

HEARING ON H.R. 2760, DISABLED SPORTSMEN'S ACCESS ACT

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION,
WILDLIFE AND OCEANS
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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HEARING ON H.R. 2760, DISABLED SPORTSMEN'S ACCESS ACT

THURSDAY, MAY 14, 1998

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISH-
ERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS, COM-
MITTEE ON RESOURCES, *Washington, DC.*

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:04 a.m., in room 1324 Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Jim Saxton (chairman of the Subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. SAXTON. Let me make an announcement, if I may. We've just been called for a vote and I have to leave here at 11 a.m.

Mr. Cunningham, do you want to try to get your statement in before we go to vote?

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. Yes.

Mr. SAXTON. OK. And let me ask unanimous consent that Mr. Pallone's statement and my statement be entered into the record. [The prepared statement of Mr. Saxton follows:]

STATEMENT OF HON. JIM SAXTON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE
OF NEW JERSEY

Good morning. The purpose of today's hearing is to discuss H.R. 2760, the Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act.

By way of background, the Department of Defense (DOD) controls nearly 30 million acres of valuable fish and wildlife habitat at approximately 900 military installations nationwide. Enacted by Congress in 1960, the Sikes Act provides a mechanism for cooperative wildlife management on these military installations.

Most military installations offer numerous outdoor recreational programs that provide excellent opportunities for both military and civilian sportsmen. However, there is no system-wide policy for making these lands available and accessible to disabled veterans or civilians with disabilities.

Today, the Quantico Marine Base, which is about 30 miles west of Washington, DC, has a "fully integrated program for disabled veterans from the first day of bow season to the last day of gun season." Quantico is a model for other military installations throughout the United States.

H.R. 2760, an amendment to the Sikes Act, would encourage the Department of Defense to provide improved access for disabled individuals, where appropriate and within the military mission. Furthermore, H.R. 2760 allows the Department to accept donations of private money, material and volunteers for the construction of facilities accessible to sportsmen with disabilities.

The goal of this proposal is to increase access to military installations for hunting, fishing, boating and other outdoor activities for the disabled. H.R. 2760 has been endorsed by a number of groups including: Disabled American Veterans, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Safari Club International, Wheeling Sportsmen of America, and the Wildlife Management Institute.

I am looking forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses today.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Pallone follows:]

STATEMENT OF HON. FRANK PALLONE, JR., A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM
THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing today on the Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act, an amendment to the Sikes Act.

The Sikes Act authorizes the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of the Interior, in coordination with the States, to carry out cooperative fish and wildlife conservation and management efforts on DOD property. This is a very important statute, in that the Department of Defense happens to control nearly 300 million acres of fish and wildlife habitat.

The Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act amends the Sikes Act to allow DOD to facilitate improved access to these properties for disabled individuals. In this way, the legislation that we are considering today could improve access to DOD property for all disabled individuals alike—including disabled veterans, military dependents with disabilities, and others with disabilities—for the purposes of hunting, fishing, and other outdoor activities on military lands. The facilitation of these activities would be carried out using donations of funding, materials and labor—no Federal funding is authorized in the bill.

Under the bill, the facilitation of these recreational opportunities for persons with disabilities must be conducted in a manner "consistent with the primary military mission of the installations" and "without substantial modification to the natural environment." The interpretation of this last phrase is something that I am interested in hearing about from our witnesses here today.

Other than that, I think this bill is fairly straightforward and should be without controversy.

I welcome today's witnesses, and I look forward to hearing their testimony.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Young follows:]

STATEMENT OF HON. DON YOUNG, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE
OF ALASKA

As a cosponsor of H.R. 2760, I am pleased that we are having this Subcommittee hearing today on the Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act.

This legislation, which would amend the Sikes Act, is an innovative way to create opportunities for disabled Americans to hunt and fish. It would encourage the Department of Defense (DOD) to work with local volunteers to build hunting blinds and fishing piers that can be used by disabled persons on some of the 30 million acres under DOD's jurisdiction.

While not limited to retired military personnel, there are some 78,000 veterans in this Nation who are confined to wheelchairs with spinal cord injuries. Five years ago, Lt. Col. Lewis Deal, with the support of his commanding officer, began a program at the Quantico Marine Base to build four handicap-accessible deer stands. This program has been a tremendous success and it is a model for the rest of the 900 U.S. military installations.

The goal of H.R. 2760 is to build upon the success of the Quantico experience and to expand, where appropriate, additional opportunities for hunting, fishing, and other wildlife-dependent activities. Under the terms of this measure, the Department would be able to accept donations of private money, materials, and volunteer time to facilitate the construction of facilities accessible to sportsmen with disabilities.

This is an excellent proposal and I compliment our colleague, Duke Cunningham, for introducing this fine bill, Lt. Col. Lewis Deal for his compassion for disabled sportsmen, and the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus for championing this important cause. It is not surprising that this bill is supported by a wide range of groups including the Disabled American Veterans, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Safari Club International, Wheeling Sportsmen of America, and the Wildlife Management Institute.

Finally, I look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses. In particular, I am pleased that the Subcommittee will hear from Lt. Col. Larry Gerlach. Col. Gerlach was the Commander of the Marine Barracks in Lebanon when it was demolished by an insane terrorist on October 23, 1983. This Nation owes a great debt of gratitude to Col. Gerlach and all of the Marines who were in that barracks on that terrible day. His support for this legislation alone is a reason to move it forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Cunningham, I believe you are the sponsor of this bill and perhaps you would like to begin.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SAXTON. Welcome aboard.

STATEMENT OF HON. RANDY "DUKE" CUNNINGHAM, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. Thank you, Jim. We'd like to, all of us sponsoring this bill—and you can see behind us the number of people we have—and I'd just like to submit this for the record, instead of going through this whole thing. Disabled sportsmen have had other disadvantages besides personal ones in their life, and that's to participate in activities that most of you and I are able to do.

This program is modeled on a program at Quantico started by Lieutenant Colonel Lewis Deal, who will testify in just a minute. We've got fishing piers, we've got hunting areas, we've got things that disabled sportsmen can utilize and improve the quality of their own lives. I can't imagine being stuck disabled for the rest of my life. And if I had any opportunity to participate in some of the normal functions of society, I think that that would be good.

This is a system which is very successful. It's a good idea and we've got private individuals to invest. I was just talking to the Colonel and we're trying to get the NFL to donate some of the lifts for us in different areas. And with that, I'd like your consideration and your help. Any changes that any of you on either side of the aisle have, we will be more than willing to look at those. But we think it's a pretty good program as is and we ask for your support.

Instead of going through this whole thing, for the time, I will just submit for the record, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Cunningham follows:]

STATEMENT OF HON. RANDY "DUKE" CUNNINGHAM, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Chairman Saxton, members of the Committee, thank you for holding this hearing on the Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act, H.R. 2760. I appreciate the opportunity to bring this legislation before you today.

I introduced this legislation to expand opportunities for sportsmen with disabilities to hunt and fish on Department of Defense facilities. In addition, this legislation will allow the Department to work with private organizations to construct facilities and operate programs specifically for sportsmen with disabilities.

Background

This legislation is based on a program run at nearby Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia. This program, created by Lt. Col. Lewis Deal, who will testify later in this hearing, is one of the nation's most successful disabled hunting programs. With the help of volunteers and donated materials, Col. Deal has built eight permanent disabled accessible hunting blinds.

In addition, Quantico is constructing a fishing pier which will be accessible for people with disabilities. This pier is designed by the Paralyzed Veterans of America and is a model for everyone in America to use.

Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act

The legislation before you today builds upon this successful program by encouraging the Department of Defense to provide improved access for disabled individuals, when appropriate and within the military mission. I want to stress that this bill protects the primary purpose of our nation's military, the defense of our nation. Nothing in this legislation is intended to hinder the ability of the nation's fighting forces.

However, this legislation is intended to expand the opportunities which our military installations offer for outdoor recreational activities. These programs and opportunities are available in many cases to both civilian and military personnel. However, there has never been a concentrated effort to provide access for people

with disabilities. This bill is intended to change that by providing improved access for sportsmen with disabilities.

Donations

The second component of this legislation will allow the Department of Defense to accept donations of money, material and volunteers for the construction of the facilities necessary to accommodate sportsmen with disabilities. This will allow the Department to help sportsmen with disabilities hunt and fish at no additional cost to the Federal Government.

Support

This legislation is strongly supported by Paralyzed Veterans of America, Disabled American Veterans, The Retired Officers Association, Wheeling Sportsmen of America, Pioneers for the American Dream, Safari Club International, Wildlife Legislative Fund of America, and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

This bill is also supported by Haas Outdoors Inc., the manufacturer of Mossy Oak camouflage. President Toxey Haas says, "The access to military lands for the purposes of hunting and fishing that H.R. 2760 provides will go a long way toward the rehabilitation of our veterans who have given so much for us all."

The Archery Manufacturers and Merchants Organization, President Dick Lattimer, says "a great number of paralyzed vets enjoy hunting with bow and arrow, and for that reason I would like to help you in whatever way I can."

Buckmasters Magazine supports this bill by saying, "this important legislation will create new opportunities for the disabled, exercising their God-given rights to hunt and fish and enjoy the outdoors."

