**Unlocking Public Lands**

According to the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP), this year’s pheasant brood survey shows a 47 percent increase over last year. The 2018 statewide pheasants-per-mile (PPM) index is 2.47, up from the 2017 index of 1.68.

“A substantial increase in the pheasants-per-mile index is an exciting prospect for South Dakota’s 100th pheasant hunting season this fall,” stated Kelly Hepler, GFP Secretary. “Weather conditions continue to play a significant role when it comes to bird numbers and better weather helped this year with the average pheasant brood size increasing 22 percent over last year.”

From late July through mid-August, GFP surveyed 110, thirty-mile routes across the state’s pheasant range to estimate pheasant production and calculate the PPM index. The survey is not a population estimate, but rather compares the number of pheasants observed on the routes and establishes trend information. Statewide, 85 of the 110 survey routes had a higher PPM than 2017.

“We are pleased to see pheasant numbers improve across the state; particularly in the far eastern part of the state where hunters will have more opportunities to harvest birds than in recent years,” stated Hepler. “The full report provides an overview of upland habitat; which remains a concern for all wildlife across the state. Just as changes in landscape-level habitat conditions have produced peaks and valleys in the pheasant population for 100 years, habitat will again be the key to preserving pheasant hunting for another century.”

The Walk-in Area (WIA) program added 39,000 new acres in addition to 8,000 new acres last year. With 1.1 million acres of public hunting land within the heart of South Dakota’s pheasant range, great opportunities remain for public access to pheasant hunting. Hepler said hunters should notice far fewer disturbed CRP fields compared to last year when emergency haying and grazing was authorized in response to severe drought conditions.

The annual hunting atlas and a web-based interactive map of public lands and private lands leased for public hunting can be found at https://gfp.sd.gov/hunting-areas/. In addition to printed and interactive maps, hunters can utilize GPS downloads and smartphone applications to locate public hunting lands throughout the state. Hunters are again asked to hunt safely and ethically, respect private landowners and those public hunting areas scattered across the state.

“Challenges exist to maintain habitat, desirable pheasant population levels, and to recruit a new generation of hunters to preserve this truly special sport of pheasant hunting. Take this fall to celebrate the hunt, the sense of community and camaraderie while appreciating how deeply rooted the tradition of pheasant hunting has been for the last 100 years,” concluded Hepler.

South Dakota’s traditional statewide pheasant hunting season opens on Saturday, Oct. 20, 2018, and runs through Jan. 6, 2019.

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**South Dakota Sportsman Face an Important Vote on The Next Governor**

To the right, to the right, to the right... To the left, to the left, to the left...

No, I’m not talking about the Cupid Shuffle that seems to be getting played at every wedding reception dance. I’m talking about the divisive nature of today’s politics. One where the political ideology has changed from working together in a bi-partisan manner, to one in which we seem to see how far left or right we can shuffle. While South Dakota has seen its fair share of political grandstanding and rhetoric, South Dakotans for the most part can still sit around a table and discuss important issues without resorting to some of the nastiness that seems to plague national politics.

This fall South Dakotans will go to the polls to vote for a new governor. This gubernatorial race is of concern to those who have an interest in conservation, wildlife and sportsmen/women related issues. This year, we will see a west river rancher, former professional bronc rider, and South Dakota Senate Minority Leader, Billy Sutton (D) take on east river farmer/rancher, former state legislator, and current U.S. House of Representative, Kriti Noem (R).

While there is much to debate the question always remains, which candidate will support those issues that more closely align with our own ideals. Over the course of the summer, we reached out to the 2018 Gubernatorial Candidates (including candidates prior to the Primary) to see where they stand on several issues. We presented each candidate with sixteen questions ranging from conservation to wildlife to other outdoor sportsmen/women related issues.

Below is the conversation with each candidate and how they view those issue important to South Dakota sportsmen & women. When you head to the polls in November, this should give you an insight into how each candidate views the issues.
The Land and Water Conservation Fund has helped secure the United States' wildlife heritage since 1964 by supporting South Dakota's anglers, hunters and outdoor recreation. According to a new report today from the National Wildlife Federation, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, however, is at risk of expiring unless Congress acts by the end of September to reauthorize and fully fund this critical conservation program.

According to the report, two football fields’ worth of natural areas in the West have been disappearing every five minutes. The Land and Water Conservation Fund helps solve this problem by securing and protecting land for Americans to go fishing, hunting, camping, fishing, hiking, and simply enjoying being in nature. These public spaces are then available for people to hike, camp, hunt, fish and enjoy being in nature.

“As America’s population grows, we need to grow our protected places and parks with it. The Land and Water Conservation Fund has been critical to securing the special places that hunters, anglers, and others count on to recreate and safeguard our wildlife heritage for future generations. This report vividly highlights how this is all at stake unless Congress acts within the next two months,” said Joe Stone-Manning, associate president for public lands at the National Wildlife Federation. “The Land and Water Conservation Fund doesn’t cost taxpayers a dime — it’s paid for by fees that are collected on offshore energy development. It should be a no-brainer for Congress to reauthorize and fully fund this amazing program so that all of its constituents will continue to benefit from it.”

Renowned sportsman Hall Herring imagined the loss Americans would experience as a future without the Land and Water Conservation Fund: “The end of the LWCF will be the end of an era in the U.S., an era in which the common citizens have come to expect a higher quality of life, clean air and water, open spaces for recreation, and plentiful wildlife for swimming, open spaces for running and playing with their children, the ability to hold on to traditions like hunting and fishing, hiking, wandering and camping, experiencing the true freedom of our birthright as Americans.”

