July 7, 2014

Re: Please oppose S. 2363, the so-called “Bipartisan Sportsmen’s Act of 2014” in the Senate

Dear Senator:

On behalf of our more than 80 national, regional and local organizations, and our millions of members, we write to express our strong opposition to S. 2363, the so-called “Bipartisan Sportsmen’s Act of 2014” and the related Senate bills (S. 1996, S. 170, S. 847, S. 1335, S. 1634, S. 1660 and S. 1212). Our collective opposition to this legislation is not based on underlying questions of whether recreational fishing, hunting, or shooting are compatible with conservation of public lands and wildlife. Rather, we oppose this legislation because it
threatens the conservation of fish, wildlife, and habitats that benefit all Americans. While there are many adverse special interest provisions contained in the legislation, the following aspects of the bill clearly demonstrate why it must be opposed.

**Rollback of Public Lands Protection**

First, S. 2363 contains several alarming rollbacks of long-standing federal environmental and public land laws including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Wilderness Act, and the National Forest Management Act. In the process, it would reduce or eliminate important protections for America’s public lands that have been in place for decades.

In regards to NEPA, for example, the bill could exempt all decisions on and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Forest Service lands regarding trapping and recreational hunting, fishing, and shooting from compliance with NEPA by mandating that such lands be open to these activities. NEPA ensures that agencies assess and consider the impacts of their land-use decisions before those decisions are made. It also serves as an effective platform for the public to assess the environmental consequences of proposed agency actions and to weigh in on governmental decisions before they are finalized.

In addition, underlying changes to the Wilderness Act embedded in S. 2363 seek to overturn decades of Congressional protection for wilderness areas. For example, the bill would require lands managed by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, including wilderness areas, to be managed as “open unless closed” to recreational shooting which includes “sport, training, competition, or pastime whether formal or informal” in Wilderness. Wilderness has always been closed to competitive events and commercial enterprises by statute and regulation.

Moreover, the bill prioritizes hunting, trapping, recreational fishing, and recreational shooting in most Wildernesses by requiring that all federal land managers (except for lands managed by the National Park Service or the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service) facilitate the use of and access to lands under their control for these activities. The agencies could interpret that enhancing hunting, fishing and recreational shooting in Wilderness could allow management measures such as motorized use to artificially increase game or fish numbers. Such measures would be inconsistent with Wilderness and the Wilderness Act.

Further, section 108 of S. 2363 would significantly change current practices and open up all Wildernesses across the country to commercial filming activities and their attendant problems, thereby preventing federal land managers from protecting designated Wildernesses from commercial filming production. The language in this section that exempts “cameras or related equipment used for the purpose of commercial filming or similar projects” from the prohibitions on motorized and mechanized equipment in Wilderness could lead to calls to allow motorized access in Wilderness for commercial filming. Congress recognized that Wilderness can easily be damaged by commercialization. The Wilderness Act’s section 4(c) provides that except as specifically provided otherwise, “there shall be no commercial enterprise . . . within any wilderness area.” We are deeply concerned that making exceptions for commercial filming would lead to opening Wilderness to even more commercial enterprises.

Such changes are in direct conflict with the stated purpose of the Wilderness Act to establish areas “where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain,” and the Act’s fundamental mandate with respect to the management of wilderness areas that federal agencies preserve the wilderness character of these lands so that they are left “unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness.”

The legislation promotes the priorities of various special interests by making substantive policy changes to public land law. It prioritizes recreational shooting activities such as those found on target ranges. As defined, recreational shooting activities are unrelated to, and potentially at odds with, the unique natural resource values of the various federal land management systems on which they would occur.
Under the **National Forest Management Act**, forest managers manage for the resilience of our national forests so that both current and future generations can benefit from multiple uses of the land. In some cases, managers need the flexibility to stop certain actions to promote long-term use of the forest resources. Requiring that all Forest Service lands be “open unless closed” to hunting, trapping, fishing and shooting is one example of many where this legislation undercuts their ability to do that.

Appropriate management of our public lands plays a critical role in stewardship for biodiversity as well as for recreational opportunities. The natural resource management laws affected by this legislation help ensure well-managed public lands that provide habitat for biodiversity, and maintain healthy populations to help prevent the need for new listings of species under the Endangered Species Act. They work to ensure that our wildlife and public land resources thrive and that hunters, birders and anglers alike can enjoy them for generations to come. By weakening these important laws, the proposed legislation would significantly undermine these important public land values.

