

Testimony of

Nick Pinizzotto, President and Chief Executive Officer
National Deer Alliance

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House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

Legislative Hearing on Chronic Wasting Disease

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**Testimony by Nick Pinizzotto, President and CEO
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Thank you Chairman Cox, Ranking Member Gohmert, and members of the subcommittee for this opportunity to testify today on chronic wasting disease (CWD). My name is Nick Pinizzotto and I am the President and CEO of the National Deer Alliance. Founded in 2015, the National Deer Alliance's mission is to serve as the guardian of wild deer conservation and our hunting heritage. Our work on behalf of deer, deer hunters, and the hunting industry is policy-focused, and our current priority areas include wild deer conservation, diseases, hunter access, and state and federal land management. We work on issues that impact all North American deer species and are backed by an impressive board of directors with members representing national deer organizations, the states through the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and the hunting industry.

While our organization was created for the purpose of working on all policy matters that impact deer, deer hunters, and the hunting industry, the staff and board of directors quickly realized that there is no more important matter than CWD. Just last year we revised our strategic plan and identified CWD as our top priority, and I estimate that nearly 90% of our work is related to the issue.

Threat to an American Tradition

I grew up in rural Pennsylvania, which has one of the strongest deer hunting traditions in the country with more licensed hunters per square mile than any other state. Well before I was old enough to hunt, I can vividly remember how excited I would get when I saw a deer, and how it seemed unthinkable to pass by one along the road without stopping to admire it. My dad did most of his driving while looking out of the side window, which is a trait that I have inherited. Even today my wife knows that I'm expecting her to be scanning the landscape as we travel, and I firmly believe that she feels a measurable level of pressure to produce a few deer sightings along the way. Not only has she become a pro at spotting deer through the truck window, I've even convinced her to shoot a few over the years despite her maintaining a vegetarian diet. My two-and-a-half-year-old son is already in training, although seeing deer while sitting in a rear-facing car seat has proved challenging so far.

I was telling deer hunting stories long before I was old enough to hunt, and some of the best memories of my life are of my dad and uncle returning home from a hunt and sharing their adventures. By the time I was old enough to hunt with them, I couldn't imagine life getting any better. If someone shot a deer in our neighborhood, everyone would gather around to see it and then share in the story behind it. In the earliest days of my hunting career nobody cared how old the deer was or what its rack scored. All that seemed significant was whether you got your buck or not. There is a lot I miss about those days.

I grew up a bit sheltered from the rest of the world as did the other kids in the area. Everyone we knew hunted, both boys and girls, and we just assumed that was the case for the entire country. It wasn't until I expanded my horizons that I eventually learned that only about five percent of Americans hunt. Today that number is less than four percent. Still, that remains enough hunters to implement the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, which has proven to be the most effective and efficient way to manage

wildlife. Unfortunately, the continued prevalence and spread of CWD across the country is not only threatening our deer hunting traditions, but the entire sphere of wildlife management and conservation.

Now, like deer hunters in 25 other states that have CWD within their borders, my family's hunting traditions will be forever altered as the disease has reached our doorstep. In fact, the very land where I shot my first buck when I was 14 years-old lies on the border of a designated CWD management area. While there will still be the "high fives" and "atta-boys," as in the past when a deer is shot, there will be underlying anxiety as the results of a CWD test are waited on. Instead of teaming up to drag a downed deer back to the truck as we've always done, we'll process it to an acceptable level in the woods, being careful not to move any infectious parts.

There will be other special rules to follow as well and we'll be asked to shoot more deer than we'd probably like to, but because we're hunters and care about deer and the hunting tradition, we'll do our part for the benefit of both. After all, now is not the time to be selfish and worry only about "our deer," or our own personal experience. Instead it is time for hunters to be leaders and do their part to see that the needs of the animal are met first, even if that means shooting more of them to slow the spread of CWD. The rules have changed and the definition of a quality deer shall now be defined as a healthy deer.

The Impact of Chronic Wasting Disease on Wildlife Conservation

Beyond the science and administrative aspects of CWD, it is creating significant challenges for the future of deer hunting, and broad wildlife conservation. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's most recent survey (2016), approximately 80 percent of all hunters pursue big game, and about 70 percent hunt deer (Appendix 1). Deer hunting alone generates almost \$40 billion to the U.S. economy each year, and it represents nearly 60 percent of total hunting expenditures (Appendix 2).

