The Importance of Managing Wildlife Populations. Wildlife conservation requires adding, removing, and relocating animals, in addition to providing habitat. This adjusts population sizes and densities according to available habitat, social tolerance, and goals for recreational and subsistence hunting. Successful management for popular game animals such as elk, deer, wolves, bear, grouse, and turkeys has made them numerous today. These species were depleted in the 19th century and then restored beginning in the 1890s through the cooperative efforts of hunters, private landowners, state fish and wildlife agencies, and the federal government. Today, wildlife conservation and management, with the exception of migratory birds and endangered species, where the USFWS and state fish and wildlife agencies have concurrent jurisdiction, are principally governed by state authority, including wildlife living on most federal lands.

Hunters still work closely with agencies in the shared mission of conservation to ensure that wildlife flourishes and remains accessible for generations. Hunters support state efforts financially through state license, stamp and permit fees and by contributing to state research and conservation programs. They also pay into federal programs—most importantly, the Wildlife Restoration Fund, which distributes revenue from a federal excise tax on sporting equipment and ammunition for wildlife management, habitat restoration, hunter safety programs and affiliated shooting ranges. The federal Duck Stamp program also channels sportsmen and sportswomen's dollars to wetlands conservation on National Wildlife Refuges. State and federal revenues work together, as state hunting revenues are used to match federal excise tax funds, both of which are protected by federal law from diversion to purposes other than conservation.

The continued success of private-state-federal collaboration requires several actions:

- **Align federal habitat management with state wildlife population management.** What federal agencies do with habitat on public lands is essential to what state managers are doing with populations using the habitat. For example, habitat for elk on federal forest land has degraded over the same period that expanding wolf packs have pressured elk populations. Success for the forests, elk, and wolves requires concerted, cooperative state and federal decisions. Similarly, grouse and wild turkey habitat has declined in mid-western forests and other federal habitats throughout the country. Requirements for better federal-state cooperation will likely take a combination of new and existing policy and formal agreements.

- **Enforce respect for state authority in hunting seasons, means, and methods.** The states’ responsibility to manage wildlife populations is carried
out largely through scientifically regulated hunting and trapping. However, some federal agencies are now ignoring these state obligations by limiting the state’s ability to establish seasons, bag limits, and regulate methods of take. For example, recently in Alaska, federal land managers are issuing regulations that undermine state management authority for bears, wolves, and other predators on public lands. This disrupts the state’s program for these species and the moose, caribou, elk, deer, and other prey on public lands. Clauses in federal law requiring federal and state cooperation and collaboration are disrespected or only partially heeded. Reversing this disturbing trend will take a combination of legislation and agency policy.

Open federal lands to state agencies for official wildlife management work. State managers need access to wildlife populations living on public lands for population monitoring or for conducting other professional tasks such as employing the use of telemetry. This access for species management has proven difficult, especially to Wilderness Areas and military withdrawal areas when the management work requires mechanical equipment prohibited by the Wilderness Act, or critical timing that must be coordinated with military training schedules. Surmounting these problems should be feasible with new or existing law and formal agreements facilitating cooperation between state and federal agencies.

Engage Congress to update the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This landmark law was last amended in 1988. Gridlock preventing updates to ESA are putting the law’s admirable principles at risk. Many of the problems concern the listing and delisting of threatened and endangered species. For example, removing a species from the list is difficult even after recovery goals have been met. A species can also be added to the list even when science demonstrates that greater conservation can be achieved by keeping it off the list. The Act leaves no discretion to the Secretary to fix these problems. As a result, the ESA has fallen into a state of near constant litigation. Arguments over words enacted in 1988 or earlier, rather than decisions based on modern science and current experience, are now driving federal ESA decision-making by the federal courts. The ESA needs to be modernized and refocused on restoring and delisting species. The clearest starting point is in the listing and delisting decisions. Species considered for listing should be chosen based on science-based priorities with great deference to state fish and wildlife agency population data. Delisting should be justified by meeting recovery population and habitat goals. More money should go to the recovery of species so that ultimately delisting better balances with new listings. More of the significant role Congress intended for state fish and wildlife agencies should be realized. These improvements can be achieved only by revision of the law.