The common theme in all of these letters of support is the importance of outdoor recreation in improving people's quality of life. This legislation can provide that benefit to people who are too often denied access to our nation's precious wildlife and natural beauty.

Action

Mr. Chairman, I know that you are aware that this legislation is included in the fiscal year 1999 Defense Authorization legislation (H.R. 3616), which was reported by the House National Security Committee on Wednesday, May 6, 1998. I hope that this Committee of jurisdiction will take prompt action to favorably pass this legislation.

Closing

Mr. Chairman, America has always provided for its veterans. This legislation lets us give a little back to our veterans who have given so much.

Thank you.

Mr. SAXTON. The chances for great success for your bill have been enhanced by the brevity of your statement.

Mr. Peterson.

STATEMENT OF HON. COLLIN PETERSON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

Mr. PETERSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, would just ask that, without objection, my statement be made a part of the record. In Minnesota at Camp Ripley, a National Guard camp that trains people from all over the United States, we have a hunt that's been going on for some time where we bring disabled people in for a deer hunt. The veterans' groups have become involved, and they hunt with shotguns and some handguns. It's very successful and something that's really appreciated by the disabled veterans and others in our area and I think it's something that we ought to do all over the country.

So here we have an example of something that works and this bill is a good way to expand it to other places in the country and we'd appreciate your support.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Peterson follows:]

STATEMENT OF HON. COLLIN C. PETERSON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM
THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

I would first like to thank Chairman Saxton and the members of this Committee for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today. I strongly support this legislation which encourages the Department of Defense to provide improved access for disabled veterans on military installations for hunting, fishing, boating and other outdoor activities. The goal of this legislation is to enable the Department of Defense to accept private donations, material and volunteers for the construction of facilities accessible to sportsmen with disabilities, and to provide access to military installations through various recreational programs.

A good example of the type of program which I believe can be applied nationwide happens in Minnesota—at Camp Ripley. The entire Camp Ripley is a state game refuge. However, this past October, Camp Ripley hosted close to 40 disabled veterans who used both shotguns and in some cases, handguns, to hunt white tail deer for three days. This is a great program which allows veterans to enjoy nature by getting back into the woods again. The deer hunt has become very popular and has been drawing more and more participants every year. In fact, the number of disabled veterans who want to participate in the hunt has been growing rapidly since the program began about five years ago. The entire hunt is planned so as not to interrupt any training exercises which occur at Camp Ripley. The program is not difficult to implement and is also administered in a safety conscious manner—especially with the help of volunteers who assist each veteran one-on-one during the hunt.

I believe that the annual white tail deer hunt at Camp Ripley, Minnesota is a highly successful program which deserves to be used as an example of what can be done across the country at different military installations. I support The Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act as a means of facilitating these types of programs nationwide.

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you very much. Mr. Chambliss.

**STATEMENT OF HON. SAXBY CHAMBLISS, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF GEORGIA**

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, have a prepared statement for the record that I think has already been submitted, and I want to just take the opportunity to thank Duke Cunningham for introducing this legislation. I know Collin feels the same way I do. It's one of the proud moments that we've had the opportunity to serve in Congress on with respect to cosponsoring a piece of legislation like this.

I've been very fortunate in my lifetime in the area where I live in south Georgia to be able to hunt and fish with my son on a regular basis, and for these folks to have more of an opportunity to do this in other areas of the country, I think is one of the best possible things that we can do with respect to the disabled folks in this country. And it's one of the best utilizations of public lands that we can make.

I think the idea is just a terrific idea and I think deserves the strong support of this Committee. Of course, you and I serve on the National Security Committee together. This legislation is a part of our Defense Authorization bill that we passed in committee last week and will be going to the floor next week.

You were a strong proponent of it in the National Security Committee, and I know you will see to its swift passage in this Subcommittee and Full Committee, and we thank you for your reception of us this morning.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Chambliss follows:]

STATEMENT OF HON. SAXBY CHAMBLISS, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE
STATE OF GEORGIA

Thank you Chairman Saxton and Members of the Committee for holding this hearing today. I am pleased to have the opportunity to join my colleague Representative Duke Cunningham and thank him for introducing the bill, H.R. 2760 The Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act. As an original co-sponsor of the legislation and the vice chairman of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus, I strongly support this bill. Mr. Chairman, as a member of the House National Security Committee along with you, I am pleased that we included the Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act in last week's fiscal year 1999 Department of Defense Authorization Bill.

All my life I have enjoyed hunting and fishing. Fortunately, my son and I have the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors together—whether it's quail hunting in south Georgia, pheasant hunting together in the midwest or fishing in one of our favorite ponds scattered across our state. Indeed, these times are priceless for a father and son.

This legislation ensures that every father and son, even if they are disabled will have the same opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors in a way that is so satisfying.

As Mr. Cunningham has said, this legislation expands opportunities for sportsmen with disabilities to hunt and fish on Department of Defense facilities. This bill will also allow the Department to work with private organizations to construct facilities and operate programs specifically for sportsmen with disabilities.

Based on the disabled hunting and fishing program run at nearby Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia, this legislation is a common-sense way to provide opportunities for these activities to individuals across America.

While I do not want to restate any of the details of the legislation that my colleague Mr. Cunningham has just presented, I do want to share with you the fact that this legislation has broad support from veterans groups, organizations representing the disabled and from a litany of outdoors and hunting and fishing groups.

Again, I thank you Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing today. It is a non-partisan issue that ensures we provide opportunities to those who too often do not have the chance to participate in hunting and fishing activities. Mr. Chairman, it is my hope that this hearing today by your Subcommittee is an indicator that the House Resources Committee will take prompt action on favorably passing this bill. I commend my colleague Mr. Cunningham and look forward to hearing the testimony of other panelists today.

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you very much. And let me just say that this bill is moving on two tracks, and the reason that it is moving on two tracks is because you three have been such great proponents for it. And we appreciate that, and I am sure that either through the free-standing bill that we are dealing with today or through the Defense Authorization bill, that within a few months, this will become a law. And it's because of your great work that we are in the position that we are, so thank you very much for your great effort.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. And the service chiefs—I have talked to all of them—support this, too.

Mr. SAXTON. Very good. Thank you very much. We will break now for our vote. When we get back, we will proceed with panel No. 2, Sherri Goodman, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, and Lieutenant Colonel Lewis Deal, Executive Officer, Weapons Training Battalion, from Quantico. We appreciate you being with us as well, so while we are gone, you can get yourselves set up there.

Prime Minister Netanyahu is here and some of us have been invited to meet with him at 11 o'clock, so hopefully, we will be able to conclude this so that we don't have to take a break for that and then come back. So I will rush over and be back within 5 or 10 minutes. Thank you very much.

[Recess.]

Mr. SAXTON. I apologize for that. And I wouldn't be surprised if there will be some more votes here in the next half hour or so, but we will persevere.

Sherri Goodman and Col. Deal, welcome aboard. We are anxious to hear your testimonies, so you may proceed.

STATEMENT OF SHERRI W. GOODMAN, DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Ms. GOODMAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is a pleasure to be here today to testify on behalf of the Department of Defense. I am very pleased to report to you that we have worked with Congressman Cunningham's staff to make some minor, but necessary, revisions to the bill as introduced, and I am now pleased to convey to you the Department's full support for this Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act.

I am also very pleased to have with me on this panel, Lieutenant Colonel Deal, whose enthusiastic support for the cause of the disabled sportsmen has made this bill possible. Col. Deal has personally been responsible for the success of the Disabled Sportsmen's Program at Marine Corps Base, Quantico.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, we manage about 25 million acres of land across the United States, which makes the Department of Defense the third largest land management department in the country. Our lands are managed first and foremost to provide for the training and testing necessary to maintain and enhance military readiness. DOD lands support the testing of new weapons systems, munitions, deployment of weapons systems, and combat training exercises.

Our lands are also rich in various natural resources and we have an obligation to protect these resources for future generations. We take pride in our stewardship program and we have policies in place to conserve our natural and cultural resources for future generations.

Although our primary conservation focus is mission support, DOD manages its lands for multiple uses, including outdoor recreation, such as hunting, fishing, commercial forestry and agriculture programs, and threatened and endangered species management.

A major component of our conservation program at many DOD installations is its natural resources-based outdoor recreation program. By offering the opportunity to hunt, fish, hike, bird watch, and engage in other outdoor activities, our conservation managers enhance the quality of life for our installation residents and those who reside in the vicinity of our installation. We've offered these programs for many years and have made them available whenever military needs and sound management practices allow.

Concerning access for disabled sportsmen, we are subject to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Furthermore, many bases have integrated special outdoor recreation programs for the disabled into their natural resources programs.

They have also constructed special facilities to encourage hunting, fishing and other outdoor uses of our natural resources by disabled persons. But there is no doubt that indeed we can do more, and that's why we support the legislation today.

I'd like to give you just a few examples of where our installations are already providing access, and then I'd like to ask Lieutenant Colonel Deal to tell his own special story about Quantico.

I am going to proceed very quickly here, Mr. Chairman. We have programs at Eglin Air Force Base that have provided special opportunities. At Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, there is a fishing pier designed specifically for persons with disabilities. This design was provided to Robins Air Force Base, Georgia, in 1996, and it became the prototype for Robins' handicapped angler access pier construction program.

