possible to claim a prize for taking the heaviest or largest by measurement. Even at that, you cannot take more than the legal limit as established by the state's Environmental Conservation Law.

That these competitions would be considered cruel by a typical hunter is also not true, as long as they are conducted under fair chase rules. In all, they do not promote the excessive and unnecessary killing of wildlife.

Glick's justification for the Bill reads, "They (hunting contests) are different from the average hunting experience since they are often rigged with animals that cannot escape. In many cases, these competitions are conducted in a party-like atmosphere and are more like slaughters or massacres and are unsportsmanlike." That simply is not true. I know of no such contests, and if I did I certainly would be calling for them to be abolished.

Additionally, AB 722 is so broadly written it will also ban field trials in New York. Hunters depend on quality, well-trained field dogs, and a ban on field trials eliminates the system through which superior genetics, bloodlines and abilities are cultivated and objectively tested. While anti-hunting groups focus their rhetoric on coyote contests, they are also quietly working to ban hunting with dogs.