State wildlife agencies are primarily funded by the sale of hunting licenses and revenue generated from the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, commonly referred to as the Pittman-Robertson Act. Therefore, deer hunters are carrying the financial burden for managing all wildlife (Appendix 3). From 2011 to 2016, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports that hunting participation declined by 2.2 million, bringing the total number of hunters down to just 11.5 million. More specifically, big game hunting participation dropped by approximately 20 percent, and there is little doubt that CWD has impacted the decision of many to quit hunting deer. From an industry perspective over the same time period, hunting related expenditures were reported to have dropped nearly 30 percent. It is easy to see what a decline in deer hunter numbers would mean for overall wildlife conservation, including management of at-risk species.

Deer hunters, in addition to being the largest segment of the hunting population, account for 63% of all days hunted in the U.S. Deer hunters have averaged slightly more than 115,000,000 days in the field in recent years (Appendix 4). Of the more than \$27 billion generated from hunting-related expenditures in 2016, deer hunters accounted for more than half (Appendix 5). Every time a deer hunter hangs up his or her rifle or bow for the last time, the negative impact is felt by wildlife and the economy (Appendix 6). Imagine trying to convince deer hunters that they should be concerned about CWD and do their part to limit its spread, while at the same time trying to recruit new hunters, or to keep existing hunters in the field to stop what has been a steady decline in participation. That is the reality faced by state and federal wildlife agencies and the greater conservation community.

Hunters and their Biases and Distortions

One of the most significant challenges posed by CWD is the way it kills deer, and how it shapes hunters' awareness of the disease, or even belief that it is something to be concerned about. Death often happens slowly, and most infected deer look and act normally until they approach death. Some deer may carry CWD for two years or more before succumbing. The disease does not kill large numbers of deer at the same time as epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) does. For example, an EHD outbreak may kill hundreds of deer in a small area, which is something people can easily see and smell. It's easy to understand why people believe EHD might be a bigger concern than CWD, but EHD is not always fatal, herds can recover from it quickly and deer can develop antibodies to help fight it should it arrive again.

CWD is always fatal. There are no survivors, and there are no antibodies to help deer resist it. For the most part, it's not a process that cannot be observed by the masses. Passionate deer hunters are like anyone else who receives bad news in that human nature is to experience mental discomfort when confronted with contradictory information, particularly on matters related to their passions or well-being. This is called cognitive dissonance. People are biased to interpret information in ways that are consistent with their desires, and when hunters cannot easily see the problem, it is easy to understand why it is hard for them to believe there is one.

Communication with, and education of hunters on the urgency of the issue is further complicated when they receive contrary information from people who they trust or admire. The conservation community has been increasingly challenged by "celebrity" hunters or spokespeople who have made it their platform to suggest that CWD is not a problem and that state wildlife agencies and others are sensationalizing its significance. Some go as far as to insult wildlife professionals and intensify lack of trust issues between sportsmen and some state wildlife agencies, creating an "us against them," mentality.

Example Social Media Post Commonly Seen from Hunters



Sawyer Buck If cwd is highly infectious and always fatal, WHERE ARE ALL THE DEAD OR ALMOST DEAD DEER in long known endemic areas in Wisconsin and etc?

Hunters and most Americans are not stupid.

Hunters are easily susceptible to affinity bias, which is the tendency to believe, or agree with, the ideas of people they like or admire, and disagree with those they dislike. Unfortunately, some have taken advantage of cognitive dissonance and affinity bias to drive a wedge between hunters and wildlife managers, largely to further their own personal interests and fame.

Example Social Media Post Suggesting CWD is a Hoax



Mike Kerry Mule..Whitetail...Still a deer regardless and was found many moons ago. This case is just like so many others. 1 out of how many 100's or 1000's of wild deer with the harmless disease. So glad hunters and the public is catching on to the CWD hoax used to payroll new useless jobs and the needle in the haystack science. Your fake ship has sailed with many catching on to the sae old question? Where are all the Dead Deer?????

Science clearly shows that CWD is a very real problem for deer, and ultimately other wildlife. It is also a very real problem for hunters, even if they don't see it or allow themselves to believe it. Despite this, a group of hunters in Pennsylvania used political influence and a misdirected publicity campaign to stop the Pennsylvania Game Commission from managing the disease. While hunters are well-intentioned, they are driven largely by emotion and the biases previously described. It is imperative that wildlife managers can use the best available tools available to them to manage CWD, and this might be more easily accomplished through more effective education and outreach to hunters. We must bridge the widening gap between the biological science, and the political and social science.