At the Naval Air Station in Jacksonville, Florida, handicapped access is taken into consideration in the construction of nature trails, as well.

These examples testify to the Department's commitment to make outdoor recreational opportunities more available to members of the disabled community. Some of our installations, such as Quantico, have developed particularly innovative programs that could well serve as models for disabled sportsmen's access anywhere, and indeed, I hope they will.

With this legislation to spur our efforts and the many successful installation programs that we have already as models, we look forward to providing the disabled even greater access to the rich and varied outdoor recreational opportunities our military lands have to offer.

And I would just like to say, Mr. Chairman, that I had an opportunity to converse with some of the witnesses on the next panel, and I have learned much from them. I think that they and the organizations they represent can be integral parts of our teamwork effort as we move forward to provide greater access for disabled sportsmen.

I would now like to have Lieutenant Colonel Deal tell his own story about his unique effort to make Quantico more accessible to disabled sportsmen and to help others across the country. Colonel Deal.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Goodman may be found at end of hearing.]

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you very much. Col. Deal.

STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT COLONEL A. LEWIS DEAL, EXECUTIVE OFFICER, WEAPONS TRAINING BATTALION, QUANTICO MARINE CORPS BASE

Colonel DEAL. Good morning, sir. I will follow the lead of my fellow naval aviator, Congressman Cunningham, and keep my remarks brief, too.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the decisive leadership and actions of Congressman Cunningham and his fellow members who have come to the aid of all disabled sportsmen. I would like also to thank all of those who have come here today to testify, especially Kirk Thomas of the Wheeling Sportsmen of America for his time and expense to travel all the way from the great state of Alabama.

My experiences at Quantico working to initiate programs and building facilities for our disabled veterans have been challenging, deeply rewarding, and a heck of a lot of fun. We've had some

unique experiences that could be classified as almost comical. I am proud to say that our programs are a success and are now open to all sportsmen, not just disabled veterans.

However, our disabled veterans still have first priority during hunting season. We are now in the final stages of planning a wheelchair accessible fishing pier. This has been a 3-year effort in which we have been working closely with Paralyzed Veterans of America. I'd like to add that from day one the Paralyzed Veterans of America, especially Bruce Scott, have been our closest ally and we couldn't have gotten this far without their help.

This fishing facility is extremely important, not just for the disabled veteran, but for the disabled dependent children aboard Quantico. For those children who will never have a chance to play football or take dancing lessons, no price tag can be put upon having the opportunity to safely go fishing with their families, especially in light of the fact that fishing is the No. 1 requested outdoor activity for disabled sportsmen.

What I would really like to say is the following: This journey, this endeavor that we have begun, does not have a road map or a blueprint. This has never been done before. We have to design and build our own course, our own roadway to the future.

It is paramount that we build a solid team, just like we did down at Quantico. There can be no hidden or selfish personal agendas. We must realize the biggest obstacle to our success is the misinformed attitudes of our fellow Americans toward disabled sportsmen.

No nation in the world is attempting to do what we are doing, returning the disabled sportsman to the great outdoors. This is Americans helping Americans in its purest form. Our success at Quantico is just one small step on this journey.

I am excited about the future. I am excited about what the future will bring. And as we say in the Marine Corps, I am eager to step off smartly.

Thank you, sir. Are there any questions?

[The prepared statement of Colonel Deal may be found at end of hearing.]

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you. The only question that I have for either of you is obviously, when we change the processes in various ways in the military, there are oftentimes what I call the necessity to work around. Is there any work around that we have to be aware of? Are there any disadvantages, I guess is what I'm saying, in an operational sense, or anything along those lines that we need to be aware of?

Colonel DEAL. From Quantico, no. We just try to piggyback on existing programs.

Mr. SAXTON. Access to bases, anything like that?

Ms. GOODMAN. Mr. Chairman, I wouldn't anticipate that this will actually change the accessibility of bases. Many of our bases around the country are open to the public for hunting and fishing today, and where they are, we want to make them more accessible to the disabled. And to those that are available only to the military there, we also want to make those available accessible to the disabled who may reside on that base.

Mr. SAXTON. In other words, if the veteran community has access to a base, then this wouldn't change anything.

Ms. GOODMAN. Right. This wouldn't change the basic access, but this will enable us to have the support and the help, the where-withal, and the ingenuity of the many organizations represented by your next panel of witnesses to help us design programs, design opportunities in hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities that are right for the disabled.

Mr. SAXTON. Very good. Well, as I said earlier, this subject, this bill, this language is moving forward on two tracks, and we are going to try to keep it doing so. So thank you very much, both of you, for being with us to share your thoughts and experiences. We appreciate it very much, and we're going to move on to the next panel. Thank you.

Panel three is composed of Lieutenant Colonel Larry Gerlach of the U.S. Marine Corps, Retired, whose home is in Fairfax, Virginia; Mr. Harley Thomas, Associate Legislative Director of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, who is accompanied by Mr. Bruce Scott, Director of Outdoor Activities, Paralyzed Veterans of America. Also, Mr. Kirk Thomas, President, the Wheelin' Sportsmen of America, and Mr. Jack Fasciana, a handicapped hunter from the Safari Club, which organization is in town today, by the way. I had the opportunity to have breakfast with them, as a matter of fact. And he is accompanied by his father, John Fasciana. The father, John Fasciana, of Bedford Hills, New York.

Welcome aboard, and Mr. Gerlach, if you are ready, why don't you just proceed.

**STATEMENT OF H. LARRY GERLACH, LIEUTENANT COLONEL,
USMC, RETIRED**

Colonel GERLACH. Thank you, Chairman Saxton, for inviting me today to testify on the Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act. I come before this Subcommittee as a veteran with a spinal cord injury who has been able to enjoy the outdoors and hunt deer and turkey at Quantico as a result of their great sportsmen accessibility program.

The Quantico program, I believe, should be used as a model for H.R. 2760. It can't be exactly replicated at every base, but I think it could be used as a guide and adapted to the local communities around the base. I'd like to thank the Subcommittee for taking the time to consider the bill, and I thank Representatives Cunningham and Tanner for sponsoring it.

As a sportsman who loves fishing and hunting or just to be afield or afloat, I have a vested interest in the Act and the program. Although I wouldn't presume to speak for all the disabled, veterans or not, I know a large number of them would benefit from the bill and it would add to their quality of life.

The inclusion of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in a consultation role, along with the national service, military and veterans organizations, I believe is significant and adds much to the bill. The Department of Veterans Affairs is a main provider of services to disabled veterans and is the recognized leader in service to the spinal cord injured.

I know from the time I spent in the hospital, the better part of 1984, that having his program would have been a welcome dimen-

sion to the VA's efforts to help those who have suffered a catastrophic injury return to a full life, or as close as they can come to it.

The program at Quantico has clearly shown the advantages of including volunteers, veterans organizations and sporting private organizations in the program, and is in step with the nation's tradition of volunteerism.

My friend Lieutenant Colonel Lew Deal, spoke earlier and in his volunteer capacity has been one of the prime leaders in setting up the program. Terry Labar, another former Marine who is an instructor at the FBI Academy and uses a wheelchair to get around, and Tim Stamps, head of the hunting and fishing section at Quantico, have been very generous with their time and effort in setting up the program.

In 1994, the program started with the building of wheelchair accessible stands and Paralyzed Veterans of America, they donated \$500 worth of materials and then that was matched by Smitty's Hardware Store in Stafford County, who donated an equal amount of free lumber. That was the beginning for the program, and they have been added to and improved every year since.

The volunteers also act as hunting partners for the disabled, and it's really unique in that, as those of us who work full-time, sometimes our schedules change. In one instance, I wasn't able to know that I was going to be able to go hunting on a Saturday until Friday. Well, the nice part about the program, I could call up—and I did, I said, "Hey, Tim, I'd like to go hunting tomorrow. Is there any possibility?" And he said, "I'll call you back in half an hour, I'll let you know." He called back in about 20 minutes and I was out hunting the next day. So it wasn't something where you had to—it was flexible, sort of like curb cuts. It's nice when they are there, so you don't have to depend on someone to haul you up over the curb when you're getting in someplace.

The beauty of the program is I think it is a win-win situation. I think it fits with DOD's quality of life program. It demonstrates a real effort and a tangible benefit to those who are currently serving on active duty, because they see that the uniformed services really are taking care of their own.

That's the conclusion of my prepared testimony. I'd be happy to answer any questions if I can.

[The prepared statement of Colonel Gerlach may be found at end of hearing.]

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you, Mr. Gerlach. That was well done. Mr. Thomas.

**STATEMENT OF HARLEY THOMAS, LIEUTENANT COLONEL,
USMC, RETIRED**

Mr. HARLEY THOMAS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, PVA, it's an honor to participate in today's hearing. PVA appreciates this opportunity to give our views on the Disabled Sportsmen's Act. Over 50 years ago, the original founders of Paralyzed Veterans came together in a united front to advocate participation in organized sports as an enhancement to rehabilitation.

Veterans suffering traumatic spinal cord injury began playing wheelchair basketball and discovered that they didn't have to be spectators, they could also participate, and in doing so, enhance the quality of their lives.

Today, some 51 years later, PVA continues to support and promote organized wheelchair sports for disabled veterans. Together with the Department of Veterans Affairs, the annual Veterans Wheelchair Games brings together over 500 participants in wheelchairs in organized competition. This is the largest organized wheelchair sporting event in the world.

