



To: Chairman John L. Morris  
Chairman Dave Freudenthal

Date: July 10, 2015

From: Don McKenzie, Director, National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative

Cc: Bob Duncan, Chair, NBCI Management Board  
Nick Wiley, Vice Chair, NBCI Management Board

Subject: Recommendation to the Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources: For a national upland game bird hunting and conservation stamp

The National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative (NBCI) is pleased to have this opportunity to suggest to the Blue Ribbon Panel a national funding opportunity that would greatly enhance the states' ability to improve management of upland game birds, while addressing a glaring shortcoming in the current wildlife conservation funding picture in the US. Most of the nation's upland game birds—including the northern bobwhite—are experiencing significant long-term, range-wide population declines and range contractions, due overwhelmingly to landscape-scale loss and degradation of habitats. As the Panel is fully aware, the states' abilities to tackle these declining habitats and populations, and stem the concurrently diminishing hunting opportunities, are severely limited by funding constraints.

The NBCI recommends the establishment of a **national upland game bird hunting and conservation stamp**, modeled after the very successful Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp.

The NBCI does not presume to have answers for the many detail questions about how to effectively develop and implement for such a mechanism. However, we believe that (1) because most upland game birds are resident species under state management authority, the revenues generated by a national upland game bird stamp should be allocated to the state fish and wildlife agencies, such as through the federal Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program; and (2) such revenues must be securely dedicated to upland game bird conservation.

With such a new source of funding, coupled with conservation funding from the Farm Bill, partnerships and other sources, state wildlife agencies could act more effectively to avert such foreseeable problems as have occurred with other declining game bird species like lesser prairie-chicken and greater sage-grouse. The sage-grouse and lesser prairie-chicken initiatives have become two excellent examples of state and federal agencies and non-government organizations finally coming together with resources and a plan to improve habitat conditions for a singular species at a landscape scale for the benefit of multiple species and landowners. The problem is that the catalyst behind these two initiatives is fear, from the threat of listing under the Endangered Species Act and subsequent federal intervention. A similar threat cannot be dismissed in the future for some other upland game birds like the bobwhite, if vigorous and determined proactive conservation efforts are not undertaken by the states on a widespread basis.

To the states' credit, strategies for the conservation of many species of upland game birds already have been proactively developed by the states; for example, the NBCI, the North American Grouse Management Plan, the National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan, the Western Quail Management Plan and others. The missing element to implement these upland game bird conservation strategies is a dedicated financial commitment and investment from the bird-hunting and conservation community to provide the necessary resources that the states require. The NBCI believes now is the ideal time to take the next big, logical step to provide enhanced, dedicated funding to implement the conservation actions in these plans to help prevent any future "listing anxiety."

Waterfowl hunters recognized many decades ago that they needed to do their part to restore and retain duck and goose populations to levels that could sustain abundant populations and maintain annual recreational harvests. Duck and goose hunters consider it a normal cost of doing business to purchase a state hunting license, a federal duck stamp and a state duck stamp every year, all of the revenues from which go to wetland habitat conservation. Thus, duck hunters are providing admirable leadership by standing tall to support and enable conservation of their resources.

Upland game bird hunters, in contrast, are far behind in accepting the conservation responsibility demonstrated by duck hunters. For example, in the state of Arkansas, a resident can hunt quail for a full season merely by purchasing a \$10.50 resident wildlife conservation license. But for Arkansas residents to hunt ducks in 2015 will require that same \$10.50 state license, plus a \$7.00 resident state waterfowl stamp, plus a \$25.00 federal duck stamp, for a total of \$42.50. Thus, resident waterfowl hunters in Arkansas invest 4 times as much (\$10.50 vs. \$42.50) in resource conservation as quail hunters, every year, with the difference being dedicated to wetland habitat conservation. In the NBCI's view, the disparity between the level of investment that duck hunters make in conservation of their resources, versus the level of investment that upland game bird hunters make in conservation of their resources is no longer defensible.

As a basis for discussion, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-associated Recreation estimates as many as 6,000,000 hunters of resident upland game birds in this country. A national upland game bird stamp of at least \$5 to \$10 could generate at least \$30 million to \$60 million per year to help states improve conservation for these important species.

The NBCI contends it is now time for bobwhite and other upland game bird hunters to stand as tall as duck hunters, to make committed, dedicated investment in the conservation of their preferred wildlife species. We understand that such a sensitive and complex endeavor would take time and broad consultation with all stakeholders, to carefully develop an effective and acceptable mechanism. The first preliminary discussions among the states about the possibility of such a national stamp already have begun within the Resident Game Bird Working Group of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Bird Conservation Committee. The NBCI stands ready to participate actively with AFWA, the states and all other stakeholders to support such a process as is necessary to advance this funding concept.

The NBCI thanks the Panel for your efforts to improve the state of fish and wildlife conservation, and for your consideration of our suggestion for an upland game bird hunting and conservation stamp dedicated to conservation and restoration of the suite of treasured upland game birds.