Sign Erected by Pennsylvania Concerned Hunters Group



Deer Hunters Asked to Do More

Most deer hunters are extremely passionate about the sport, and equally passionate about making sure that there are healthy herds to pursue. These passions have become conflicted in many cases due to the spread of CWD. When CWD is detected, typically a state wildlife agency defines a management area around the location of where an infected animal was found, and then implements new rules that hunters must follow to help control its spread. Some of these enhanced regulations may include not allowing transport of harvested deer from the area, limiting or totally forbidding the use of bait, urine-based scents or other attractants, requiring mandatory testing for CWD, liberalized harvest limits, and special requirement for handling of meat and disposal of certain infectious parts.

While more is being learned about how to best manage the disease, two practices that have proven effective are not moving live or harvested animals across the landscape, and thinning herds to limit prevalence. Both pose challenges to hunters. For example, an elderly hunter may not be physically capable of properly processing a deer in the woods and then transporting it home, or to a butcher shop. Another example would be the frustration felt by a hunter that purchased and has been managing his or her land for a certain number of deer and buck antler score and age structure, only to be asked to now shoot more deer than desired. Beyond private landowners, deer hunters in general enjoy seeing many deer while hunting, and it is understandable why they are frustrated when asked to thin local herds.

While hunters will be asked to play an important role to manage CWD, it is important that we are sensitive to the social and political challenges that some of the best-known management strategies might present. Even if it seems like a simple proposition to thin herds and not move deer for the sake of the greater herd and future of deer hunting traditions, it must be accepted on some level that even the most open-minded and informed hunters may not be able to accept it.

Wildlife managers need help with the costs of monitoring, research, and educating and outreach to hunters. Hunters want answers to their questions, and to understand that what they may be asked to do for the greater good will have a positive impact. Leadership is required on all fronts, even outside of the hunting and conservation community, to give us the best chance to find the most effective approaches to managing CWD and implement them.

Conclusion

In summary, CWD is an unprecedented threat to healthy deer herds, our hunting traditions, and the North American Model for Wildlife Conservation. This 100 percent fatal disease is continuing to spread across the country and is now confirmed to exist in more than half of our states. Hunters, particularly those that pursue big game, generate the bulk of the funding that is used for the management of all wildlife, including threatened species. A further decline in hunter numbers means a further decline in the purchase of hunting licenses and equipment. That's a losing formula for deer, hunters, or anyone who enjoys our country's invaluable wildlife resources. It is unrealistic to think that CWD is going away any time soon. We need to come to grips with the idea that this is a "forever" issue, and that there is no end in sight. The sphere of influence around deer, which includes scientists, wildlife managers, hunters, and even the general public must learn to be comfortable being uncomfortable as we face the challenges that CWD presents.

The National Deer Alliance exists to advance the interests of deer, hunters, and the hunting industry, and there is no bigger threat to our mission than CWD. We appreciate the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations' concern about the disease, and we look forward to the support of Congress to help manage it for the sake of the country's most iconic animals and hunting traditions.

Sources

Hunting in America: An Economic Force for Conservation (National Shooting Sports Foundation)
2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