The new report outlines the projects that The Land and Water Conservation Fund has invested in that benefit sportsmen and wildlife by increasing access to hunting and fishing grounds and connects wildlife migration corridors so there are more continuous wilderness areas across America. The Land and Water Conservation Fund utilizes fees on oil and gas revenues from the outer continental shelf and has zero cost to taxpayers.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund has funded dozens of projects throughout South Dakota including:

- Lake Herman State Park
- Custer State Park
- Bear Butte Campground

“Since 1964, the Land and Water Conservation Fund has helped make sure hunters and anglers have places to get outdoors and enjoy the sports they love,” the report reads. “In all 50 states, LWCF is supporting wildlife, protecting habitat, and ensuring public access for sportmen and women. It’s time for Congress to step up and reauthorize and fully fund this amazing resource that benefits us all. The future of our beloved hunting and fishing heritage depends on their action.”

Call your Congress People today and ask them to support this important Legislation.

SDWF and SDWF-Camo Coalition recently drew the winners of their recent raffles and fundraisers. I want to THANK ALL of YOU for your financial support you give so generously to SDWF and SDWF-Camo.

Kent Roe, SD was the lucky person drawn for the SDWF-Camo Ultimate Hunt Package, Kent is shown with his winning gun. George Lesser, SD won the bonus shotgun in the drawing also.

SDWF also drew for the Pheasant hunt and the 2018 Buffalo Shoot winners;

Jim Jackson of Arkansas won the Pheasant hunt.
Scottie Hojer, SD won the Buffalo Shoot for 2018. THANK YOU!
President’s Column  by Mark Widman

My favorite time of the year is now upon us and if you’re like me… it’s your favorite time of the year as well. I’ve been waiting for what seems an eternity since I enjoyed my last outdoor adventure (Spring Turkey Hunt in the Black Hills). I’ve imagined walking along the breaks of the Missouri River hunting Sharp tail Grouse and Prairie Chickens in early October. I’ve eagerly anticipated see my GSP “Charlie” go on point whether we’re hunting pheasants along the fence rows, near shelterbelts, in cattails or on public grounds. I’m also ecstatic about going Mule Deer hunting West River after a two year hiatus. That was a long two years! The best part of hunting is spending time with my brother Rich and my friends (Jeremy, Jason and Matt) when they have time. We’ve shared a lot of memories over the years and always bring up the embarrassing ones when we get together. Hunting and fishing is about making memories and that is what keeps me here in South Dakota. I am thankful that I was born and raised in South Dakota and have relatives that own land and have given us permission to hunt. I am also thankful for the public lands we have in South Dakota, which allows us more hunting and fishing opportunities. However, we have seen massive loss of habitat in grasslands and shelterbelts in this state due to farming practices. We’ve seen more nitrate contamination of our lakes and streams due to drain tiling, loss of wetlands and a lack of buffer strips. SDWF supported the bill two sessions ago to incentivize landowners to install buffer strips and we continue to fight for strong provisions in the Farm Bill to do the same. One organization, based in Sioux Falls has been working with rural and urban residents for several years to implement buffer strips along the Big Sioux River. They are the “Friends of the Big Sioux River” (a 501c3 non-profit) and they have made REAL progress. Buffer strips do make a difference! To find out more about this organization and the progress they have made; go to: www.friendsofthebigsiouxriver.org

We held our 73rd convention in Murdo the weekend of August 24th. The Jones County Sportsman’s Club really stepped up and made the weekend a success. I’d like to congratulate my brother Rich for being awarded the 2018 SDWF Conservationist of the Year for all of his efforts to fight for our hunting and fishing heritage. Rich has more of an “I don’t care what they think of me” attitude, which allows him to fight for what he believes. He believes right is right and wrong is wrong and doesn’t like it when politics gets in the way. Too many times, politics prevents our allowances to take our resources to become easier and easier and science gets set aside. Remember that quote about history being bound to repeat itself? I am proud of Rich, but he’s not the only one that has worked hard to fight to protect our hunting and fishing heritage over the years. There are several others within our organization that do the same. You’ll see their names in this addition of the Out of Doors. If you get a chance, send them a note and thank them for the time they put in. With that being said, the work seems to be falling on fewer and fewer people. We need more people and younger people to step up and give more than just their opinion on social media. It does take time away from your family and it does take money to fight the fight, but we are the only statewide wildlife conservation organization actively advocating for your hunting and fishing rights at the Capitol in Pierre.

We were happy to have SDGF&P Commissioner Gary Jensen attend our convention, in addition to Sec. Kelly Hepler, Director of Wildlife Division, Tony Leif and Special Projects Coordinator, Kevin Robling. We expressed our frustration with the commission and their failure to vote against the “Reetz Lake” proposal and what seems to be other proposals when the comments were so significantly against. What good is sending in comments when they are dismissed? Commissioner Jensen explained that they have to consider many things about each proposal, not just comments. At the end of the discussion, there was an idea put forth for the commission to publish their decisions to help the public understand their thinking. I hope that idea becomes reality, because it doesn’t seem like they are working in the best interest of the sportsman/woman.

We also participated in a presentation from G,F&P on the new Deer Allocation Proposal. It was a very in depth presentation and it looks as though more deer hunters would have success at obtaining a license over the current system we have in place. I see there is growing opposition to this proposal on Facebook, but I think it’s because many people don’t fully understand it. One thing is for certain… change is hard even when the intentions of the proposal are to have a higher number of successful applicants.