**Lead ammunition pollution**

Second, S. 2363 would remove the Environmental Protection Agency’s authority to regulate toxic lead or any other toxic substance used in ammunition or fishing equipment under the Toxic Substances Control Act. A nationwide ban on lead shot in migratory waterfowl hunting was adopted in 1991 after biologists estimated roughly two million ducks died each year from ingesting spent lead pellets. The hunting industry groups that want to prevent the EPA from regulating lead ammunition and fishing tackle are the same groups that protested the ban on lead shot for waterfowl hunting in 1991. Despite the doom-and-gloom rhetoric, hunters know two decades later that this was a good decision for waterfowl, and didn’t lead to the end of duck or goose hunting. A federal agency should be able to carry out its duties without uncalled for and unscientific laws impeding this process. Such decisions should be left to the discretion of federal agencies based solely on the best available science on the impacts of toxic substances such as lead. Congress should not tie the hands of professional scientists and prevent them from even evaluating or considering future policies to protect the public and the environment.

**Polar bears in peril**

Third, S. 2363 would allow the import of 41 sport-hunted polar bear trophies. This would be the latest in a series of import allowances that Congress has approved, and the cumulative effect is devastating to our most imperiled species. Despite having notice of the impending prohibition on import of polar bear trophies for sixteen months (between January 2007 and May 2008), a number of trophy hunters went forward with hunts anyway. In fact, the 41 individuals all hunted polar bears AFTER the Bush Administration proposed the species for listing as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, and all but one hunted more than a year after the listing was proposed. They were given repeated warnings from hunting organizations and government agencies that trophy imports would likely not be allowed as of the listing date, and that they were hunting at their own risk. If this behavior were rewarded through a congressional waiver, it could accelerate the pace of killing any species proposed for listing in the future, since hunters would believe they could get the trophies in even after the listing becomes final. Each new allowance may involve only a few animals, but the cumulative impacts of these waivers time and time again lead to more reckless trophy killing.

**Conclusion**

This bill is extreme and reckless. It would undermine decades of land management and planning and would topple the delicate balance between allowing for public use and the need to protect public resources. In regards to public land access for recreational hunting and fishing, it is also unnecessary. Hunting and fishing are already permitted on 85% of public lands. This bill’s proponents seek to solve a problem that does not exist, and the legislation they propose could in fact cause serious damage to America’s natural heritage.

Please oppose S. 2363, as well as any of the Senate bills that are companions to individual titles of this legislation – S. 1996, S. 170, S. 847, S. 1335, S. 1634, S. 1660 and S. 1212 – and oppose any effort to attach
this legislation to another bill. This legislation is bad for public lands and water resources, bad for fish and wildlife, and bad for the American people.

Sincerely,

Richard Patch
Vice President, Federal Affairs
The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Stephen Wells
Executive Director
Animal Legal Defense Fund

Sarah Stewart
President
Animals Are Sentient Beings

Adam Roberts
Chief Executive
Born Free USA

William Snape
Senior Counsel
Center for Biological Diversity

Colin O’Neil
Director of Government Affairs
Center for Food Safety

Lenny Siegel
Executive Director
Center for Public Environmental Oversight

Laura Nirenberg, Esq.
Founding Executive Director
Center for Wildlife Ethics, Inc.

Robin McClary
President
Citizens for the Preservation of Wildlife, Inc.

Janet Kessler
Co-Director
Coyote Coexistence

Leda Huta
Executive Director
Endangered Species Coalition

Benjamin Schreiber
Climate and Energy Program Director
Friends of the Earth
Marnie Gaede  
President  
Fund for Wild Nature  

Shelley Silbert  
Executive Director  
Great Old Broads for Wilderness  

Michael Markarian  
Chief Program & Policy Officer  
The Humane Society of the United States  

Susan Krebsbach, DVM  
Advocacy & Policy Division  
The Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association  

Robert Koons  
Executive Director  
The Humane Society Wildlife Land Trust  

Anja Heister  
Director, Wild and Free Habitats  
In Defense of Animals  

Debbie Friedman  
Co-Chair  
MOMS Advocating Sustainability  

Katherine McGill  
Director  
National Urban Wildlife Coalition  

Brooks Fahy  
Executive Director  
Predator Defense  

Jean Barnes  
Director  
Primate Freedom Project, Inc.  

Camilla H. Fox  
Executive Director  
Project Coyote  

Karen Schambach  
California Field Director  
Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility  

Lisa Owens Viani  
Director  
Raptors Are The Solution
David Parsons
Wildlife Biologist
The Rewilding Institute

Eric Uram
Executive Director
Safe Minds

Kerry Kriger
Executive Director
SAVE THE FROGS!

