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WMI Outdoor News Bulletin

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Hunting/conservation organizations line up to urge expanded use of Coop Units:

Nearly 30 hunting/conservation organizations have urged Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne to make greater use of the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit (CFWRU) research and training partnership in carrying out cooperative conservation efforts to meet this nation's pressing future natural resource challenges, reports the Wildlife Management Institute (WMI).

Each of the 40 CFWRUs, in 38 states, is a true federal/state/university/private partnership among the U.S. Geological Survey, a state natural resource agency, a host university and WMI. The CFWRUs build on these partner contributions to leverage more than three dollars for every one dollar appropriated to the program by Congress.

The hunting/conservation organizations are the Archery Trade Association, Bear Trust International, Boone and Crockett Club, Bowhunting Preservation Alliance, The Campfire Club of America, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, Dallas Safari Club, Delta Waterfowl Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, Houston Safari Club, Izaak Walton League of America, National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses, National Trapper's Association, National Wild Turkey Federation,

North American Grouse Partnership, Orion-The Hunters Institute, Pope and Young Club, Quality Deer Management Association, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Ruffed Grouse Society, Safari Club International, Sand County Foundation, Texas Wildlife Association, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Wildlife Forever, The Wildlife Society, and Wildlife Management Institute.

In a letter to Interior Secretary Kempthorne, the organizations collectively stressed that the CFWRUs across the country are crucial to addressing successfully the natural resource management challenges posed by energy development needs, invasive species, infectious diseases, wildfire and increased demand for limited water resources. They argued that solving these problems and others requires the CFWRU's management-oriented, community-based approach to research, which relies on interdisciplinary efforts and fosters collaboration and accountability.

According to the organizations, the nation's management challenges also include replacing the unprecedented number of natural resource professionals who will be retiring over the next 10 years. The groups maintained that the CFWRUs are well positioned to meet this need with an established record of training new natural resource professionals who are management-oriented, well-versed in science, grounded in state and federal agency experience, and able to assist private landowners and other members of the public.

To begin meeting these high priority research and training needs, the organizations asked Secretary Kempthorne to establish a competitive, matching fund program within existing CFWRU legislative authority that would make available up to $20 million annually in new funds beyond base operational costs. These new funds would support future cooperative research efforts in key areas and essential training of new natural resource professionals to replace the large number who will retire within the next decade.

In order to fill current scientist vacancies, restore seriously eroded operational funds for each CFWRU, and enhance national program coordination, the groups stressed that the Interior Department budget request for the CFWRUs must increase approximately $5 million above the fiscal year 2007 funding level. This funding would restore necessary capacity in the CFWRU program for it to meet the nation's research and training needs, and it would ensure that the Interior Department provides the federal scientist staffing agreed to with partners so that the return on their continuing investment in the CFWRUs is realized and fully leveraged. Without an infusion of funds, nearly a quarter of all CFWRU scientist positions (24) will need to be vacant by the end of Fiscal Year 2007.

The recommendations by the hunting/conservation groups would implement key provisions of the National Cooperators' Coalition (NCC) Vision and Strategies for the Future of the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit System. The NCC is an alliance of nearly 70 nonfederal CFWRU program cooperators and other supporters of the CFWRU program. Its members include state wildlife agencies, universities and nongovernmental organizations. The mission of the NCC is to build a stronger and more coordinated base of support to serve research, education, and technical assistance needs of the nonfederal CFWRU program cooperators.

The organizations' letter to Secretary Kempthorne and the NCC Vision and Strategies for the Future of the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit System may be obtained by at www.wildlifemanagementinstitute.org/pages/notices.html (rpd)

Suspected culprit identified in CWD transmission:

Recent research at Colorado State University (CSU) and published in the journal Science (vol. 314: 133-136) suggests that chronic wasting disease (CWD) can be spread from one animal to another through their saliva, reports the Wildlife Management Institute.

CWD is a neurological disease of cervids (deer) that belongs to a family of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies, or prion diseases. The disease attacks the brains of infected deer, elk and moose, causing the animals to become emaciated, display abnormal behavior, lose bodily function and die. There is no evidence that the disease is linked to any neurological disease that affects humans. At present, the disease has been found in 14 states and 2 Canadian provinces.

The mode of CWD transmission among animals has been a matter of conjecture. Its transmission is unusual because, unlike its very hard-to-spread, pathogenic relatives, it seems to spread fairly readily from animal to animal. Other body fluids, such as blood and urine, have been suspected. In fact, blood has been known to transmit other prion diseases. However, the seemingly easy transmission of CWD prompted speculation that saliva is a key vector. Normal cervid behaviors of nuzzling or grooming, especially during breeding season, would facilitate transmission through saliva.