In this edition of the Out of Doors, our board of director’s spotlight is on Mr. Joe Long. Joe lives in Aberdeen. He’s a member of the Brown County Sportsman’s Club and has been on the SDWF board for a little over two years now. He’s been a great addition to our board of directors and I can see Joe leading our organization in the near future.

Remember to support the SDWF and SDWF Camo when those raffle tickets arrive in the mail. We offer some great prizes and it helps our organization to continue to fight for our outdoor hunting and fishing heritage. Last, but not least, when you are enjoying the great outdoors this Fall, remember to PICK UP THE LITTER, be respectful and keep the places we hold near and dear clean!

To help keep our operational costs down, you can sign up to receive the “Out of Doors” by email. Just go to our website and click on “Sign Up” located under the box titled “Out of Doors” on our homepage. www.sdwf.org

*** If you haven’t received the Out of Doors newsletter in the mail, PLEASE LET US KNOW. Contact Chris Hesla: sdwf@mncomm.com

Variety of Game Meat Again Donated

Thanks to the interest and effort of many sportswomen and sportsmen, a variety of game meat was again donated in fall of 2017 through South Dakota Sportsmen Against Hunters (SDSAH) to families in need across the State. In addition to these hunters the success of this game donation program was made possible by participating game processors and by public food pantries associated with Feeding South Dakota.

Expansion of the SDSAH game donation program over the years to provide this variety of game meat is greatly appreciated by the food pantries since they are better able to meet the requests of needy families. The variety of game donated this past year included 614 deer, 21 antelope, 16 elk, 1,739 pheasants, 1,918 Canada geese, and 152 walleyes. This, plus game meat donated through SDSAH food drives, resulted in 34,015 pounds of game meat delivered to food pantries either directly or through Feeding South Dakota food banks for distribution to families in need.

Over 200 hunters took advantage of the SDSAH Processing Certificate Program to pay for processing of donated antlerless deer. Also, over 100 hunters used the SDSAH processing certificates available from participating SDSAH processors to pay processing costs of donated Canada geese. Funds used in backing processing certificates came from nearly 14,000 hunters who made cash donations through the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks (SDGF&P) hunting license application check-off system. Hunters are encouraged to continue using the SDGF&P application check-off cash donation system and the SDSAH Processing Certificate Program.

For more information on South Dakota Sportsmen Against Hunger go to website www.feedtheneedsd.com.
Where do you live? Where did you grow up?
I have lived in Aberdeen, SD for 29 year now but grew up in “Big Sky Country” in the little of town of Fort Peck, MT, which is home to the 1st dam on the Missouri river. Maybe you’ve heard of it? It follows Sakakawea & Oahe as the 5th largest reservoir in the US but is the largest “hydraulically filled” dam in the US. As part of President Roosevelt’s “New Deal” plan to put people back to work after the great depression, its construction started in 1933 and was finished in 1940. The dam is 4 miles long. It is the tallest of the 6 dams on the Missouri. The reservoir is so big that there are places where you can’t see land on the other side of the lake. Its home to some huge walleyes too. Although very large, it’s a very unpopulated area. It’s not unusual to fish all day and only see a couple other boats.

I went to HS 20 miles away in Glasgow and graduated from Montana State University in 1985 with a BS in Mech. Engineering. That degree allowed me to land my first job with a defense firm in MD, just N. of Washington DC. In 1989 I moved to Aberdeen, where that same missile system is manufactured. How long have you been a member of SDWF and BOD?
I joined the Sportsman’s Club of Brown County (SCBC) in 2009 as the Secretary, which automatically made me an affiliate member of the SDWF. After writing a few letters to legislators I learned I could help even more by becoming a board member. I was elected as a vice-president in 2016. Why are you a member of the SDWF?
I am a member of the SDWF because I care about wildlife, conservation and the preservation of our rights and good ol’ “Mother Earth”! I want future generations to be able to enjoy the same hunting & fishing opportunities that I have had.

How is SDWF different than other Wildlife Conservation Groups?
I don’t know exactly how SDWF differs from other wildlife conservation groups. What I do know and am proud to be a part of is that the SDWF has an affiliate group called CAMO coalition, whose mission is to fight and lobby against the constant barrage of legislation to commercialize, privatize and otherwise limit outdoorsman’s rights. On their web site you can see all the bills affecting hunting, fishing and natural resources. It provides an easy link to be able to e-mail your legislators. I urge you take the time to visit the web site and take a few minutes to write them about an issue you feel strongly about. They almost always will respond to you!

Why is protecting our outdoor heritage important to you?
In fact, as hunters and fisherman, writing your legislators is one of the easiest things you can do to protect our SD heritage. I’m disappointed to say it, but I see less and less hunters/fisherman who are willing to take just a few minutes of their time to stand up for their rights. We have the numbers to influence our govt. but everyone needs to do their part. Standing on the sidelines has allowed others to make gains on commercializing & privatizing our public lands/ waters and natural resources, including our wild game & fish.