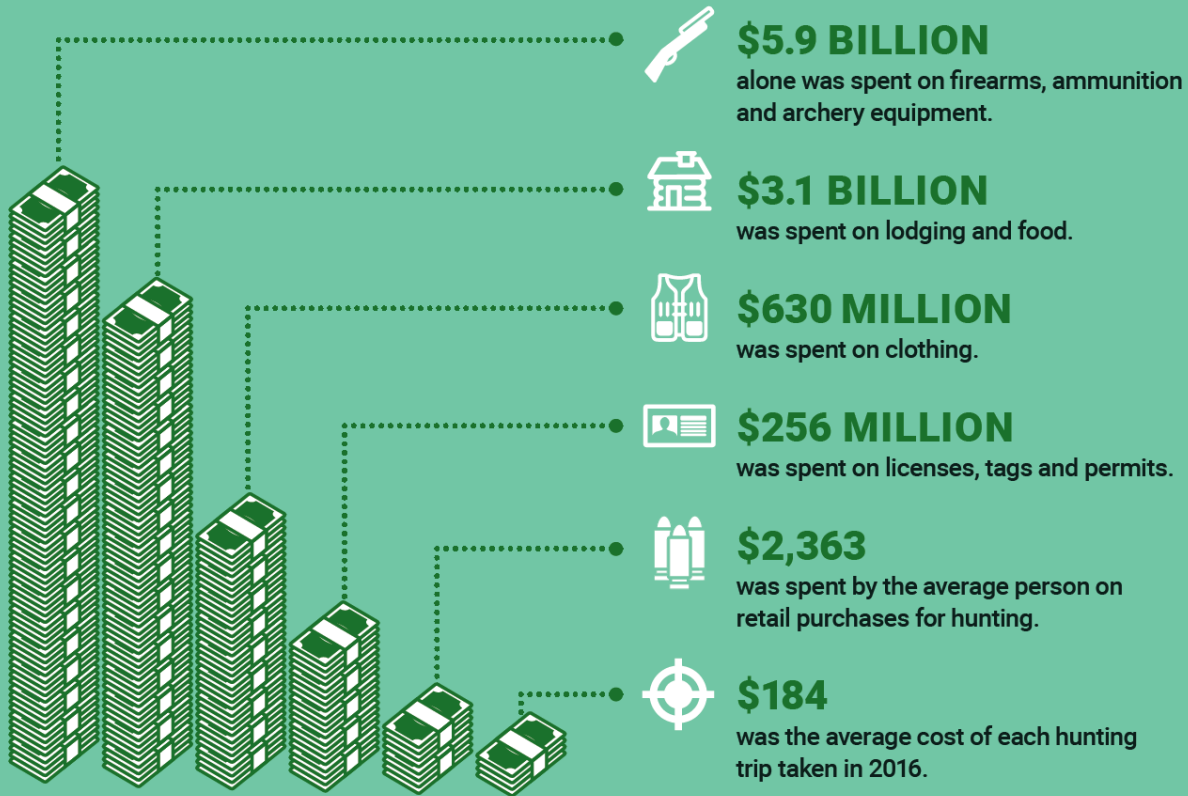
**Appendix 1
Number of Hunters by Species**

REGION	ALL HUNTING	DEER HUNTING	MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING	UPLAND GAMEBIRD
New England	273,000	182,000	— *	55,000 ^
Middle Atlantic	1,001,000	787,000	— *	— *
East North Central	2,871,000	2,481,000	634,000 ^	— *
West North Central	1,565,000	953,000	285,000 ^	504,000
South Atlantic	1,623,000	1,132,000	103,000 ^	— *
East South Central	1,365,000 ^	1,002,000 ^	— *	— *
West South Central	1,700,000	746,000	604,000 ^	315,000 ^
Mountain	1,121,000	482,000 ^	396,000 ^	207,000 ^
Pacific	791,000	375,000 ^	— *	— *
UNITED STATES†	11,453,000	7,905,000	2,618,000	1,919,000

Appendix 2 Economic Contribution from Deer Hunting

REGION	RETAIL SALES	TOTAL MULTIPLIER OR RIPPLE EFFECT	VALUE ADDED (GDP)	SALARIES AND WAGES	JOBS	STATE AND LOCAL TAX REVENUES	FEDERAL TAX REVENUES
New England	\$258,900,000	\$438,700,000	\$234,300,000	\$138,700,000	2,600	\$23,000,000	\$36,200,000
Middle Atlantic	\$2,080,000,000	\$3,597,200,000	\$1,789,500,000	\$1,091,000,000	18,500	\$192,400,000	\$273,500,000
East North Central	\$3,802,500,000	\$7,033,600,000	\$3,803,200,000	\$2,226,300,000	56,100	\$414,100,000	\$543,500,000
West North Central	\$881,700,000	\$1,559,800,000	\$827,400,000	\$478,200,000	12,600	\$79,900,000	\$115,900,000
South Atlantic	\$1,585,400,000	\$2,949,200,000	\$1,673,000,000	\$967,600,000	28,100	\$141,600,000	\$242,300,000
East South Central	\$1,711,500,000	\$2,901,100,000	\$1,894,800,000	\$1,190,100,000	65,000	\$125,300,000	\$269,100,000
West South Central	\$3,830,200,000	\$6,872,500,000	\$3,774,200,000	\$2,294,800,000	75,600	\$342,000,000	\$552,100,000
Mountain	\$1,163,300,000	\$1,996,500,000	\$925,900,000	\$589,600,000	16,200	\$99,100,000	\$139,600,000
Pacific	\$375,300,000	\$689,300,000	\$387,200,000	\$232,800,000	4,700	\$44,400,000	\$58,600,000
UNITED STATES	\$15,721,800,000	\$39,773,800,000	\$20,858,900,000	\$12,446,900,000	305,400	\$1,945,800,000	\$3,078,300,000