Lynn Carroll
Senior Scientist
TEDX, The Endocrine Disruption Exchange

Kevin Proescholdt
Conservation Director
Wilderness Watch

Kimberly Poisson
Executive Director
A2 Raptor Rescue

Steve and Wendy Hall
Directors
Adirondack Wildlife Refuge & Rehab Center

Gregory J. Harber
Chairman, Conservation Committee
Alabama Ornithological Society

Jeff Miller
Director
Alameda Creek Alliance

Susan Russell
Wildlife Policy Director
Animal Protection League of New Jersey

Gail Walter
President
Audubon Society of Kalamazoo

Michael J. Bartlett
President
Audubon Society of New Hampshire
Scott Ford  
DVM, DABVP-Avian Veterinarian  
Avian Specialty Veterinary Services

Donnie Dann  
Advocacy Chair  
Bird Conservation Network

Louise Shimmel  
Executive Director  
Cascades Raptor Center

Jerry Maynard  
President  
Chocolay Raptor Center

Julie Lewin  
President  
Connecticut Council for Humane Education

Ron Kagan  
Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer  
Detroit Zoological Society

Peter J. McKosky  
Founder  
Empty Cages Collective

Amy Trainer  
Executive Director  
Environmental Action Committee of West Marin

Natalynne DeLapp  
Executive Director  
Environmental Protection Information Center

Christopher Justice  
Executive Director  
Footloose Montana

Susan Krause  
President  
Four Harbors Audubon Society

Ruth Brooks  
President and Founder  
Freedom Center for Wildlife

Gary Macfarlane  
Ecosystem Defense Director
Friends of the Clearwater

Larry Winslett
President
Friends of Georgia

Melody Paris
President
Georgia Animal Rights and Protection

Cindy Margulis
Executive Director
Golden Gate Audubon Society

Allen Fish
Director
Golden Gate Raptor Observatory

David Karopkin
Founder & Director
GooseWatch NYC

Robin McClary
President
GooseWatch VA

Heather Dove
President
Great Salt Lake Audubon Society

Ernie Reed
Council Chair
Heartwood

Dr. Bill Hilton, Jr.
Executive Director
Hilton Pond Center for Piedmont Natural History

Stan Kotala
Conservation Chair
Juniata Valley Audubon

Louise Kane, JD
Founder
Justice for Wolves

Tom Gauron
President
Kittitas Audubon Society
John Di Leonardo
President
Long Island Orchestrating for Nature

Joan Easley
President
Loon Lake Loon Association

Harry Vogel
Senior Biologist/Executive Director
Loon Preservation Committee

Jeff Kuyper
Executive Director
Los Padres ForestWatch

Kurt R. Schwarz
Conservation Chair
Maryland Ornithological Society

Wendy Malmid
Program Chairperson
Monmouth County Audubon Society

Chris Hartzell
Vice President
Monterey Audubon Society

Susan Harvey
President
North County Watch

Wally Sykes
Co-Founder
Northeast Oregon Ecosystems

Larry Boersma
CEO
Preserve Our Wildlife

Amanda Starbuck
Energy Finance Program Director
Rainforest Action Network

Tim Keating
Executive Director
Rainforest Relief

Lori Andresen
Board President
Save Our Sky Blue Waters
Matthew Schwartz  
Executive Director  
South Florida Wildlands Association

Ron Hoff  
President  
Tennessee Ornithological Society

Wendy Perrone  
Executive Director  
Three Rivers Avian Center

Todd Steiner  
Executive Director  
Turtle Island Restoration Network

Mike Splain  
Executive Director  
Ventana Wilderness Alliance

Buffalo Bruce  
Staff Ecologist  
Western Nebraska Resources Council

Kirk Robinson  
Executive Director  
Western Wildlife Conservancy

Gary Landers  
President  
Wild Wings Raptor Rehabilitation

Karen Wilson  
Executive Director  
WildCare

Buz Marthaler  
Chairman, Board of Directors  
Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Northern Utah

Matthew Koehler  
Executive Director  
WildWest Institute

Rebecca Lessard  
Executive Director  
Wings of Wonder

John Carter  
Manager  
Yellowstone to Uintas Connection
Carroll Muffett  
President & CEO  
Center for International Environmental Law

Lesley Sampson  
Founding Director  
Coyote Watch Canada

Tracy Coppola  
Campaigns Officer  
International Fund for Animal Welfare

Kai Williams  
Executive Director  
The International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council