

POSITION OF THE WILD SHEEP FOUNDATION

Title: State Constitutional Right to Hunt and Fish
Submitted by: WSF Communications Approved by: Board of Directors
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Overview

Hunting and fishing are deeply rooted in America's history, individual liberties, and conservation legacy. Prior to European settlement in the New World, access to these activities was often restricted to royalty and the privileged. As the American colonies established their independence, early state constitutions began recognizing hunting and fishing as important individual rights while retaining the authority to regulate wildlife harvest. Pennsylvania's Constitution of 1776 and Vermont's Constitution of 1777 codified hunting and fishing as rights of citizenship, establishing a tradition that continues today.

Currently, 24 states have adopted constitutional amendments recognizing the right to hunt and fish, affirming their importance as individual rights, enduring American traditions, and essential components of wildlife conservation.

Regulated hunting and fishing are foundational to the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, which recognizes wildlife as a public trust resource managed by expert agencies for present and future generations. Hunters and anglers have helped build and sustain this system through license fees, excise taxes, advocacy, field observations, and direct contributions to conservation. Conservation organizations, sportsmen's clubs, and private individuals further support habitat protection and conservation, wildlife research, population management, and species restoration.

In recent decades, hunting, fishing, and proven wildlife management practices have faced increasing challenges from ballot initiatives, legislation, and litigation that seek to restrict or eliminate certain activities and methods of take. These developments underscore the importance of protecting hunting and fishing while preserving the authority of wildlife agencies to manage wildlife in the public interest.

State constitutional protections safeguard individual rights and longstanding traditions in accordance with science-based wildlife management. They do not eliminate hunting seasons, bag limits, licensing requirements, or other appropriate regulations, nor do they diminish private property rights or trespass laws.

As a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to wild sheep and their habitats, the Wild Sheep Foundation (WSF) recognizes that successful conservation that produces healthy wildlife populations and habitats requires effective management and sustained public participation.

Protecting the right to hunt and fish preserves the conservation funding, public support, and stewardship ethic essential to North America's conservation legacy.

Position

The Wild Sheep Foundation's mission is to *“enhance wild sheep populations and their habitats, promote scientific wildlife management, and educate the public and youth on sustainable use and the conservation benefits of hunting while promoting the interests of the hunter.”*

Consistent with this mission, WSF strongly supports state constitutional protections recognizing the individual right to hunt and fish through regulated, science-based wildlife management. WSF views these protections as an important safeguard for America's hunting and fishing heritage and a way to sustain the public participation, conservation funding, and habitat stewardship essential for healthy, sustainable wildlife populations.

Hunting and fishing are more than recreational pursuits or historical traditions. When responsibly regulated and scientifically managed, they are integral to North America's wildlife conservation system. Protecting these activities helps sustain a proven conservation model that has restored wildlife populations, protected habitat, and delivered lasting public benefits.

WSF believes constitutional protections serve three fundamental purposes:

1. **Protecting individual liberty** by affirming the right to participate in hunting and fishing, subject to appropriate regulations and applicable law.
2. **Preserving America's heritage** by ensuring future generations can continue these traditions, including harvesting wild game for food.
3. **Sustaining wildlife conservation** by protecting public participation in activities that provide essential funding, support habitat conservation, and contribute to responsible wildlife management.

Accordingly, WSF supports recognizing hunting and fishing, including traditional methods of take, as preferred and important tools for wildlife population management and conservation when consistent with the best available science and established management objectives.

State wildlife agencies must retain the authority to establish seasons, methods of take, harvest limits, licensing requirements, and other scientifically justified regulations necessary to sustain wildlife populations and address changing conservation needs. State constitutions ensure these decisions are guided by qualified wildlife professionals.

The principles of individual liberty and responsible stewardship remain as relevant today as they were when America was founded. Protecting the right to hunt and fish helps ensure future generations can participate in and contribute to the conservation of our shared natural resources.

The Wild Sheep Foundation supports state constitutional protections for the right to hunt and fish as an investment in America's conservation future. By safeguarding hunters' and anglers' participation while upholding science-based management and the authority of qualified wildlife professionals, we ensure healthy wildlife populations, intact habitats, and a healthy environment, which strengthens North America's conservation legacy.