What favorite memories of the outdoors helped shape you into stepping up to protect our outdoor heritage?
My most favorite hunting memory is when I shot my first whitetail at the age of 12, at the TV towers just E. of the spillway outside Ft. Peck, MT. It still ranks as the largest bodied, biggest antlered buck that I have taken in my 43 years of hunting! It weighed over 250#. I remember that when the hocks were hoisted to the rafters in our garage, the horns laid sideways on the floor! What’s most memorable was that on the way to this public hunting area, Dad hit a washout with the van. The gun sights got knocked off and Dad spent all my shells except (2) sighting it back in. In after, I told Dad I didn’t want to go hunting with just (2) shells left. He told me to get out of the van, which I did. He locked the doors and said, “You don’t have to hunt. You can sit here all day”. After watching my Dad and Brother walk off in one direction, I reluctantly slug the gun on my back and trudged down off the ridge, muttering. It wasn’t 5 minutes later that I heard my brother (The “rifleman”) empty his .30-30 lever action, then I saw the huge buck running towards me. I knelt to my knee and took that 50 yd. broadside shot at him running full throttle. He fell but immediately got back up and was almost at full speed again when I fired again. He fell again, got back up and disappeared over the hill. Remembering what my Dad had taught me, I just waited a few minutes, hoping they would come find me. After about 10 more minutes, they both appeared. We walked over the hill and there he was all piled up. We later determined that it was not the 2nd shot to the neck with my trusty .243, but the 1st shot to the liver that was his fate.

What are some key issues that outdoors people need to be aware of?
If I were to have to pick the most significant issue that everyone should be aware of is the threat to limit your access & use of public water (HB1001) that was passed last year. In just 1 legislative session, 150 years of water law precedence has been removed. It now allows landowners to close off non-meandered lakes (public water) to public use.

Bill Antonides (C) is honored as SDWF Communicator Conservationist of the Year for 2018. Joe Long (L) member of Brown CO Sportsmen and SDWF President Mark Widman (R) presenting the award to Bill.

Mike McKerrnan (L) SDWF Conservation Camp Director who is re-tiring as Director, past SDWF President. Mike was honored with a new 9mm pistol and recognized for his years as Camp Director and appreciation, from the 1000’s of young adults Mike has met and influenced over the years. Thank You Mike!

Bob Bucholz (C) Is honored as SDWF Wildlife Conservationist of the Year for 2018. Bill Antonides (L) member of Brown Co. Sportsmen and SDWF President Mark Widman (R) presenting the award to Bob.

Sen. Jim White (C) is honored as Conservationist Legislator of the Year for 2018. SDWF President Mark Widman (L) and Beadle Co. Sportsman President Dave Eichstad (R) presenting the award to Sen. White.

Rich Widman (C) is honored as SDWF Conservationist of the Year for 2018. SDWF President Mark Widman (L) and President of Brookings Wildlife Federation Spencer Va (R) presenting the award to Rich.

Angie Knisley (C) is honored as SDWF Youth Conservationist of the Year for 2018. Mike Mckerman (L) member of Jones Co. Sportsmen Club and SDWF President Mark Widman (R) presenting the award to Angie.
While there are a lot of things that GF&P does right, there are areas for improvement as well. As with many areas of state government, South Dakotans have called for greater accountability and transparency within the agency. I want to bring GF&P debates from the boardroom to the living room. Too many important decisions are made in small meeting rooms with limited public access. Using free technologies like YouTube and Facebook Live, I will work to bring these meetings into every home.

Additionally, I want to modernize and expand open.SD.gov, working with the state legislature to encourage the universal posting of all agendas, minutes, and livestreams to a modernized and easily searchable Open.SD.gov.

2. What changes would you make to the Strategic Plan or are there certain priorities that you would encourage to be brought forth.

Senator Billie Sutton - Candidate Response:

One of the priorities of the Strategic Plan is to inspire confidence in the people GF&P serves by increasing transparency and accountability throughout the agency. Transparency is a priority, not only for GF&P, but government-wide that I plan to focus on in my administration.

For GF&P, this goes back to getting public input, implementing plans according to recommendations or explaining deviations, and increasing accountability by improving internal communication and management practices. It’s important that the Agency is accountable and follows through on their promises, and I’ll work with the Agency to ensure that the plans put in place are implemented and evaluated regularly.

Senator Kristi Noem - Candidate Response:

We need to prioritize the next generation of hunters and fishers. I grew up in a hunting family. My dad took us big-game hunting, and my Grandma Dorris made bird hunting a huge part of our family heritage. They both inspired me in a love of the outdoors and an appreciation for conservation efforts. I want to use my role as governor to inspire the next generation as well, serving as the state’s “Sportsman in Chief.” Moreover, I will resist attempts to limit hunting opportunities for the next generation, including efforts at the federal level to limit our 2nd Amendment Rights.

Game Commission:

Acting within its legislative mandates, the GF&P Game Commission serves as the advocate and liaison between the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks and its stakeholders - the people of South Dakota. As our next Governor, you will be tasked with appointing members of this committee to 4-year terms.

3. What are the qualities you will look for when appointing members.

Senator Billie Sutton - Candidate Response:

One of the most important qualifications that I want to consider is first-hand experience with the resources and interests affected by GF&P. I also will make it a top priority to include people from a variety of perspectives on the issues. It’s important that people who influence decisions have a connection to the resources and be able to bring the kind of knowledge to the commission that can only be earned by years of experience. I’ll continue to ensure balance by appointing members of differing perspectives, as well, i.e. sportsmen/landowners, east/west river, members of each political affiliation, etc.

Senator Kristi Noem - Candidate Response:

I’ll look for commissioners who keep the best interests of the state’s resources in mind. If we have this as the basis, I’m confident the GF&P Commission can be an agency that meets the needs of South Dakota sportsmen,creatively and sufficiently addresses some of the habitat challenges we face today, and ultimately preserves our state’s rich hunting, fishing, and outdoor traditions.

Wildlife Philosophy & Policy:

A recent survey by Responsive Management for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identified one of the top reasons why people stop hunting as “Limited Access and Game”.