The recent research was done with tame, tractable white-tailed deer fawns hand-raised in Georgia, away from any known source of CWD. Use of tame fawns allowed the researchers to handle the animals safely and easily in order to expose them to saliva, blood, urine, feces, and injected or orally administered brain tissue from infected free-ranging or captive Colorado mule deer that were CWD positive. The saliva was squirted into the mouths of the test deer.

The exposed deer were housed in a specialized lab for up to 18 months. Biopsies of tonsil tissue were taken periodically during that time period, to look for presence of CWD prion. At the end of the study, brains from the study animals were autopsied. All three of the saliva-exposed deer demonstrated symptoms of CWD, as did three deer given a single transfusion of blood from a CWD-infected deer. The three deer exposed to urine and feces, and the two control deer showed no symptoms.

The researchers cautioned that these results did not rule out urine and blood sources, because of the small number of test animals.

These CWD-positive results are significant and improve understanding of how the disease spreads. It has been known for some time that, even if infected deer are removed

from a pasture, newly introduced deer can become infected with the disease. In latter stages of CWD, an infected animal demonstrates excessive drooling and drinking of water. Deposits of saliva could be a significant source of disease contamination and later transmission.

A logical next step in CWD research will be to study how infectious prions contaminate the environment.

To learn more about CWD please see the CWD Alliance website at www.cwd-info.org/index.php. (lhc)

Prairie Grouse Management Plan making progress:

In 2005, the North American Grouse Partnership secured a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grant to develop grassland conservation plans for greater and lesser prairie chickens and sharp-tailed grouse-flagship species of prairie ecosystems and conservation planning. These grassland plans feature an ecosystem diversity approach to identify areas of the landscape on which to focus quality and quantity grassland habitat management efforts and to develop monitoring strategies to determine changes in prairie grouse populations. These plans also will benefit a host of other native species that depend on healthy grasslands. A composite draft management plan is nearing completion, reports the Wildlife Management Institute.

Prairie grouse are charismatic species of the Great Plains. They require expansive and often complex habitat, thus making them excellent indicators of ecosystem integrity at landscape scale. Grassland habitat extent and quality have declined drastically from historic conditions on the Great Plains due to a variety of causes that include conversion to cropland, woody encroachment, energy development and urban sprawl, all of which potentially have significant impacts on species distribution and abundance.

Jon Haufler of the Ecosystem Management Research Institute (EMRI) is evaluating 38 Major Land and Resource Areas (MLRA) delineated by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and based on geoclimatic conditions. For each MLRA, Haufler has classified historical ecosystem diversity. By comparing historical conditions with current land-use information, coupled with knowledge of species abundance, areas for implementation of conservation efforts are being targeted.

Also, the overall plan will regionalize grassland conservation goals according to Bird Conservation Regions (BCR) identified by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative.

This planning effort is being coordinated by Bill Vodehnal (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission) along with steering committee members Rick Baydack (University of Manitoba), Dawn Davis (New Mexico Department of Game and Fish), Jon Haufler

(EMRI), Rob Manes (The Nature Conservancy-Kansas), Stephanie Manes (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), Jim Mosher (North American Grouse Partnership), Steve Riley (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission) and Heather Whitlaw (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department).

The steering committee's goal is to have a draft Prairie Grouse Management Plan completed by the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in March 2007, with a final plan to be approved at the fall meeting of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. When implemented, the plan will guide essential coordination between states and provinces for projects that include research and landscape-level habitat restoration. For more information, contact Bill Vodehnal at 402-684-2921 or bill.vodehnal@ngpc.ne.gov

Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act is reauthorized:

On October 12, President Bush signed the Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act of 2006 (S. 2430) into law, reports the Wildlife Management Institute. The bill was co-sponsored in the Senate by Mike Dewine (OH) and Carl Levin (MI) and in the House by Dale Kildee (MI) and Mark Kirk (IL). As reported in the August issue of this newsletter, S. 2430 doubles the existing authorization for fish and wildlife management activities in the Great Lakes states from $8 million to $16 million. Actual funding levels will be determined by Congress later this year.

The measure was first enacted in 1990 and reauthorized in 1998. The 2006 reauthorization places new emphasis on terrestrial wildlife projects, whereas the previous Acts were primarily devoted to fisheries. For example, the current bill shifts responsibility for coordinating selection of grant proposals from the Council of Lake Committees (comprised of fisheries heads of state wildlife agencies that border the Great Lakes and representatives from the tribal groups that have management authority via treaties) to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), and it specifies that at least one of the members of the new grant-selection committee must have wildlife expertise. This likely will result in more balanced funding between terrestrial and aquatic projects.

