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Fish and Wildlife Funding—Past and Future [abstract]

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The trend is for increased funding for fish and wildlife agencies, but the primary source of those funds, except for a few exceptions, continues to be from anglers and hunters. In fact, general fund support continues to decrease as a percent of the total except for states such as Missouri and potentially Arkansas, where the voters approved a 1/8 percent sales tax. This financing trend is coming at a time when the public expects a state fish and wildlife agency to have a broad wildlife program that serves the increasing numbers of people who may not be active hunters and anglers. In heavily populated areas, state agencies are increasingly being asked to deal with wildlife that are either causing damage or present a nuisance or danger to people. With this type of future, it is unrealistic and inappropriate to expect that traditional sources of funding will provide either the breadth or quality of fish and wildlife programs the public will expect. Many states are now searching for additional sources of funds. The Teaming with Wildlife Initiative is a major effort to both broaden the funding and permit the states to meet current and future public expectations for fish and wildlife programs by extending the current manufacturer’s level excise tax (user fee) to some additional outdoor recreation products to create a third fund.

Patterned after the highly-successful Pittman-Robertson and Wallop-Breaux programs, the proposal has attracted widespread support from a very large coalition of organizations and businesses that now numbers almost 2,800. The future of fish and wildlife management will be heavily impacted by the outcome of this effort.