Additionally, GF&P commissioned a study to determine the economic impact of outdoor recreation on the South Dakota economy. That study indicated that collectively outdoor recreational users spend $1.3 billion annually. The money spent by those enjoying South Dakota’s outdoor resources generated $1.9 billion in economic activity throughout the state. This activity supported an estimated 18,000 full and part-time jobs which contributed over $970 million to the state’s GDP, including $83 million in tax revenue for state and local governments.

4. What strategies or policies do you plan to employ and how do you intend to increase hunting and fishing opportunities for South Dakota Residents?

Senator Billie Sutton - Candidate Response:

To increase opportunities for all South Dakotans, my focus will be on increasing public access, focusing on habitat to preserve game populations, and protecting existing resources like our wetlands and grasslands. To execute those priorities, I plan to more aggressively and efficiently support and use existing state and federal programs, and work to develop further public/private relationships. We must do a better job of bringing both landowners and sportsmen to the conversation about conservation.

We all value our hunting heritage so essential to South Dakota, and we all value the hard work farmers and ranchers do to feed the world, both industries are pillars of our economy. I want to create more opportunities for these groups to meet, improve communications, and work together for ways to increase opportunities.

Senator Kristi Noem - Candidate Response:

Expanding access to hunting and fishing opportunities requires a two-pronged approach. First, we must continue to build working relationships with landowners — relationships that are built on respect and mutual understanding. Second, maintaining and improving habitat is essential to the future of hunting in South Dakota. We can invest in habitat management, and we can do so without raising taxes by broadening the base of support in a multitude of ways, including working with the Division of Motor Vehicles and GF&P to develop a specialty pheasant license plate program in which all proceeds would go directly toward habitat management.

5. What should the goals of Game, Fish and Parks be as we move forward in a time of increasing pressure on limited public access?

Senator Billie Sutton - Candidate Response:

South Dakota is nationally famous for our hunting and fishing, but there’s more to our reputation than just game and fish population. Ours is a state where sportsmen can still find access to wild game in wild places without paying a fortune. It’s important to South Dakotans that we protect our current public lands, both state and federal, and also maintain and strengthen public access to land and water so that this tradition and way of life can flourish for generations to come. As a rancher, I also understand and respect the rights of property owners. Private property plays an important role in funding our roads, bridges, schools, and local infrastructure as well as in managing habitat for strong wildlife populations. In South Dakota roughly 10% of the land is open for public access.

To preserve our heritage of hunting and fishing, we must protect our current state and federal public lands and find ways to ensure public access while upholding the rights of property owners. We must work to promote partnerships and improved relationships between sportsmen and property owners.

Senator Kristi Noem - Candidate Response:

GF&P must balance two goals:

(1) Open recreational opportunities for hunters and fishers, and
(2) Forge partnerships with landowners that are built on respect and mutual understanding. Second, maintaining relationships that are built on respect and mutual understanding. Second, maintaining partnerships and improved relationships between sportsmen and property owners.

Public Lands & Water:

While increasing amounts and caring for Public Lands and Water is one of the most important factors that benefit wildlife. These public resources are greatly enjoyed by all people. A recent survey by Responsive Management for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identified one of the top reasons why people stop hunting as “Limited Access and Game”.

6. Perpetual conservation easements are a valuable tool to protect habitat and agricultural land. Do you support a private landowner’s right to sell perpetual conservation easements on his/her land as a tool to protect wildlife habitat, improve water quality and enhance other natural resources?

Senator Billie Sutton - Candidate Response:

Yes

Senator Kristi Noem - Candidate Response:

I support the right of private landowners to participate in the programs available when deciding how to use their own land for conservation.

7. Would you, as Governor support, legislation that would authorize monies from the General Fund to the purchasing of flooded lands and entrust those lands to GF&P to manage for wildlife and fisheries?

Senator Billie Sutton - Candidate Response:

I am open to the idea of some strategic land acquisition when consensus can be found among those impacted. To increase public access on a large-scale however, we must work to promote partnerships and improved relationships between sportsmen and property owners.

Senator Kristi Noem - Candidate Response:

I would encourage GF&P to continue working with willing landowners on strategic land acquisition.

8. Under HB1001 passed by the 2017 Special Session, do you view the Non-Meandered Waters issue as settled law now? If not, what changes would like to see to the law?

Senator Billie Sutton - Candidate Response:

While we’ve at least achieved some stability on the issue in the past few legislative sessions, there is still room to better this compromise. I am supportive of a compromise that protects the rights of private property owners while also preserving the right of
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sportsmen to hunt and fish on public bodies of water. for now, the compromise seems to have struck a fine balance between the competing interests. lessons will be learned as we work to find agreements with private landowners and gain access for sportsmen, and we need to be prepared to adjust the policies accordingly.

senator kristi noem - candidate response:

no policy should ever be considered a closed book. we will continue to watch this issue and work with stakeholders to ensure the current arrangement properly balances recreation and respect.

big game:

game fish & parks in 2017 released its white-tailed deer & mule deer management plan and is currently working to develop alternatives to the deer allocation process. the us fish & wildlife services determined that, one of every 25 americans older than 16 years of age, and eight of every 10 hunters, hunted deer making them clearly the species of choice for most hunters.

