

United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship
The Great Outdoors: Small Businesses and America's Outdoor Recreation Economy
Written Testimony of Christopher Fox, Iowa State Chair of Ducks Unlimited
November 1, 2023

Madame Chair, Ranking member Ernst, members of the committee – thank you for the opportunity to testify on the impact of our outdoor recreation economy on small business. It's an honor to represent Ducks Unlimited and our one million supporters across the United States, as well as all of our nation's waterfowlers, our outdoor industry, conservation partners, and millions of Americans who enjoy our great outdoors every day.

Ducks Unlimited is the world's leader in wetlands conservation and as State Chair for Iowa, I have the privilege of leading DU's 1,200 Iowa volunteers who work tirelessly to raise private funding for conservation. We have nearly 17,000 members in Iowa, and they contribute their hard-earned dollars because they care about the future of wildlife, and our communities, that benefit from well managed natural resources. We work together with private landowners, conservation partners, farmers and ranchers, tribes and government agencies to conserve wetlands sufficient to fill the sky with waterfowl today, tomorrow, and forever.

Most relevant to today, Ducks Unlimited's work, and the access to outdoor recreation opportunities it provides, is an indispensable driver of economic activity, particularly in rural communities. Ducks Unlimited's work doesn't just benefit the outdoor recreation economy, waterfowl and other wildlife. All Americans enjoy the Ecosystem Services that wetlands provide in the form of carbon sequestration, clean water, groundwater recharge, flood attenuation, and coastal resiliency.

Recreational opportunities created by conservation work are a significant economic engine across this country. According to a recent study published by the National Shooting Sports Foundation, waterfowl hunting alone contributed \$4 billion to US GDP and supported 56,900 jobs, paying a total of \$2.4 billion in wages. Waterfowlers also paid more than \$509 million in federal taxes and \$399 million in state taxes.¹ According to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, \$663 million is attributed to "Trip Expenditures" benefiting the travel and service industries.²

These numbers get more impressive when you expand your lens to look at the economic impact of outdoor recreation more broadly. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, outdoor recreation accounts for 2.1 percent of US GDP valued at approximately \$460 billion and generates 5.2 million high-paying jobs³.

What many folks may not realize is that beyond the direct connection between small business and the recreational pursuits that natural resource conservation sustains, there is also a direct linkage between on-the-ground dirt moving work that is frequently involved with DU's wetland conservation efforts and economic impact of our work. With funding secured by DU through private philanthropic contributions of our supporters, federal programs like the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, and state agencies like the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship for example, we hire local contractors to operate the heavy equipment needed for restoration projects. Materials needed for water control structures, dikes and berms, and other wetland project elements are sourced through local suppliers, which support American jobs directly tied to the habitat conservation work we make happen. Having conserved 16 million acres across North America, with over 6,000 acres of conservation impact in New

¹ Southwick Associates. *Hunting in America: An Economic Force*. 2018 edition

² US Fish and Wildlife Service, Economic Impact of Waterfowl Hunting in the United States, (March 2015)
https://outdoorrecreation.wi.gov/Documents/Research%20Library%20Page%20files/US%20-%20Economic%20Impacts/Economic%20Impact%20of%20Waterfowl%20Hunting_2011.pdf

³ Bureau of Economic Analysis, *Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2019*, (Nov. 10, 2020)
https://www.bea.gov/sites/default/files/2020-11/orsa1120_1.pdf

Hampshire and over 83,000 in Iowa. DU's conservation work is a driver of small business in communities across America.

Given the importance and impact of conservation, Congress should therefore work to:

- Eliminate regulatory “green tape” that hinders the delivery of scientifically beneficial conservation programs.
- Enhance voluntary and incentive-based conservation programs for working lands to support farmers and ranchers.
- Expand programs to meet the local needs of conservation on tribal lands and in areas that are accessible to historically underserved communities.

These efforts will result in more waterfowl and wildlife and stimulate greater economic activity in our tourism industry, and they will also make our air and water cleaner, recharge precious groundwater systems, and fortify our communities against the threats of extreme weather. These are things that all Americans need and support.