Although the Veterans Wheelchair Games is a true success story, it only accommodates a small number of the over 78,000 disabled veterans suffering from traumatic spinal cord injury or dysfunction, and a mere fraction of the estimated 9 million veterans classified as disabled.

PVA launched the annual U.S. Open Bass Tournament for disabled anglers back in 1987. And in 1984, this event was expanded into the Bass Trail, which consists of five to six events annually. Each of these events, held at various locations around the country, draws between 70 to 75 disabled anglers.

In 1988, PVA launched a trap shoot for disabled individuals. This event has prospered over the years and this year was expanded to five different locations. The rules for disabled trap shooting are the same as for able-bodied individuals.

Outdoor recreational facilities and opportunities are extremely important to all veterans and all individuals with disabilities. In a 1996 survey that we conducted, we found that the No. 1 recreational activity for our members and all people with disabilities was fishing, closely followed by hunting and all other recreational activities.

Unfortunately, the numbers of accessible outdoor recreational facilities are extremely limited. Many local municipalities simply do not have the funds available to provide adequate outdoor recreational facilities.

The Marine base at Quantico, Virginia has taken steps to ensure accessibility to outdoor recreation facilities by disabled individuals. This program has been extremely successful, and as Col. Gerlach said, "I'm not much of a spectator sports fan, but I really love hunting and fishing. It's more fun doing than watching."

This program needs to be expanded nationwide to all military installations providing maximum availability of quality outdoor recreation facilities to disabled veterans, and to others with disabilities.

The enactment of H.R. 2760 can provide a solution to this problem. Most military bases have ongoing outdoor recreation facilities to include fishing, hunting, boating, camping, and many other desirable activities. The Department of Defense is already required to provide access for qualified individuals with disabilities in all of its programs by virtue of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

However, full implementation has been hampered by the lack of resources and the cutback in budgets. The ability to use volunteers and donations to make recreational areas accessible will greatly increase the implementation of these existing regulations.

By making these facilities accessible to disabled veterans, military dependents and other persons with disabilities would have access to more than 30 million acres, much of which is prime hunting ground. Utilization of these facilities can enrich the quality of life for many disabled individuals.

Through the use of volunteers and donation of time and materials, costs associated with converting the existing outdoor activities to accommodate disabled individuals will be minimal. PVA has a staff of expert architects that are leaders in the field of disability and ADA standards. PVA would be happy to provide technical assistance to any military installation in providing accessible outdoor recreation facilities to the disabled community.

I would like to extend a special thank you to Congressman Duke Cunningham for his introduction of this vital piece of legislation and the positive impact it will have on the disabled community. And I'd also like to thank Senator Burns for his introduction of the like bill in the Senate.

Mr. Chairman, PVA urges passage of H.R. 2760. Thank you for holding this important hearing. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Harley Thomas may be found at end of hearing.]

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you very much. Very excellent testimony.

As you have heard, we are again having a vote on the House floor, and I have about 5 minutes to get over to do the vote. Let me make an unusual suggestion. Obviously, I feel like it's necessary, inasmuch as I've been invited to a meeting with the Prime Minister, to be there at 11 o'clock.

Therefore, we can do one of two things. I can just go to make my vote and by the time I get back, it will be 11 o'clock. And so I will go on to the meeting, and would you rather we adjourn to a time certain in the next, say, 12 o'clock? Or would you just prefer to wait and I will get back as soon as I can?

Mr. KIRK THOMAS. Whatever you want to do is fine with me.

Mr. SAXTON. All right, we will adjourn pending my return and, as was just suggested by staff, there are other members who are busy off doing votes and other things who may be back before I am, and if so, they will take the chair and you can give your testimony in that way.

Thank you very much for understanding, and I apologize.

[Recess.]

Mr. PETERSON. [presiding] We are prepared to reconvene the hearing. Our next witness will be Mr. Kirk Thomas, President, Wheelin' Sportsmen of America. Welcome.

**STATEMENT OF KIRK THOMAS, PRESIDENT, WHEELIN'
SPORTSMEN OF AMERICA, INC.**

Mr. KIRK THOMAS. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee for the privilege to testify before you today. I'd like to also thank Congressman Cunningham and Senator Burns for the leadership role they played.

It is an honor to represent myself, Wheelin' Sportsmen of America and all disabled individuals across America. Persons with disabilities are the largest minority group in our country. There are

approximately 54 million people with disabilities in the United States, 9 million of which are veterans.

Outdoor activities are extremely important to people with disabilities. It provides a lot of things, good health, education, enjoyment, confidence, character, and goes a long way in building self-esteem, all of which add to the quality of life.

The goal of WSA is to provide opportunities for all people with disabilities so they can get out and enjoy outdoors. Our emphasis is on teamwork. We team disabled and nondisabled together to negate many barriers. This, of course, does a good job in promoting disability awareness.

We also team up with other organizations, groups, et cetera that are interested in our same goals. The reason for our explosive growth and success in such a short time has been because of teamwork.

We offer our partnership to this bill, H.R. 2760. H.R. 2760 can be a tremendous teamwork opportunity for everyone. I'd like for everyone to see that. We are dedicated to our goals and objectives. Myself and WSA are proud to step up as leaders in providing our expertise, leadership effort, promotional resources, and dedication in the success of H.R. 2760.

I believe H.R. 2760 could be the catalyst that is needed for millions of people to team up to provide outdoor recreation for people with disabilities. It is very important. We look forward to the opportunities, challenges and success ahead of us.

In closing, myself and WSA are interested in seeing the outdoors made accessible, more available. Teamwork and reality in working together can make the outdoors accomplishable.

Thank you very much, and if there are any questions, I will be glad to take them.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kirk Thomas may be found at end of hearing.]

Mr. PETERSON. Thank you very much, Kirk. I really appreciate your willingness to come and share with us.

I will introduce our next speaker, Mr. Jack Fasciana, Handicapped Hunter of the Year, Safari Club International, and he's accompanied by his father, John, of Bedford Hills, New York.

He is a very young man who wrote his own testimony. Don't be nervous. We are just people like your dad. Mrs. Kelly was hoping to introduce you. She had to leave for a few minutes, and she is going to miss the opportunity. We apologize for her, but welcome and congratulate you on having the courage to do what you're doing. I know your dad is very proud of you, and we are, too. So please proceed.

STATEMENT OF JACK FASCIANA, SAFARI CLUB INTERNATIONAL

Mr. FASCIANA. Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee. Thank you for granting me the opportunity to speak here today.

I am here to speak in support of H.R. 2760, the Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act. I am speaking to you from my perspective as a disable American sportsman who has been fortunate enough to enjoy adventures in our outdoors. My achievements have been rec-

ognized by Safari Club International and I was the first recipient of the Special Young Hunter Award last January.

My disability results from the fact that I have an extremely rare neuromuscular disorder called dystonia, which significantly limits my ability to walk and use my hands and arms.

Federal lands are part of America's heritage, and part of its living legacy to all its citizens, including disabled sportsmen. H.R. 2760 allows a partnership between the Department of Defense and the private sector so that they can join forces to make these lands accessible to people like me.

Safari Club International, which has been a leader in providing opportunities for disabled hunters, is an example of a private sector organization that will be an effective partner.

The United States leads the nations of the world in making all aspects of life accessible to its disabled citizens. The pilot program at Quantico Marine Corps Base demonstrates that this concept can work well.

I know I am disabled, and I know the consequences of my disability. The dedication of my family, especially the dedication and sacrifices of my dad, have given me the opportunity not only to enjoy the outdoors, but to demonstrate to myself and to my peers that my disability is only an obstacle to be overcome, not a barrier to participation.

The Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act will make it easier for many disabled Americans to overcome these obstacles and to experience the adventures that I have experienced.

I hope you will vote in favor of this legislation and I again offer to you my profound thanks for granting me the opportunity to address the Committee this morning. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Jack Fasciana may be found at end of hearing.]

Mr. PETERSON. Thank you very much, Jack. At this time, I ask unanimous consent to be joined by Congresswoman Sue Kelly. So ordered. Mrs. Kelly, please proceed.

Mrs. KELLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the Subcommittee this morning. I am happy to be here to express my support for an important piece of legislation introduced by my friend, Duke Cunningham, to increase outdoor recreation opportunities for the disabled at military installations.

I am also please to be here to listen to an impressive young man who happens to be a constituent of mine, Jack Fasciana, from Bedford Hills, New York. Outdoor sporting activities, such as hunting and fishing, are important to our society on a number of levels. They contribute billions of dollars to our economy every year and support millions of American jobs. I realize that this issue is not often thought of in economic terms, but when I hear the rhetoric from those who seek to restrict hunting and fishing opportunities, I have to remind them of the importance of these activities to New York's and the nation's economy.

Fishing alone supports nearly 18,000 jobs in New York State. These activities also support the environment. Excise taxes on outdoor equipment have pumped billions of dollars into wildlife restoration activities over the years.

Of course, Mr. Chairman, we all know that hunting, fishing, and other outdoor sports represent more than dollars and cents. They represent an important part of our heritage, a tradition that's passed down from generation to generation.