9. what policies or strategies do you plan to employ that will help create better habitat in the state to support healthy deer populations?

senator billie sutton - candidate response:

coming from rural south dakota and growing up on my family's ranch which has included a hunting operation for generations, i have an ongoing dialogue with hunting operators, landowners, and sportsmen and women about how to improve game population and protect the strong tradition of hunting in south dakota. i know well the value of this open dialogue in crafting policy and have utilized this approach with my constituents in the legislative district i represent that has some of the best deer hunting in the state. building better communications between the stakeholders, including private landowners who provide a substantial portion of the habitat for our deer populations, and creating more opportunities to discuss solutions for the habitat issue are among my top priorities for outdoor policy.

senator kristi noem - candidate response:

above, i've talked a little about the changes i'd like to make to broaden the base of support for habitat investments. beyond that, i would like to crowdsource habitat solutions. the fact of the matter is that hunting is a statewide tradition with statewide economic impact, so maintaining and growing the industry requires statewide involvement. taking advantage of online capabilities, my administration will expand the capabilities at habitat.sd.gov to ensure every south dakotan, not just those on assigned advisory boards or in pierre, can directly contribute to the policymaking process. should your ideas be implemented, your hunting license fees for that year ought to be waived as well.

10. what policies or strategies do you plan to employ that will help ensure that every south dakotan who chooses to deer hunt has the opportunity.

senator billie sutton - candidate response:

this is a question of how we can work together as landowners and sportsmen to find the right balance of habitat for wild game and access that our resources can support. i don't know that the focus should be only on increasing game population, but rather on finding ways to ensure a healthy population, by focusing on habitat conservation, that hunters can more easily access, by building partnerships among public/private entities. again, continuing to build strong relationships with private landowners will be key to providing access for sportsmen.

senator kristi noem - candidate response:

maintaining and improving habitat is critical to expanding hunting opportunities in the state. i am proud to have prime hunting habitat on some of our family's land and have long participated in the crp program as a means to preserve it. but as land values have increased, areas like this have begun to disappear, gravely impacting wildlife populations. for this reason, i fought for and won sodsaver protections in the 2014 farm bill, which help preserve our region's native grasslands. additionally, i continue to push federal policymakers to enhance crp through the farm bill. these are important programs i will fight to protect as governor too.

11. do you support the idea of transfer of big game licenses? why or why not?

senator billie sutton - candidate response:

i am open to more discussion on the idea of allowing south dakotans with a significant amount of land and landowner preference licenses to transfer one or two licenses per immediate family to other south dakota hunters. i do not support unlimited transfer of big game licenses or transfer of licenses to non-residents. these ideas work against the spirit of our hunting/fishing heritage in south dakota. in talking to folks in south dakota, there doesn't seem to be a lot of support for those ideas.

senator kristi noem - candidate response:

thus far, there hasn't been a broad base of support behind big-game license transfers.

pheasants & habitat:

preserving pheasant habitat is one of my highest priorities when it comes to conservation efforts. i was born, raised, and live in the heart of south dakota pheasant country. my family has had a hunting operation for generations, and i have represented folks operating dozens of pheasant hunting enterprises in my legislative district that spans much of the area that makes south dakota the "pheasant capital of the world." i have an open and ongoing dialogue with hunting operators, landowners, and sportsmen and women about how to improve the pheasant population and protect the strong tradition of hunting in south dakota. the habitat work group of 2014 came up with the right ideas to address our declining pheasant population, and i think the focus needs to be on funding those researched and proven solutions rather than experimenting with unproven ideas with our limited resources. south dakota is known for wild game in wild places, and a habitat focus maintains that reputation as the priority. i will continue to listen to the folks most knowledgeable about the issue in pursuing the best approach to ensure this south dakota tradition remains strong for generations to come.

senator kristi noem - candidate response:

yes, i call it my second century initiative. essentially, it's my commitment that if elected governor, i would fight to ensure this family tradition and driver of our economy lasts a century more. the five-point plan includes ideas to:

1. increase resources for habitat management - without raising taxes
2. crowdsource habitat solutions
3. target predators, while inspiring the next generation of south dakota hunters
4. maintain habitat management as a national priority
5. serve as sportsman in chief for south dakota pheasant hunting

12. do you have a specific plan to address the decline in pheasant populations and the corresponding hit to local economies?

senator billie sutton - candidate response:

preserving pheasant habitat is one of my highest priorities when it comes to conservation efforts.

13. since the sd game fish & parks has limited funds, would you support the creation of a new source of state dollars to financially support the concepts of soil health, water quality and wildlife habitat? why or why not?

senator billie sutton - candidate response:

it's exceedingly important that we find ways to make conservation a priority in south dakota. it's the right thing to protect our land and our economy. financing these efforts has to begin with increased state/federal partnerships. we have several well-constructed programs and funds in place; we need to work with all stakeholders and prioritize these long-term solutions instead of searching for quick fixes that don't protect our land and traditions for future generations. there are several opportunities for funding, including some programs that match state contributions with federal and private dollars, but we have to do our part as a state too. i would work within current programs to be more efficient in how we use existing funds, and i will fight for federal dollars for conservation to protect our natural resources, so we can grow our hunting and fishing opportunities in our state. preserving our land and heritage to hand down to the next generation must be a top priority for all south dakotans, and together we can identify and develop options to make that affordable.

senator kristi noem - candidate response:

as outlined above, i believe we can invest in habitat management without raising taxes. we can do that by broadening the base of support through strategies such as a specialty pheasant license plate program or the exploration of evidence-driven voluntary funding solutions.

waterfowl:

south dakota is located within the central flyway and is an important waterfowl breeding ground. there are many issues facing migratory birds including loss of habitat and disease along with water quality problems being near the top. the continuation of wetland drainage drain tile installation and grassland loss all contribute to these water quality issues.

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Sportsmen/women- Want to help fund SDWF and the Youth Conservation Camp plus reduce your taxes this year? Donate stocks and land to the SDWF. You not only won’t have to pay taxes on those assets, you will pay less tax because of your generosity!

