

Game Changers: The Greatest Conservation Milestones in Hunting and Fishing History

A look at 125 years of conservation victories, starting with *Field & Stream*'s initial pleas for fish and wildlife protections

How important is conservation to *Field & Stream*? Probably the best measure is how many people we have pissed off by taking the stands we have, and how long we have been willing to do it.

In the 1920s, when waterfowlers believed it was their God-given right to shoot every duck and goose they saw, editor Ray Holland had the gall to suggest that we'd better impose some kind of limit on ourselves.

In the 1970s, shooting editor Bob Brister angered a great many people, lots of them in the gun industry, when he argued that it was time to switch to steel shot.

Conservation editor George Reiger was hated by everyone from commercial fishermen to oil companies to James G. Watt, Ronald Reagan's secretary of the interior, but it didn't stop Reiger from writing, or the magazine from publishing what he wrote.

There are some fights that you can't walk away from. —D.E.P.

1895

The first issue of *Field & Stream* is published. From the beginning, the magazine calls for shorter seasons, smaller bag limits, uniform game laws, and a universal excise tax to pay for conservation measures and enforcement.

1900

The Lacey Act prohibits the trade of wildlife taken, possessed, transported, or sold in violation of international or domestic regulations. Over 100 years later, it remains our most potent check on poaching.

1901

- Teddy Roosevelt, 42, is sworn into office following the assassination of William McKinley. *Field & Stream* hails “Our Sportsman President.” Roosevelt appoints Gifford Pinchot as the first director of the new Forest Service. Pinchot popularizes the term conservation.
- John Muir publishes *Our National Parks*, writing: “Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home: that wildness is a necessity.”

1903

By executive order, President Roosevelt creates the country’s first national wildlife refuge, Pelican Island in Florida.

1906

Congress passes the Antiquities Act, which Roosevelt uses to proclaim millions of acres as “national monuments,” including the Grand Canyon and Katmai National Park and Preserve in Alaska.

1909

Roosevelt leaves office having created 51 refuges, five national parks, 18 national monuments, four game preserves, and 150 national forests—totaling 230 million acres.

1910

Field & Stream becomes the official organ of The Camp Fire Club, a sportsman's society whose members included Roosevelt, Zane Grey, and Ernest Thompson Seton. The club spearheads efforts to create Glacier National Park and end the sale of game in New York state.

1913

- Pennsylvania becomes the first state to issue a hunting license.
- The Weeks-McLean Act gives the government authority over the hunting of migratory gamebirds. The first such regulations are adopted.

1916

Woodrow Wilson creates the National Park Service.

1918

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act establishes formal cooperation between the U.S. and Canada for the purpose of protecting waterfowl migrating between the two countries.

1934

The Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act, known as the "Duck Stamp Act," is passed by Congress. First proposed by *Field & Stream* editor Ray P. Holland and the magazine's Conservation Council, the law requires waterfowl hunters to purchase a stamp each year to help fund the protection of waterfowl habitat. Since 1934, 6 million acres have been acquired and more than 300 national wildlife refuges have been created or expanded using Federal Duck Stamp dollars.

1937

- Ducks Unlimited is founded. To date, DU has conserved at least 12.5 million acres of waterfowl habitat in North America.

- Jay Norwood “Ding” Darling, outdoorsman and Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist, creates the General Wildlife Federation. Later called the National Wildlife Federation, it is the nation’s largest grassroots conservation organization.
- Congress passes the Pittman-Robertson Act, a tax on guns, ammunition, and archery equipment that has, to date, raised more than \$12 billion to benefit wildlife and their habitat. The act proved seminal in bringing whitetail deer, wild turkeys, wood ducks, and other game species back from the brink of extinction.

1949

Aldo Leopold publishes *A Sand County Almanac*, which becomes one of the cornerstones of modern conservation. The book still sells about 40,000 copies a year.

1950

The Dingell-Johnson Act authorizes an excise tax on fishing equipment and funnels a portion of license sales to create the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, which has since raised \$30.5 billion to support fisheries management.

1959

Trout Unlimited is founded.

1962

Biologist Rachel Carson publishes *Silent Spring*, which leads to a 1972 ban on the sale of DDT in the U.S.

1964

- The Wilderness Act is signed into law, designating 9.1 million acres as wilderness in 13 states. Today there are over 100 million acres of federally protected wilderness, offering myriad hunting and fishing opportunities.

1970

- First Earth Day.
- President Nixon forms the Environmental Protection Agency to enforce laws that protect the environment and public health.

1972

The Clean Water Act is passed by Congress, placing a limit on the flow of raw sewage into rivers, lakes, and streams.

1973

- The National Wild Turkey Federation is founded.
- The Endangered Species Act is enacted.

1985

The Conservation Reserve Program begins, incentivizing landowners to revert marginal cropland to native grasses, creating millions of acres of habitat for deer, turkeys, ducks, pheasants, and quail.

1989

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act passes. To date, the act has funded more than 3,000 projects totaling \$1.8 billion in grants. More than 6,300 partners have contributed another \$3.67 billion in matching funds.

1995

Wolves are reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park in the U.S.

1996

The Farm Bill includes its first Conservation Title, incentivizing farmers to protect fish and wildlife habitat.

2001

The Roadless Area Conservation Policy is created to conserve the remaining unprotected roadless areas in the National Forest System.

2015

Hunters and anglers spearhead the #keepitpublic social-media campaign to defeat a coordinated push to transfer federal public lands to the states. The final nail comes in 2017 with then-Rep. Jason Chaffetz's withdrawal of H.R. 621, after an overwhelming public outcry.

2018

The Modern Fish Act passes, properly recognizing the economic value of recreational fishing and realigning federal fisheries management accordingly.

2020

The Great American Outdoors Act is signed into law. It permanently funds the Land and Water Conservation Fund at its highest possible amount—\$900 million annually—to improve habitat and access on public lands in every state of the nation.