What concerns me is whether Jack's generation will be able to enjoy the same opportunities that my family did. And this is why the Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act is so important. This is important legislation and it will ensure that outdoor programs on our nation's military installations will be accessible to the disabled.

General Norman Schwartzkopf called Jack Fasciana a true American hero, and I couldn't agree more. Despite having a very rare neuromuscular disorder called early onset torsion dystonia, Jack has proved that a disability doesn't have to be an obstacle to enjoying the outdoors. He's hunted with his dad since he was two and a half years old, and he was recently honored with the Safari Club International's Special Young Hunter Award. As a matter of fact, Jack told me at that event, he stood in front of an audience and addressed an audience of 1,500 people, right, Jack? And he did it very well.

Dystonia is a terrible disease, Mr. Chairman, but it hasn't dampened Jack's love of the outdoors. We, as policymakers, have an obligation to Jack and to other disabled sportsmen to enact policies which will allow them to enjoy hunting and fishing so that they will be able to pass this tradition on to their children and grandchildren.

I thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for giving me the opportunity to speak this morning. And Jack, I thank you for very good testimony. We really appreciate having you with us this morning.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. PETERSON. We thank the gentlelady from New York for coming and sharing with us about her constituent. We appreciate that. I would like to thank the entire panel, and especially Jack. Jack, those of us who sometimes worry about the future of this country, when we see young people like you, motivated as you are, willing to speak out as you are, I think we are in good hands for the future. So you keep on doing what you are doing. You keep on being the exceptional young man that you are, and we'll all be very proud to watch you proceed.

To the whole panel, thank you for coming today and supporting a very good piece of legislation.

[The prepared statement of the National Rifle Association may be found at end of hearing.]

Mr. PETERSON. This hearing is in recess.

[Whereupon, at 11:14 a.m., the Subcommittee adjourned subject to the call of the Chair.]

[Additional material submitted for the record follows.]

STATEMENT OF SHERRI W. GOODMAN, DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
(ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY)

I would like to thank Chairman Saxton and the members of the House Resources Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans for inviting me to testify today on behalf of the Department of Defense. I am happy to report that the Department has worked with Representative Cunningham's staff to make some minor but necessary revisions to the bill as introduced, and I am now pleased to convey to you the Department's full support for the Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act.

DoD manages 25 million acres of land across the United States, an area the size of the state of Virginia, which makes us the third largest land management department in the United States. DoD lands are managed first and foremost to provide for the training and testing necessary to enhance military readiness.

DoD lands support readiness, testing of new weapon systems, testing of munitions, deployment of weapon systems, and combat training exercises. To have the ability to deploy and fight successfully anywhere in the world, the armed forces must train in a wide variety of climatic and terrain conditions. Training areas are located throughout the United States on grasslands, deserts, coastal areas, forests and tundra. For example, desert environments are used for maneuvers that involve large, mechanized battalions; coastal zones and beaches provide the setting for missile launches and amphibious landings; forested areas are essential for small arms combat training; and, large open areas are needed to accommodate air-to-ground bombing ranges.

DoD lands are rich in various natural resources and we have an obligation to protect those resources for future generations. Our lands are home to many important species and habitats. DoD takes pride in its stewardship program and has had policies in place to conserve its natural and cultural resources for many years. This early commitment to sustainable resource management has evolved into well-defined, formalized, and integrated conservation policies.

DoD's conservation program is focused on supporting the military mission. Sound conservation practices enhance mission safety; promote sustainability of training areas; and provide increased flexibility for military trainers. For example, we are working closely with military trainers to reduce the risk of loss of aircrews and aircraft to bird strikes. Recent efforts have substantially increased our ability to map large concentrations of birds. We have also started to use weather radar to provide near real time information on bird locations. This will permit aircrews to make last minute changes to flights to avoid potential hazards. The Army's Integrated Training Area Management program helps control vegetation loss and reduce soil erosion caused by tracked vehicles through a combination of monitoring, rehabilitation, and education. By clearly identifying when and where training lands are impacted, we are able to balance immediate military training needs with the land's ability to sustain long-term use.

DoD also is developing new management approaches to increase military training flexibility on the use of land with sensitive species or habitats. One approach is to manage natural resources as part of an entire ecosystem. Land management plans and species recovery plans are developed based upon a more complete understanding of resources and habitat throughout the region. The plans balance the responsibility for supporting endangered species among all major Federal landowners. In addition, the plans ensure future development does not interfere with mission capabilities and is compatible with measures to protect endangered or threatened species. That's why we are moving to an ecosystem approach to managing our lands. This new approach has increased access to formerly restricted areas at locations such as Camp Pendleton, California, and Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Although DoD's primary conservation focus is mission support, DoD manages its lands for multiple uses, including outdoor recreation such as hunting and fishing, commercial forestry and agriculture programs, and threatened and endangered species management. By using comprehensive, integrated resource planning, DoD natural resource managers ensure that military mission requirements are met and other uses are accommodated whenever feasible.

A major component of DoD's conservation program at many DoD installations is its natural resources-based outdoor recreation program. By offering the opportunity to hunt, fish, hike, bird watch, and engage in other outdoor activities, DoD's conservation managers enhance the quality of life for our installation residents and those authorized patrons who reside in the vicinity of an installation. DoD bases have offered these programs for many years and have made them available whenever military needs and sound management practices allow.

Concerning access for disabled sportsmen the Department of Defense is subject to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Additionally, it is DoD policy that all outdoor recreational opportunities meet all requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Furthermore, many bases have integrated special outdoor recreation programs for the disabled into their natural resources programs. They have also constructed special facilities to encourage hunting, fishing, and other outdoor uses of our natural resources by authorized patrons who are disabled. I would like to provide you with just a few examples of where our installations are providing such access to disabled sportsmen.

For example, for the past ten years, Naval Surface Weapons Center, Crane, Indiana, has annually invited approximately 120 holders of an Indiana Handicapped Deer Hunting Permit to hunt on base prior to the legal firearm deer hunting season, with the permission of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. The Indiana Deer Hunters Association helps the Station with this hunt by assisting in notifying hunters of the hunt and by supplying people to walk with the disabled hunters. The success rate during the hunt is usually double that of a regular hunt because the Navy allows hunters with disabilities more chances to move around than are allowed during regular hunts, and use the volunteers and Station personnel help the hunters track down any deer they might have wounded. For many of the hunters, this is the only chance they have each year to hunt deer with a reasonable chance of success.

Scott AFB, Illinois, offers a fishing pier designed specifically for persons with disabilities. Scott provided this design to Robins AFB, Georgia, in 1996, and it became the prototype for Robins' handicapped angler access pier construction program. Robins has constructed two fishing piers accessible to persons with disabilities. This design also has been proposed for use throughout Air Mobility Command. The design complies with national handicapped access standards. The all weather construction allows safe access to the water with a protective hand rail throughout and a roomy, level deck extending over the water surface.

For the last four years, Eglin AFB, Florida, in conjunction with the Florida Disabled Hunters Association, has sponsored a Mobility Impaired Hunt in areas normally closed to public hunting due to mission testing. These areas have some of the highest white-tailed deer and wild hog densities on Eglin and in the Florida Panhandle. The Eglin Natural Resources Branch distributes to and accepts applications from interested hunters, and the Florida Disabled Hunters Association screens those applications to ensure applicants meet the mobility impaired criteria. After the screening process, Eglin randomly selects 40 qualified applicants to participate in a two day, weekend hunt Eglin invests many field hours identifying and designating hunting locations to provide the highest quality hunting opportunities possible. Eglin escorts the hunters into the closed areas and drops them off at their designated stand locations. They check on the hunters several times during the day to see if they need any assistance, including finding, retrieving, and dressing game. During last year's hunt, a total of 37 hunters harvested 54 deer and one hog. Among the successful hunters were one who had been unable to harvest a deer in 35 years, and another who had not been successful for the past ten years.

Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia, has constructed nine ground blinds on stands for disabled hunters. These stands were built by volunteers with donated materials from the Paralyzed Veterans of America and a local hardware store. These stands are reserved for disabled hunters only, and availability is advertised in local newspapers and the Paralyzed Veterans newsletter. The stands are open all season. Quantico is also planning to build a fishing pier with access for handicapped persons, with low gradient trails. It will be completed next year to allow year round river access for disabled fishermen.

Ravenna Army Ammunition Plant, Ohio, provides deer hunting permits for those in wheelchairs, as space permits, and sets aside a designated hunting area for these special needs hunters. Ravenna helps the hunters set up, and ensures that each hunter has a non-hunting partner to assist his or her needs.

McAlester Army Ammunition Plant, Oklahoma, dedicates one weekend during the annual deer hunt to physically challenged hunters only. An average of 100 hunters participate in these hunts.

Pine Bluff Arsenal, Arkansas, has just implemented a policy which allows persons with disabilities to have exclusive use of deer stands that they erect. Pine Bluff also allows persons with disabilities to purchase a lifetime permit for the price of a normal annual permit.

Blossom Point Research Facility, Maryland, has one wheelchair accessible stand and two others that are only one step off the ground. An individual with a motorized wheelchair and others who have had hip and/or knee replacements and cannot climb stairs use these stands. The Blossom Point hunting program is open to the public

by lottery so that hunting opportunities are offered to all individuals, not just those affiliated with DoD.