55th Youth Conservation Camp

For the 55th consecutive year, young campers from across South Dakota and a few from Minnesota traveled to the Black Hills to attend camp. This year’s camp was nearly full with 95 campers in attendance. Campers, along with counselors and staff, gathered at Camp Bob Marshall to spend the week of June 3th – 9th learning about wildlife and conservation. The annual SDWF Youth Conservation Camp provided these young people an opportunity to make new friends, hear the message of conservation, and have a fun-filled, exciting time. The weather and outstanding programs provided both the campers and staff an exceptional camp week.

The week’s activities really brought out the enthusiasm of the young people. On Monday campers were divided into two groups. In the morning both groups were bussed to Rapid City. One group spent the morning getting an in-depth tour of the Fish Hatchery. The second group spent the morning at the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks Outdoor Campus West in Rapid City. What an amazing facility. The campers toured the facility and participated in activities including archery, BB gun shooting, canoeing, and kayaking. In the afternoon the two groups switched venues. On Tuesday morning the staff of Custer State Park provided programs for the campers. The young people had the opportunity to select from the following hikes: Prairie Trail, the Lover’s Leap Trail, Little Devil’s Tower, and because of our location in Black Hills, dutch and outdoor cooking, nature photography, trout fishing, muzzle loading shooting, archery, lake survey, fly-fishing & fishing, building a bow, reservoir fishing, waterfowl hunting, boating safety, can you canoe, wilderness survival class, upland bird hunting with pointing dogs, birding in the Black Hills, dutch and outdoor cooking, nature photography, trout fishing, meat treats, and turkey hunting. Because campers selected which programs they wanted to attend, the response was overwhelmingly positive.

On Friday, campers traveled to Hot Springs. Throughout the day campers were divided into pairs and traveled south of Hot Springs to the Whitney Preserve at Cascade Creek. Upon their arrival, the campers hiked the preserve. The Whitney Preserve is a unique Nature Conservancy site. Along with visiting the Whitney Preserve, campers visited the Mammoth Site where they first watched a short video on the site and then toured the facility.

The evenings were also filled with interesting presentations. Monday evening, Dan Streifel, an avid wildlife photographer from Aberdeen, showed an awesome PowerPoint on birds that he has photographed in South Dakota. Dan has photos of over 300 species of South Dakota birds. Tuesday evening, John Halverson of Black Hills Raptors brought several birds of prey including a ferruginous hawk, and several smaller raptors and described each bird in detail. On Wednesday, all campers traveled to Mt Rushmore for the spectacular lighting ceremony. Thursday evening, we had Rushmore Retriever Club from Rapid City area put on training session involving experience to beginning young dogs. Friday night, camper’s enjoyed a PowerPoint presentation of the week’s activities. Our camper’s then showcased their talent with music, comedy and fun awards.

Every year the camp is proud to present awards to outstanding individuals and campers. The Roehr Conservation Award is presented to the outstanding girl camper. Kaitlin Schieuer from Sioux Falls was selected for this honor. The Erdman Conservation award is presented to the outstanding boy camper. This year’s winner was Juan Gonzalez from Aberdeen. Both winners will be invited to camp next year as CIT’s (counselors in training).

Each year, awards are presented to individuals who have made a significant contribution to camp. The Putzier Conservation Award, presented to an individual or organization who is not a member of the camp staff, went to the Pactola Reservoir Fishing (Michelle Bucholz, Jack Davis, Jeremy Kientz, Greg Simpson) all of GFP. The McClellan Conservation Award is presented to a staff member who has made a contribution to camp. This year the award was presented to Wayne Heilman of Clark, South Dakota.

We want to thank all the presenters and volunteers who worked so hard to make camp a success. A special thanks to the professionals of the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks and Custer State Park. They devoted their time and expertise to make the SDWF Youth Conservation Camp a unique learning experience.

I would like to give a special thanks to Dan Opp. Dan and I have been working as a team for many years to make sure Conservation Camp runs smoothly. Dan handles all the counselors and is a big part of the success of the camp. I also want to thank some of the individuals who make contributions to the camp. Bob Schaeffer (SD Bob), who is in the process of taking over my job. Bob Erdman (MN Bob) made it back this year from Minnesota and brought two campers with him and will be taking over for Dan. Both the Bobs have been a great help in running the camp. Thanks and welcome to Judy Ulrich as our camp nurse. I would like to give a special thank you to all the preceding individuals. A BIG THANK YOU to Maggie Lindsey, Education Services Coordinator for G, F&P. Maggie coordinates and lines up all the classes from Custer State Park and Game, Fish & Parks and does an outstanding job.

I also want to thank all the counselors, CIT’s, and the clubs and individuals who helped make the 2018 edition of Conservation Camp a success. Thanks to Chuck Rokusek, an avid supporter of our camp, who recruits kids in the Sioux Falls area and raises the money to send them to camp. Also thank you to SDWF Executive Director Chris Hesla for all his help and support. Thank you to Great Plains Outdoormen for the generous grant in support of the camp. Thanks to Scheels All Sports for providing T-shirts for the campers. We proudly wore them to Mt Rushmore. And finally, thanks to the staff at Camp Bob Marshall for taking such good care of us. Check us out on our Facebook page, SDWF Youth Conservation Camp. The entire camp staff is privileged to have spent a week with a group of great young people from all across South Dakota, and we are looking forward to next June 2-8, 2019.