Appendix 3 Deer Hunters Carry the Financial Burden for Managing All Wildlife



PERSPECTIVE

IF THE HUNTING
INDUSTRY WERE
A SINGLE COMPANY,
IT WOULD

RANK 104



ON THE

**FORTUNETM
500³**

DEER HUNTERS
SPENT



**\$15.7
BILLION**

IN 2016, ALMOST
TWICE THE AMOUNT
AMERICANS SPEND
ANNUALLY ON
GREETING CARDS⁴

MIGRATORY BIRD
HUNTERS SPENT



**\$2.9
BILLION**

WHICH IS MORE THAN
THE COMBINED BOX
OFFICE REVENUE
FOR THE TOP FIVE
MOVIES IN 2016⁵

**\$6.3
BILLION**

SPENT BY
HUNTERS ON FOOD,
LODGING AND
TRANSPORTATION
IN 2016 WAS

50 PERCENT

MORE THAN
HYATT'S ANNUAL
REVENUES⁶

³ The Fortune 500 List, 2016: <http://fortune.com/fortune500/2016/list>

⁴ Greeting Card Association, Greeting Card Industry Key Facts: <https://www.greetingcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/About-Greeting-Cards-General-Facts.pdf>

⁵ Box Office Mojo: <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=2016>

⁶ MarketWatch.com: <https://www.marketwatch.com/investing/stock/h/financials>

**Appendix 4
Days of Hunting by Species**

REGION	ALL HUNTING	DEER HUNTING	MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING	UPLAND GAMEBIRD
New England	3,611,000	1,886,000	— *	227,000 ^
Middle Atlantic	12,548,000	9,071,000	— *	— *
East North Central	59,462,000	40,809,000	5,372,000 ^	— *
West North Central	20,732,000	9,135,000	3,250,000 ^	5,755,000
South Atlantic	16,674,000	11,858,000	940,000 ^	— *
East South Central	37,459,000 ^	22,796,000 ^	— *	— *
West South Central	17,459,000	11,406,000	2,736,000 ^	1,352,000 ^
Mountain	10,659,000	5,584,000 ^	1,506,000 ^	936,000 ^
Pacific	6,071,000	2,498,000 ^	— *	— *
UNITED STATES[†]	184,021,000	115,042,000	15,621,000	12,983,000