Camp Ripley, Minnesota, annually conducts a two-day, Disabled American Veterans hunt for deer in cooperation with the Department of Natural Resources Wildlife and Enforcement divisions, the Department of Veterans Affairs, Disabled American Veterans, and local veterans groups. This program was initiated in 1992, when twenty one participants succeeded in obtaining seven deer.

Camp Navajo, Arizona, initiated a successful hunt for disabled veterans only, which allows them to hunt without interference from other hunters. This hunt will be expanded this year with the addition of some four wheel drive all terrain vehicles that will be used to transport disabled veteran hunters throughout the hunting area.

Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren Laboratory has hosted a Disabled Veterans Special Deer Hunt annually since 1987, in cooperation with the Virginia Deer Hunters Association. The Association provides 50 to 75 volunteers each year to aid disabled veterans, conduct the deer drives, provide nourishment to the hunters, and prepare the venison. The disabled veterans are situated in the back of pickup trucks to enhance their ability to see the deer and to gain access to different parts of the base. Some 12 to 15 disabled veterans participate each year.

At Naval Air Station, Jacksonville, Florida, handicapped access is taken into consideration for all nature trails. For example, the Station is currently building a wheelchair ramp onto the pavilion at its Watchable Wildlife area, with a paved walkway leading from the pavilion to its natural resources education center. The Station is also constructing a nature walk with fiber mulch and a boardwalk through a wetlands area that meet Americans for Disabilities Act standards.

The many examples I have discussed with you today testify to the Department's commitment to make outdoor recreational opportunities more available to members of the disabled community. Some of our installations have developed particularly innovative programs that could well serve as models for disabled sportsmen's access anywhere. With this legislation to spur our efforts, and these many successful installation programs as our polestar, we look forward to providing the disabled even greater access to the rich and varied outdoor recreational opportunities our military lands offer.

I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.

STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT COLONEL A. LEWIS DEAL, UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

Mr. Chairman and members of the House Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife, and Oceans, it is my great pleasure and honor to address you today on such an historic piece of legislation. I would like to begin by acknowledging the leadership of Rep. Cunningham and Sen. Burns for their leadership on behalf of disabled sportsmen.

BACKGROUND

The genesis and foundation for my involvement with disabled sportsmen began at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia, in 1993. I read an article in the March 1993 edition of *OUTDOOR LIFE* magazine addressing the needs and challenges of disabled sportsmen returning to the great outdoors. It occurred to me that Quantico could develop a hunting program that would allow access for our disabled veterans. I wrote a proposal and sent it to Brigadier General Steele who at that time was the base Commanding General. His decision was quick and decisive, "We are going to make this happen." With the help of eager volunteers, donated materials from the Paralyzed Veterans of America and a local hardware store, we constructed several wooden ground blinds. That fall we initiated a disabled veterans "pilot" hunting program. It was a huge success. Quantico now has a fully integrated disabled hunting program open to any disabled sportsman. The hunting program includes deer, small game, and turkey. There are 10 permanent ground blinds and a "HUNTMASTER" elevating lift. The base Boy Scout Troop just completed building wheelchair accessible paths for our Trap/Skeet range. We are also in the final planning stages for building a handicapped accessible fishing pier. We feel Quantico has a model program for other DoD installations. In fact, I have received requests from disabled veterans as far away as Oklahoma and Florida asking to come hunt at Quantico. I do not feel disabled veterans should have to travel that far to utilize a military facility, especially when there are military bases in their home states.

CONCEPT

Since the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed in 1990, there has been a tremendous groundswell of support for people with disabilities in this country. Nationwide there are hundreds of programs and initiatives to give citizens with disabilities access to buildings, facilities, and recreational activities.

The Department of Defense (DoD) manages nearly 25 million acres of land, containing every conceivable landform and type of habitat. These well managed lands provide environments in which fish and game animals flourish. Our military installations offer numerous outdoor recreation programs (fishing, hunting, trap/skeet, boating, camping, wildlife viewing, etc.) which provide outstanding opportunities for both military and civilian sportsmen.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is dedicated to administrating Federal programs and benefits for nearly 28 million veterans. There are approximately 9 million veterans classified as "disabled" of which nearly 78,000, due to a spinal cord injury or dysfunction (SCD) are in wheelchairs. The SCD numbers are increasing at 1,200 to 1,500 a year. This is due in part to the "aging" of the veterans population (9.3 million, 65 or older by the year 2000) and its associated medical problems. In this era of decreasing budgets and healthcare reform, the VA is constantly seeking resources and innovative programs to provide for adequate healthcare and improved quality of life.

It is a well documented fact that outdoor activities for people with disabilities are more than just recreation, they are therapeutic. They add an intangible quality to life and personal well being. The opportunity to have access to outdoor facilities/programs is a powerful form of proactive rehabilitation which emphasizes outpatient vice inpatient healthcare.

An invaluable source of "volunteer" support and resources for assistance on this issue are the national service and military organizations (i.e., Paralyzed Veterans of America, Inc., Marine Corps League, Vietnam Veterans Institute, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Jewish War Veterans of the United States, Association of the United States Army, Navy League of the United States, Air Force Association, AMVETS, etc.).

There are also numerous sporting industry and public-private sporting organizations which are already assisting in other disabled outdoor projects (The Wheelin' Sportsmen of America, Inc., National Shooting Sports Foundation, Coalition to Promote Accessible Outdoor Recreation, Haas Outdoors Inc., Savage Arms, Inc., National Wheelchair Shooting Sports Federation, Safari Club International, Fishing has no boundaries, Inc., Ducks Unlimited, The Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, Buckmasters, etc.).

Summary

In closing I would like to thank all the individuals and organizations across the country who have worked so hard in support of disabled sportsmen.

My involvement with disabled sportsmen, specifically our disabled veterans has been a deeply rewarding and satisfying experience. When I have put the call out for volunteers to help with our program at Quantico the response has always been nothing less than overwhelming. I am confident that such support will continue.

Thank you for allowing me to be here today. I am eagerly standing by to assist in any manner I can. SEMPER FI!

STATEMENT OF H. LARRY GERLACH, LT.COL. USMC (RET.)

Thank you, Chairman Saxton for inviting me to testify today on H.R. 2760, the Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act. I come before the Subcommittee today as veteran with spinal cord injury who has been able to enjoy the outdoors and hunt deer and turkey for the past three years as result of the great disabled sportsmen's access program at Marine Corps Base Quantico. The Quantico program can and should serve as the model for the implementation of H.R. 2760. It shouldn't be exactly replicated on every installation but can be used as a guide and adapted to the local community. I thank the Subcommittee for taking the time to consider this bill and I thank Representatives Cunningham and Tanner for sponsoring it.

As a sportsman who loves fishing and hunting or just to be afield or afloat, I have a vested interest in this Act and program, and although I wouldn't presume to speak for all the disabled, veterans or not, I know a large number of them would benefit from this Bill which would enable many of them to add to their quality of life. The inclusion of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in a consultation role along with national service, military, and veterans organizations and sporting organizations in the private sector is significant and adds much to the Bill. The Department

of Veterans Affairs is a main provider of services to disabled veterans and is the recognized leader in service to those with spinal cord injury. This should provide another avenue for the VA in their dedicated effort to provide for their customers, the veterans. I know from the time I spent in the hospital, which was the better part of 1984, having a program such as this would add a welcome dimension to the VA's ongoing efforts to help those who have suffered a catastrophic injury return to a full life, or the closest they can come to it.

The program at Quantico has clearly shown the advantages of including volunteers, veterans organizations and sporting organizations in the program and is clearly in step with the Nation's tradition of volunteerism.

My friend Lt. Col. Lew Deal, Executive Officer of Weapons Training Battalion, Quantico who is here today, has in his volunteer capacity been one of the prime leaders in this program. Since the summer of 1994, wheelchair accessible stands have been built and placed in the woods of Quantico. Terry Labar, another former Marine who works at the FBI Academy and uses a wheelchair to get around, and Tim Stamps, head of the fish, game and agronomy section at the base were also highly involved in this effort. The PVA donated \$500 and Smitty's Hardware Store in Stafford County matched that amount in free lumber. Volunteers built the stands, which have been increased and improved upon every year since. They also act as hunting partners for the disabled hunters and if they aren't also enjoying themselves, they've fooling me. Some have even indicated to me it adds to their quality of life.

The beauty of this program is it fits hand in glove with on going efforts to improve outdoor recreational activities consistent with DOD quality of life program and it includes the disabled with minimal cost. Additionally it doesn't detract from the mission of defending our republic and it fact may add to the intangible by demonstrating to those currently serving on active duty that the uniformed Services do take care of their own.

In closing, I would like to thank all who have been involved in the disabled sportsmen's access program at MCB Quantico. The disabled who have been able to take advantage of the program appreciate the individuals who have generously invested extensive effort and time in this successful operation. I also thank you Members of Congress for your time and effort in considering this Bill. I feel sure that after these hearings, you will not find it difficult to write a favorable report. Of course, you know that is what I hope you will decide. Regardless, God Bless you and the United States Of America.

STATEMENT OF HARLEY THOMAS, ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR, PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

Chairman Saxton and Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) it is an honor to participate in today's hearing. PVA appreciates this opportunity to express our views on the "Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act."

PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS FACILITATES REHABILITATION

Over fifty years ago the original founders of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, (PVA) came together in a united front to advocate participation in organized sports as an enhancement to rehabilitation. Veterans suffering traumatic spinal cord injury began playing wheelchair basketball and discovered they didn't have to be spectators, they could participate and in doing so, enhance their quality of life.

Today some fifty-one years later, PVA continues to support and promote organized wheelchair sports for disabled veterans. Together with the Department of Veterans Affairs, the annual Veterans Wheelchair Games, brings together over 500 of the best wheelchair athletes in the nation for organized competition. This is the largest organized wheelchair-sporting event in the world. Although the veterans wheelchair games is a true success story, it only accommodates a small number of the over 78,000 disabled veterans suffering from traumatic spinal cord injury or dysfunction, and a mere fraction of the estimated 9,000,000 veterans classified as disabled.

PVA launched the annual U.S. Open Bass Tournament for disabled anglers in 1987. This event was expanded into the "Bass Trail" which consists of 5 to 6 events annually, in 1994. Each of these exciting events held at various locations around the country, draws between 70-75 disabled anglers.

In 1988, PVA launched a Trap Shoot for disabled individuals. This event has prospered over the years and this year was expanded to five different locations. Each of these events draws from 60-75 participants. The rules for disabled trap shooting are the same as for able-bodied individuals.

OUTDOOR RECREATION NUMBER ONE

Outdoor recreational facilities and opportunities are extremely important to veterans and all individuals with disabilities. In a 1996 survey conducted by PVA, we found that the number one recreational activity for our members was fishing, followed closely by hunting and all other outdoor recreational activities in general. Unfortunately the numbers of accessible outdoor recreational facilities are extremely limited. Many local municipalities simply do not have the funds available to provide adequate outdoor recreation facilities.

The Marine base at Quantico, Virginia has taken steps to ensure accessibility to outdoor recreation facilities by disabled individuals. This program has been extremely successful. Former Marine Larry Gerlach says, "I'm not much of a spectator sports fan, but I really love hunting and fishing. It's more fun doing than watching. The program at Quantico, which allows actual doing, is a godsend. If it can be expanded nationwide, I know it will be enjoyed by many other handicapped individuals who can then enjoy the physical and mental pleasure it offers."

This program needs to be expanded nation-wide to all military installations, providing maximum availability of quality outdoor recreation facilities to disabled veterans and other, with disabilities.

The enactment of H.R. 2760 can provide a solution to this problem. Most military bases have ongoing outdoor recreation facilities to include fishing, hunting, boating, camping, and many other desirable activities. The Department of Defense is already required to provide access for qualified individuals with disabilities in all of its programs, by virtue of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (38 CFR sections 15.149-150 (1997)). However, full implementation has been hampered by lack of resources. The ability to use volunteers and donations to make recreation areas accessible will greatly increase the implementation of these existing regulations.

By making these facilities accessible to disabled veterans, military dependents and other persons with disabilities, they would have access to the over 30,000,000 acres, much of which is prime hunting grounds. Utilization of these facilities can enrich the quality of life for many disabled individuals.

Through the use of volunteers and donations of time and materials, costs associated with converting existing outdoor activities to accommodate disabled individuals will be minimal. PVA has a staff of expert architects that are leaders in the field of disability and ADA standards. PVA would be happy to provide technical assistance to any military installation interested in providing accessible outdoor recreation facilities to the disabled community.

PVA would like to extend a special "thank you" to Congressman "Duke" Cunningham for his introduction of this vital piece of legislation and the positive impact it will have on the disabled community.

Mr. Chairman, PVA urges the passage of H.R. 2760. Thank you for holding this important hearing, it shows your concern for the needs of disabled veterans. Mr. Chairman this concludes my testimony. I will be happy to respond to any questions you or members of the Committee may have.

CURRICULUM VITAE OF HARLEY THOMAS

Harley is a veteran of twenty years military service in the United States Navy. During his military career, he spent a tour in Japan and Vietnam with Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron One (VQ1).

In 1968, Harley served aboard the USS Piedmont in support of fleet operations in Vietnam. Harley spent his final tour in the service with the Defense Communications Agency in Reston, VA, where he retired in February 1976 as a Chief Data Processing Technician. Following his military career, he worked in the computer industry as a senior system analyst until 1996. Harley holds a degree in business from the University of Virginia. He is currently employed by the Paralyzed Veterans of America, as an Associate Legislative Director.

INFORMATION REQUIRED BY RULE XI 2(G)(4) OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Pursuant to Rule XI 2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives, the following information is provided regarding Federal grants and contracts.

Fiscal Year 1998

General Services Administration—Preparation and presentation of seminars regarding implementation of the Americans With Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12101, and requirements of the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards—\$15,000.

Department of Veterans Affairs—Donated space for veterans' representation, authorized by 38 U.S.C. § 5902—\$243,912* (as of December 31, 1997).

Court of Veterans Appeals, administered by the Legal Services Corporation—National Veterans Legal Services Program—\$63,656 (as of December 31, 1997).

Fiscal Year 1997

Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board—Develop illustrations for an Americans With Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. 12101, technical compliance manual—\$10,000.

Department of Veterans Affairs—Donated space for veterans' representation, authorized by 38 U.S.C. § 5902—\$975,651.*

Court of Veterans Appeals, administered by the Legal Services Corporation—National Veterans Legal Services Program—\$238,307.

Fiscal Year 1996

General Services Administration—Preparation and presentation of seminars regarding implementation and the Americans With Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12101,—\$25,000.

Federal Elections Commission—Survey accessible polling sites resulting from the enactment of the Voting Access for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984, Public Law 98-435—\$10,000.

Department of Veterans Affairs—Donated space for veterans' representation, authorized by 38 U.S.C. § 5902—\$897,522.*

Court of Veterans Appeals, administered by the Legal Services Corporation—National Veterans Legal Services Program—\$200,965.

*This space is authorized by 38 U.S.C. § 5902. These figures are estimates derived by calculating square footage and associated utilities costs. It is our belief that this space does not constitute a Federal grant or contract, but is included only for the convenience of the Committee.

STATEMENT OF JACK FASCIANA, SAFARI CLUB INTERNATIONAL

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for granting me the opportunity to speak today.

I am here to speak in support of H.R. 2760 the "Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act."

I am speaking to you from my prospective as a disabled American sportsman who has been fortunate enough to enjoy adventures in our beautiful outdoors. My achievements have been recognized by Safari Club International and I was the first recipient last January of SCI's Special Young Hunter Award.

My disability results from the fact that I have an extremely rare progressive neuro-muscular disorder called dystonia which significantly limits my ability to walk and use my hands and arms.

Federal lands are part of America's heritage and part of its living legacy to all its citizens, including disabled sportsmen.

H.R. 2760 allows a partnership between the Department of Defense and the private sector so that they can join forces to make these Federal lands accessible to people like me. Safari Club International, which has been a leader in providing opportunities to disabled hunters, is an example of a private sector organization that will be an effective partner.

The United States leads the nations of the world in making all aspects of life accessible to its disabled citizens.

The pilot program at the Quantico Marine Corps Base demonstrates that this concept can work well.

I know I am disabled and I know the consequences of my disability. The dedication of my family, especially the dedication and sacrifices of my dad have given me the opportunity not only to enjoy the outdoors but to demonstrate to myself and to my peers that my disability is only an obstacle to be overcome not a barrier to participation.

The Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act will make it easier for many disabled Americans to overcome these obstacle and to experience the adventures that I have experienced.

I hope you will vote in favor of this legislation and I again offer to you my profound thanks for granting me the opportunity to address the Committee this morning.

STATEMENT OF THE NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

The National Rifle Association of America (NRA) would like to take this opportunity to express our enthusiastic support for H.R. 2760. This bill is designed to en-

courage the Department of Defense to provide military installations the support needed to make their public outdoor recreation programs accessible to all Americans with disabilities.

H.R. 2760 will extend to military installations the legacy established by many public and private organizations that have successfully operated thousands of hunts and shooting events for citizens with disabilities for almost five decades. To ensure that the full range of outdoor recreation programs is included, we recommend that the bill be amended to add recreational and competitive shooting to the activities listed in the bill as falling within the meaning of "outdoor recreation opportunities."

The NRA recognized the importance of including sportsmen and women with disabilities in its hunting and shooting events as early as 1950, which was a full forty years before the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. It was in that year that NRA amended its Competitions Rulebook to allow shooting sports competitors with disabilities the opportunity to participate on equal terms with their able-bodied counterparts. As a result, competitors with disabilities have won numerous national, state and regional shooting competition titles.

Since World War II, many organizations have created hunting, fishing and shooting opportunities for citizens with disabilities. A number of these opportunities have been offered on military lands such as the hunts conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in which a large percentage of disabled veterans have participated. According to state departments of natural resources that permit sportsmen with mobility impairments to hunt from a motor vehicle, or with a crossbow, there are already over 50,000 disabled veterans and other citizens being served. The pilot programs for serving this population were started many years ago when states began offering disabled veterans free, or reduced, hunting and fishing licenses.

A national Disabled Shooting Services office was created by the NRA seven years ago specifically to serve this unique population by providing adaptive equipment design, helping to solve disability-related shooting function problems, and addressing accessibility issues and medical considerations. This office annually responds to over thirty-five hundred calls and letters for guidance. We are proud to say that many of the pioneering disabled hunting and shooting organizations received assistance and guidance from the NRA in the early stages of their development and, as a result, are better equipped to serve our growing populations with disabilities.