S. 2430 also reauthorizes the existing state and tribal grant program and provides new authority for the Service to undertake regional restoration projects. In addition, it directs the Service to create and maintain a website to document actions taken as a result of the Act. Reauthorization of this program was one of the recommendations in the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy Report, which was prepared by a partnership of officials from federal, state and local governments, tribes, and other stakeholders in the region.

For additional information on the Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act reauthorization and the Great Lakes restoration and protection strategy, contact Jane West, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 3, at jane_west@fws.gov. (pmr)

Worth reading:

Who among us hasn't yearned to live a carefree, self-sufficient life in the wilderness, far from traffic, televangelism, election blather, cell phones, Paris Hilton updates and rap music, among other daily inflictions here in dense America? Who among us hasn't thought wistfully of escaping to the frontier, any frontier, to hunt, fish, trap, gather and generally be organic and at peace? Who among us hasn't decided to do all that maybe next year?

Heimo Korth did it 30 years ago. And he still is doing what many have thought and wished they could, and what only a few have actually tried, most of who failed rather miserably or tragically. A one-time barfly in native Wisconsin, Heimo lives, with his family, more remotely in Alaska than anyone else. The Final Frontiersman (2004) by James Campbell documents Heimo's fascinating journey and metamorphosis from the Midwest to a cabin on the Coleen River in northeastern Alaska. It does more than that. It affords the reader a look into the necessary mindset, personality, skills and privations attendant to living on a subsistence basis far from the madding crowd. Its 303 pages tell of the unique dimensions of Alaska and of the Alaskan character-economic, social, cultural and meteorological. It gives considerable pause to the dreamers among us-wannabe "white Indians" (John McPhee)-who think they can cut the vastness, isolation, Diptera, temperature, myriad dangers and unforgiveness of true wilderness. And it acknowledges that bush life for Native and immigrant alike is predicated on pragmatism and a litany of axioms, e.g., dress in layers, beware the overflow, stay dry, drink lots of water, keep busy, don't overexert, avoid dark ice, don't take unnecessary chances and, again, stay dry.

James Campbell is Heimo Korth's cousin-a distant first cousin geographically and by 27 years of separation prior to their meeting in 2002. To make the reacquaintance happen, and to learn and draft his relative's story, he spent time with an initially reluctant Heimo at his main cabin in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (by rare permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), reaching the place courtesy of a good bush pilot and good weather. In fact, the author stayed in a tent near the cabin where trapper Heimo resided with his wife Edna and two daughters, who considered their cheechako guest in the yard to be a suitable first line of defense against possible marauding bears.

Campbell witnessed the foresight, strength, familial bonds, attitude, and caution that has kept his surprisingly affable cousin from turning back-nay, racing back-to indoor plumbing, grocery stores, cable television, processed sugar and other of the prevailing seductions and softenings of civilization. That is not to say that Heimo is an ascetic or that he thrives on reclusion in what Robert Service called "the great alone." To the contrary, Heimo is quite social, admitting that he needs people and because "nobody is a wolverine." Heimo, as Campbell reveals, is a man of fierce determinism, stamina, simple tastes, "emotional sturdiness," confidence in his self-reliance and personable nature-Huck Finn with years added and romantic notions chiseled away. Those qualities lent themselves to acceptance by the Natives, sourdoughs and bush rats who helped him when he first

broached the Last Frontier. The "Alaska Kid" proved tenacious and lucky-requisites of sustained human life on the taiga.

Heimo's luck included his survival of such axiom-testing experiences as being stalked by a polar bear, being in an Eskimo boat harpooning Aghvook (bowhead whale), being chased by a cold war Russian coast guard boat when hunting Au-vuq (walrus) unwittingly close to Siberia, and being dunked by capsized boats, crumbling cutbanks and sweeper trees.

His best luck, however, was winning the heart of Edna, a Yupik Eskimo. Asking her father for her hand in marriage was a bit more problematic. Not for $10 million, Heimo was told. Fortunately, the suitor's good intentions, persistence and 25 grayling, some moose meat, a moose stomach and a wolverine skin overcame his soon-to-be father-in-law's resolve. In Edna, he found a mate willing to help cut, hew and shovel a life out of Alaska's interior-a land formerly and occupied mainly, periodically and for millennia by the G'wichen, peripatetic Athabaskan "people of the caribou," the oldest culture in Alaska.

Very sadly, there was a limit to Heimo's luck.

On the other hand, my luck was finding this book. It is mainly about Heimo Korth, but it also is about the Last Frontier's recent past, its awkwardly dynamic present and wherein fits someone living gratefully the anachronistic life of a wilderness trapper-a G'wichen life. James Campbell's first book is not adventure story, drama or romance. It is a magnificently crafted, spellbinding documentary, and my favorite Alaska book since McPhee s Coming Into the Country (1977).

The Final Frontiersman was published by Atria Books; it lists for $25.00.

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