Appendix 5 Deer Hunters Account for More than Half of Expenditures

U.S. HUNTING-RELATED EXPENDITURES IN 2016	HUNTING (ALL TYPES)	DEER HUNTING	MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING	UPLAND GAME HUNTING
Food, drink & refreshments	\$2,506,900,000	\$1,270,500,000	\$313,100,000	\$313,900,000
Lodging (motels, cabins, lodges, campgrounds, etc.)	\$607,100,000	\$153,100,000	\$215,300,000	\$65,000,000
Airplane fare	\$118,900,000	\$70,800,000	\$4,700,000	\$15,800,000
Public transportation, including trains, buses, taxis, etc.	\$74,200,000	\$33,000,000	\$31,200,000	\$2,300,000
Transportation by private vehicle	\$2,991,400,000	\$1,475,600,000	\$447,700,000	\$215,700,000
Guide fees, pack trip or package fees	\$658,400,000	\$434,600,000	\$31,400,000	\$81,900,000
Public land use or access fees	\$18,600,000	\$3,500,000	\$10,400,000	\$1,000,000
Private land use or access fees (except leases)	\$1,813,900,000	\$1,110,300,000	\$132,900,000	\$177,400,000
Heating & cooking fuel	\$103,300,000	\$67,000,000	\$6,700,000	\$3,500,000
Equipment rental such as boats, hunting or camping equipment, etc.	\$204,600,000	\$194,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$2,500,000
Boat fuel	\$15,100,000	\$200,000	\$7,200,000	\$1,800,000
Boat launching fees	\$2,200,000	\$100,000	\$1,100,000	\$200,000
Boat mooring, storage, maintenance, insurance, etc.	\$81,800,000	–	\$81,800,000	–
Rifles	\$1,190,100,000	\$766,500,000	\$22,000,000	\$22,600,000
Shotguns	\$553,100,000	\$92,400,000	\$214,900,000	\$5,200,000
Muzzleloaders & other primitive firearms	\$110,000,000	\$95,300,000	–	–
Handguns	\$1,060,600,000	\$586,100,000	\$80,300,000	\$59,400,000
Bows, arrows & archery equipment	\$1,613,700,000	\$1,423,400,000	–	\$1,200,000
Telescopic sights	\$220,300,000	\$123,100,000	–	–
Decoys & game calls	\$204,300,000	\$55,700,000	\$55,400,000	\$400,000
Ammunition	\$1,413,800,000	\$510,700,000	\$533,900,000	\$62,100,000
Handloading equipment & components	\$228,900,000	\$134,000,000	\$9,700,000	\$51,400,000
Hunting dogs & associated costs	\$448,600,000	\$52,200,000	\$157,500,000	\$132,200,000
Other hunting equipment (cases, knives, etc.)	\$340,500,000	\$180,400,000	\$30,100,000	\$9,900,000
Camping equipment	\$567,400,000	\$411,400,000	\$18,400,000	\$25,300,000
Binoculars, field glasses, telescopes, etc.	\$187,500,000	\$122,200,000	\$1,500,000	\$2,900,000
Special hunting clothes, foul weather gear, boots, waders, etc.	\$629,900,000	\$307,100,000	\$133,800,000	\$30,100,000
Processing & taxidermy costs	\$684,900,000	\$480,700,000	–	\$200,000
Books and magazines devoted to hunting	\$193,900,000	\$102,900,000	\$36,200,000	\$9,900,000
Dues or contributions	\$209,500,000	\$78,000,000	\$43,200,000	\$33,400,000
Other support items (such as snowshoes, skis, equipment repair, etc.)	\$118,100,000	\$65,400,000	\$13,300,000	\$5,900,000
Bass boat	–	–	–	–
Other motor boat	\$800,000	\$100,000	\$400,000	–
Canoe or other non-motor boat	\$800,000	\$100,000	\$400,000	–
Boat motor, trailer, hitch, or accessories	\$200,000	\$80,000	–	\$24,000
Pick-up, camper, van, travel tent trailer, motor home, house trailer	\$3,274,500,000	\$2,427,600,000	\$28,300,000	\$14,100,000
Cabin	–	–	–	–
Off-road vehicle: trail bike, 4x4 vehicle, 4-wheeler, snowmobile, etc.	\$852,800,000	\$693,600,000	\$67,600,000	\$70,900,000
Other special equipment (ice chests, airplane, etc.)	\$47,900,000	\$21,900,000	\$9,400,000	–
Land owned primarily for hunting, 2016 expenses and payments	\$1,547,900,000	\$596,000,000	\$91,400,000	\$325,600,000
Land leased primarily for hunting, 2016 expenses and payments	\$1,350,700,000	\$1,111,500,000	\$24,700,000	\$10,200,000
Licenses	\$556,300,000	\$331,700,000	\$46,400,000	\$32,500,000
Tags, permits and other similar fees	\$90,400,000	\$44,200,000	\$14,900,000	\$8,500,000
Plantings related to hunting	\$165,400,000	\$94,700,000	\$5,500,000	\$5,700,000
TOTAL	\$27,059,000,000	\$15,721,800,000	\$2,923,600,000	\$1,800,600,000

Appendix 6
Loss of Hunters Negatively Impacts the Economy

SPOTLIGHT

**525,000
JOBS**

supported by hunting
is more than

**3x THE NUMBER OF
JOBS IN THE OIL AND GAS
EXTRACTION INDUSTRY**

in 2016⁸

BY THE NUMBERS:

The **\$5.3 BILLION** in federal taxes collected from hunting purchases could have provided social security benefits to nearly **325,000** retired workers in 2016.⁹

Hunters contributed **\$23.8 MILLION** a day in state, local and federal taxes—money that supports the operation of wildlife agencies and conservation efforts.

Spending by hunters generates **\$3.4 BILLION** in state and local taxes, which could pay the salaries of over **48,300** registered nurses or **53,700** police officers.¹⁰

⁷ The World Bank: <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/GDP.pdf>

⁸ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: <https://www.bls.gov/iag/tgs/iag211.htm#workforce>

⁹ Center on Budget Policy and Priorities: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/social-security/social-security-benefits-are-modest>

¹⁰ Bureau of Labor Statistics: <https://www.bls.gov/booh/>