

The power of the hunters' dollars



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay



If you like having lots of wildlife around, like these pronghorn, thank a hunter and a fisher. (Photo/Mark Rackay)

Probably the worst kept secret in the world is that your's truly is an avid hunter. When I am not hunting, I am preparing, packing, or at least thinking about hunting. During my tenure in the Florida Keys, I had the same passion for saltwater fishing.

Many people hate me for this. Whenever I post some pictures on social media from a recent safari or trip, I get the barrage of threats, insults, name calling, all coupled with the "endangered wildlife" speech.

I'm sure you have seen the non-hunter side's emotional public relations campaign, brought out to convince good-hearted but uninformed people that the wolf is endangered, and the last polar bear on earth has sailed into the sunset on an iceberg. I venture to say, the only wolf these people have ever seen was on television, social media, or in a zoo.

If healthy wildlife populations are going to continue, we must engage the support of the non-hunting public. People don't realize that without sport hunters, and their dollars spent for licenses, there would be no wildlife.

Between 1890 and 1930, we had just about wiped out the entire populations of deer, elk, moose, and pronghorn, not to mention many other small game species, from North America. It was not sport hunting that did them in, it was commercial hunters and a lack of laws and supervision to protect them.

In 1890, the whitetail deer population in the entire United States was right around 300,000. Thanks to wildlife

management, funded by hunter's dollars, there are some 30 million whitetails in the United States. By the early 1900s, elk numbered less than 100,000 in North America, but today there are around 1 million, with 290,000 in Colorado alone.

If you watch any of the outdoor channels on television, you have probably seen the "Hug a Hunter" and the "Hug an Angler" commercials. They are part of a promotional campaign that started in Colorado and has spread to conservation groups and wildlife agencies across the country.

In the late 1990s, the Colorado State Legislature established the Colorado Wildlife Council, whose primary objective is to educate the general public about the importance of hunting and fishing in relation to habitat conservation and wildlife management.

The Wildlife Council's ongoing media campaign is funded by a 75-cent surcharge on every Colorado hunting and fishing license. The campaign includes radio and television spots, bill-

boards, and advertising in magazines as well as special promotions. Other states, like Michigan, have modeled a similar program.

Hunters and fishers pay for all fishery management, fishery management, and conservation programs in Colorado through Habitat Stamp purchases and license sales. Colorado Parks and Wildlife, CPW, does not receive general tax dollars, and is almost entirely financed by outdoor people.

Those dollars allow CPW to manage 18 different fish hatcheries that raise some 35 species of cold and warm-water fish. Using a fleet of 80 specially designed trucks, CPW stocks around 90 million fish annually into Colorado waters. Using a fleet of 4 Cessna aircraft, CPW stocks 350,000 trout annually into more than 500 backcountry lakes. None of this could happen without fishers and hunters.

Approximately 300,000 resident hunters in Colorado purchase over 350,000 Big Game hunting licenses. Total hunting and fishing li-

licenses in Colorado raise around 96 million dollars annually for the wildlife resources. These funds allow CPW to manage 23 million acres for hunting.

The Colorado Wildlife Council says hunting is an 843-million-dollar industry in Colorado. Fishers and hunters contribute 3.25 billion dollars and 25,000 jobs to the state economy.

Colorado is not the only state contributing to wildlife management. Over 800 million dollars are spent on fishing licenses nationwide annually. There are over 34 million resident hunting licenses sold in the US annually, raising some 1.8 billion dollars for wildlife.

Two states have numbers for hunter that really stand out, one being Wisconsin, which has 680,000 hunters that pay 40 million in license fees. The other state in South Dakota, which has 24% of their residents purchasing a hunting license each year, raising over 20 million dollars annually.

Speaking of dollars, everyone loves those wildlife refuges, and there are over 50 of them in the U.S. that are over 1,000

acres and funded at least 95% by hunter dollars. Places like the Horicon Marsh in Wisconsin, or the Tulare Basin in California would not exist without hunting.

Wildlife in Colorado would not exist without hunters and fishers, and their dollars spent on licenses. There would be very little public land to access, short of National Parks, and even then, there would be no wildlife to speak of. Without CPW to manage the game populations, control poaching and the illegal killing, poisoning, and trapping of game, there would be no protector of the wildlife. The same can be said nationwide.

Perhaps, as hunters and fishers, we need to do a better job at educating the non-hunting, anti-crowd, and help them to understand that without us, there would be no wildlife to protect.

Ask Kenya. They once had the best population of African game, and it was hunted by sport hunters, paying big money for tags. The money was funding the officers to enforce anti-poaching laws. The government

shut down all hunting, and the poachers ran amuck, with no law enforcement to stop them. Now, wildlife only exists in a few National reserves in Kenya, as the wild population is all gone.

Encourage them to visit Hugahunter.com and see what the dollars sports people pay have done for Colorado. Once they understand everything hunters and anglers do for our state, they may want to give us a hug. I would settle for them to stop the hate and just say "thanks."

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for several saltwater fishing magazines. He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world in search of adventure and serves as a Director and Public Information Officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. Personal email is elkhunter77@icloud.com For information about the Posse call 970-765-7033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

BLACK CANYON

FROM PAGE B1

"Businesses are going to work together to share this information via a branded campaign," Wingfield explained, and DART is still working out exactly how that

is going to look.

Part of the initiative includes a web page with information about other local attractions, as well as ways people can still experience the Black Canyon. For example, it provides information on local stores like Colorado-ology where people can get park merchandise, as

well as information on parts of the canyon like the North Rim, Mesa Creek Trail and Morrow Point Dam that are still accessible.

But, the campaign isn't just geared toward tourists. LeViness stressed that while he believes the initial panic is over, tourism season is still a big

deal for many Montrose businesses, and it's extra important to support them at times like this.

Some, including Ed's, are also helping raise money for canyon reconstruction efforts through special promotions and products.

"Keep the money in the

community," he said. "This town is built on small businesses."

"We know how important the Black Canyon is to the local economy, not just for us, but for Montrose as a whole," Johnson added. "And we're hopeful that as the park recovers, we'll all bounce back stronger."

the rain stops here.

GREAT OUTDOORS Company

10 SOUTH SELIG AVE MONTROSE, COLORADO 81401 970-249-4226

Marmot