

“Public Lands Package” Headed to President’s Desk

On February 26, 2019, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Natural Resources Management Act of 2019 (S. 47). The bill is also known as the "Public Lands Package." The bill has been sent to the President’s desk for his signature. The bill had previously passed the Senate and President Trump has indicated that he will sign it into law.

This legislative package includes measures to permanently reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and, it creates additional hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting opportunities, while also conserving and maintaining wildlife habitat and fisheries.

Once signed into law, the bill package will play an important role in the protection of conservation programs and in the future of hunting in the U.S., and more importantly, hunting on public lands.

The package contains many provisions important to hunters, anglers, trappers and recreational shooters. One of the key elements of the legislation codifies the "Open Until Closed" policy on federal lands.

The “Open Until Closed” management policy will require public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service to be open for hunting, fishing and recreational shooting unless specifically closed for cause.

For decades, anti-hunting organizations have pressed lawsuits challenging hunting on public land, arguing that federal agencies must jump through laborious procedural hoops to open public land to hunting, thus creating a system where one small procedural mistake would block hunting. The law will help block the lawsuits brought on behalf of the anti-hunting groups who persistently use the courts to block hunting opportunities on public land. Ultimately it will protect hunting rights and increase hunting access on millions of acres of public land, similar to the protections which now exist for wildlife refuge lands.

Other important issues that the package addresses include:

It amends the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937, informally known as the Pittman-Robertson (PR) Act, to allow certain funds to be used for shooting sports facilities. It also reduces the matching funds necessary to qualify for public shooting range development grants.

It will allow the permitting or leasing of public land for shooting and target ranges.

It authorizes the transportation of archery equipment through National Park Service lands.

And, it includes the WILD Act, which strengthens wildlife conservation by reauthorizing sportsmen’s wildlife conservation programs, assists in the management of invasive species and promotes anti-poaching programs.