Senator Billie Sutton - Candidate Response:
As a lifetime farmer/rancher and avid hunter, I understand the careful balance between production and conservation. In the U.S. House, I fought to expand the sodsaver program, incentvizing the protection of native grasslands while ensuring the choice was ultimately left to producers. As governor, I have committed to expand voluntary conservation programs by improving landowner relationships. Working together, we can boost soil health, improve water quality, and increase productivity on every acre.

Senator Kristi Noem - Candidate Response:
No.

16. The State recently passed a law incentivizing the voluntary establishment of buffer strips along certain river segments to improve water quality, however few landowners have signed up. Do you have a plan to encourage more to landowners to establish buffer strips along rivers, streams and wetlands?

Senator Billie Sutton - Candidate Response:
As a state legislator, I was instrumental in passing the buffer strip legislation. As Governor, I will work to take it to the next step by further incentivizing buffer strips, so more landowners utilize the program that is good for our environment and water. One of the simplest ways to do this is by expanding existing landowner programs to include buffer strips.

Senator Kristi Noem - Candidate Response:
I'll continue to support the program and efforts to educate producers about the importance of conservation and enrolling land in the buffer strip program.

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Possible cuts to conservation in the next Farm Bill

If the U.S. House version of the next farm bill is approved, the Upper Midwest would suffer nation-wide losses in federal funding for working lands conservation, according to a new report.

The House farm bill proposes to eliminate the Conservation Stewardship Program, or CSP, and fold some of its funding into another ag conservation program. That would cut a total of about $5 billion in funding over the next 10 years, with the bulk of the loss in the Upper Midwest, according to the report from the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

Combined, Minnesota, South Dakota, North Dakota and Montana would account for $2.65 billion of the total $5 billion reduction.

Minnesota would lose $801 million, the most in the nation. South Dakota would lose $745 million and North Dakota $729 million, second and third most, respectively, in the nation. Montana would lose $379 million, the ninth-largest loss.

The Senate version of the new farm bill — the centerpiece of federal food and ag policy — would retain CSP, according to the sustainable ag group.

Now, the Senate and House are trying to resolve differences in their respective bills.

“As farm bill conferes work to reconcile the differences between the House and Senate bills, it is critical they understand the state-by-state funding implications of the House’s proposal to eliminate CSP,” Alyssa Chamey, senior policy specialist with the sustainable ag group, said in a prepared statement.

“A final conference report must protect the existing toolbox of working lands conservation programs, ensuring that funds are not redistributed to drastically disadvantage so many agricultural states,” she said.

A few states, especially California and Texas, would gain CSP funding if the House version is approved. California would see the largest increase, about $625 million over 10 years, with Texas gaining about $202 million over 10 years. Taking those funding increases into account, the total nationwide decline in funding would be $5 billion.

California and Texas would be big gainers because, historically, they’ve been at the top of the list for allocations in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the program into which some current CSP funding would be folded under the House farm bill, according to the report.

Though the Conservation Reserve Program may be better known, the Conservation Stewardship Program has a bigger role, at least measured by enrolled acres.

Through CSP, ag producers and forest landowners earn payments to actively manage, maintain and expand conservation activities, such as cover crops and buffer strips, while maintaining active ag production on their land. About 70 million acres are enrolled nationwide.

In contrast to CSP, the Conservation Reserve Program gives landowners an annual per-acre payment to take environmentally sensitive farmland out of production. About 22.5 million acres were enrolled in CRP at the end of January, according to online information from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Conservationists say LWCF key to unlocking inaccessible public lands

There are millions of acres of landlocked public land in the western U.S., and conservation advocates say a soon-to-expire conservation fund is vital to unlocking access to them.

A new report produced by the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and onX Maps says a total of 9.52 million acres of federal public land across 13 western states are surrounded by private lands and inaccessible to the public. In Montana, an estimated 1.52 million public acres are unreachable, a total surpassed in the report only by Wyoming and Nevada.

Joel Webster, Western lands director for TRCP, said any hope of gaining public access to some of those lands relies on the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a pot of federal money to expire on Sept. 30.

“This is the tool to address this issue,” Webster said. “If this program is not reauthorized, we’ve got a problem without a solution.”

Webster presented the report on Monday at the TRCP Western Media Summit, a three-day gathering of writers, scientists, conservation advocates and state government officials from around the country. The event began Sunday with a dinner and continued Monday with sessions on chronic wasting disease and public access.

The report on landlocked public land compiled road and landowner data to try to catalog truly inaccessible public lands across the West, meaning they can’t legally be reached by road, on foot or by water. It found that most of the landlocked parcels are managed by the Bureau of Land Management — including 1.4 million of Montana’s 1.52 million acres.

Buying private lands adjacent to public ground and making them public is one way to provide access. Webster said LWCF has been a vital source of money for those projects and has had a renewed focus on enhancing public access in recent years.

The fund, created in 1965, is filled by offshore drilling royalties. The money goes to conservation and parks projects all over the country. It has been used to build city parks in Bozeman and to secure access to public land in the surrounding area.

It has also been instrumental in deals orchestrated by land trusts. Kristin Kolavik, a senior project manager at The Trust for Public Land, said each of the seven projects she is working on now involve LWCF.

“It’s absolutely vital to what we do,” Kovalk said.

The fund has faced the threat of expiration before, most recently in 2015 when it went dormant for more than two months before being renewed.

All three members of Montana’s congressional delegation support making it permanent. At the media summit’s opening dinner on Sunday, U.S. Sen. Steve Daines, R-Montana, said LWCF should be funded at its maximum level of $900 million, a level it has reached only once before.