The Manager of the NRA's Disabled Shooting Services is an expert in the field of disability-related hunting and shooting issues. He presently serves as Chairman of the Shooting Sports for the International Paralympic Committee and is head coach of the U.S. Disabled Shooting Team. This NRA-supported team of disabled marksmen and women travel the world representing the U.S. in international shooting competitions. During the past ten years the team has won 214 medals, and set seven World and sixteen Pan-American records for our nation.

We feel that military support for sportsmen and women with disabilities, through passage of H.R. 2760, will be a fitting addition to the hunting and shooting opportunities that are already being provided for disabled veterans and other citizens on military, state and private lands.

We would like to make another suggestion with respect to this legislation. If the number of military installations that are willing to make their hunting and shooting opportunities wheelchair accessible should reach a level requiring a director of a military-wide program, we suggest that the Department of Defense select one of the many fine Paralyzed Veterans of America sports directors to the post. The choice of a disabled veteran will visibly demonstrate the military's commitment to making outdoor recreation accessible to the disabled and will reflect well in the eyes of all Americans.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on H.R. 2760.

Statement of
Founder/President Kirk R. Thomas
Wheelin' Sportsmen of America, Inc.
before the
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Resources
and the
Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation,
Wildlife & Oceans
on
May 14, 1998
concerning
H.R. 2760
The Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act

Supplemental to Kirk R. Thomas Testimony regarding H.R. 2760, The Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act

Name: Kirk R. Thomas

Address: Wheelin' Sportsmen of America, Inc., 5459 Troy Highway, Montgomery, AL 36116-5143

Telephone: 334-286-8446, toll-free 1-888-832-6967, fax 334-286-8447

Outline of Testimony Recommending Passage of H.R. 2760, The Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act

- I. Introduction/Main Statement
- II. Support is Key to Disabled Opportunity
- III. What is WSA?
- IV. WSA Alabama
- V. WSA Nationwide
- VI. WSA Promotional Resources
 - a. Wheelin' Sportsmen Outdoors
 - b. Organizational Presentations
 - c. Makin' Tracks Newsletter
 - d. Media Coverage
 - e. Individual and Group Events
 - f. Outdoor Trade Shows & Product Endorsements
 - g. Additional WSA Highlights

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I very much appreciate the opportunity to testify before you on behalf of H.R. 2760, the Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act. I would also like to thank Representative Cunningham and Senator Burns for their leadership in introducing this bill. It is a tremendous honor to represent all persons with disabilities as well as Wheelin' Sportsmen of America, Inc. (WSA) in my testimony.

People with disabilities represent our nation's largest minority group. Presently there are approximately fifty-four (54) million individuals in the United States with a disability. This includes approximately nine (9) million disabled veterans. Unfortunately, these numbers increase every day. Since the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, opportunities for people with disabilities has improved. Unfortunately, there has not been much concentrated improvement to allow the disabled community the opportunity to participate in outdoor recreational activities. Outdoor recreation is extremely important for people with disabilities because it promotes such positive goals as good health and educational experiences, as well as helping build confidence, character and self-esteem—all of which contribute to a remarkable improvement toward the enjoyment and quality of life.

The approval of H.R. 2760 would have a tremendous impact on future opportunities for people with disabilities to enjoy the outdoor resources that should be available to all Americans.

The emphasis of WSA is teamwork. We accomplish our goals and objectives not only by teaming up disabled and non-disabled individuals to accomplish outdoor recreational goals, but also by working with other groups and organizations that are interested in our efforts to provide these opportunities for all people with disabilities. The opportunity to participate is the key for most participants. WSA is unique in that we recognize and provide opportunity for all levels of disability. We realize the difficulty in providing opportunity for everyone, but we see this as a challenge, not an obstacle. It is our intention to see the outdoors made accessible to all. Teamwork can make this a reality.

The thousands of members of WSA and I are proud to step forward as leaders and actively campaign and assist in obtaining approval for H.R. 2760. We also understand that H.R. 2760 presents a tremendous teamwork opportunity for everyone.

I encourage the Department of Defense to see H.R. 2760 as the catalyst it could be for millions of Americans to work together in providing outdoor recreation for themselves and others. I look forward to the future and to the opportunities we will encounter in our efforts to make a difference in the lives of many. It is not my intention to see the outdoors made accessible, just available. Teamwork can make this a reality.

SUPPORT IS KEY

Around 8:30 a.m. on the morning of November 27, 1992, my life, as I knew it, changed forever. Little did I know that enjoying one of life's activities that I loved so much would contribute to my accident, leaving me a T-12 paraplegic and confined to a wheelchair. As I lay on the ground with my backbone crushed completely into, choking on blood and experiencing indescribable pain, I can remember praying what I thought would be my last prayer. I can also remember the prayer that followed hours later as well. While hard to admit, the subject of this prayer was me asking God to take my life and let me die. I know in my heart this prayer was heard and I am very thankful that the answer was no.

I am a strong believer that everything happens for a reason and has a purpose behind it. I don't believe in luck, good or bad. I realize my accident has given me the opportunity to experience many tremendous blessings. I have discovered many reasons to see my disability as a blessing. I am now a better Christian, husband, father and man. I also now see life with a different perspective and have learned to find the positives and overcome the negatives of life. I have accepted my disability and now consider it an inconvenience. I am not making light of it, but there have been a lot of factors that have contributed to my success in helping me overcome my disability.

The tremendous support I received from my family, employer, friends and others has been a tremendous blessing and has been a key factor in overcoming my disability. Unfortunately, many disabled individuals do not receive the support they need. This knowledge contributed greatly to the creation of Wheelin' Sportsmen of America, Inc. Dealing with a disability is hard. How you deal with a disability is what makes the difference. Some of these individuals do good, some do bad and all could do better. WSA is designed to contribute support to enable everyone to do better.

WHAT IS WSA?

Wheelin' Sportsmen of America, Inc., headquartered in Montgomery, AL, is a non-profit association dedicated to providing individuals with disabilities the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors again, or even for the first time. It was formed by a group of disabled and non-disabled individuals who share a common interest in outdoor activities. Providing individuals with disabilities the opportunity to participate in outdoor activities is the primary goal of WSA, while promoting good health, good character, good sportsmanship and disability awareness are essential secondary objectives. WSA activities and services are designed to overcome the six barriers that prevent or limit the disabled individual's ability to enjoy the great outdoors which are: 1. Being overlooked 2. Difficulty of activity 3. Communication gaps 4. Lack of opportunity 5. Expense 6. Lack of assistance.

Through organized programs and activities for able-bodied and disabled members, WSA overcomes these barriers by: locating those in need of help, providing member assistance and communicating. The passage of H.R. 2760 would greatly expand WSA's resources to provide such assistance to the disabled.

Another main goal of WSA is to establish a nationwide network of disabled and non-disabled members. As the two member groups are built into the network, members can choose and participate as partners in preferred outdoor activities. Participation is

completely at the discretion of members. In addition, WSA provides organized member events ranging from golf tournaments and hunting, to fishing roundups and many other outdoor activities.

WSA is governed by five (5) officers and twelve (12) board members. These officers and members include both non-disabled and disabled individuals. The organization recognizes that any type of disability can present unique challenges to those with outdoor interests.

WSA is a non-profit association organized under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Member categories include disabled members who represent all disabilities, non-disabled members who assist the disabled when necessary, associate members and corporate members.

WSA ALABAMA

Since founding WSA in March 1996, I have seen the organization experience tremendous growth. In Alabama alone our membership is approximately 4,000 and continues to grow daily. Several thousand more participants have taken part in WSA activities in Alabama. Some of these events include catfish roundups, fun & learn days, all types of hunting and fishing, shooting sports, archery, outdoor shows and fundraisers. WSA state charters will be patterned after the success of WSA Alabama. We are excited about this tremendous growth and look forward to granting charters in all fifty (50) states.

WSA NATIONWIDE

The WSA national goal is to organize state charters to represent the organizational goals and objectives of Wheelin' Sportsmen of America, Inc. The states of Mississippi, Florida, and Georgia are already in the process of establishing charters. Several more states are in the developmental stages and have applied for charter criteria.

Once WSA began, we knew it would be accepted simply because it was needed. Little did we know that our enrollment of members and participants would explode as quickly as it has. We are proud of the accomplishments that we have made and look forward to the challenge, work and expansion of WSA.

WSA PROMOTIONAL RESOURCES

Upon passage of H.R. 2760, WSA is prepared to promote activities on available lands through resources presently being utilized by the organization including our television show, organizational presentations, our quarterly newsletter, media coverage, individual and group events, and representation at outdoor trade shows.

Wheelin' Sportsmen Outdoors

"Wheelin' Sportsmen Outdoors" began production of its first national television series on January 1, 1998. Accepted by America One, an affiliate of Liberty Sports Fox Network, and is broadcast nationally as well as regionally on WCOV Channel 20/Montgomery and WDFX Channel 34/Dothan. WSO is a subsidiary of Wheelin' Sportsmen of America, Inc. and the purpose of the show is to promote the goals and objectives of WSA, Inc. WSO is currently negotiating to increase its 40 million viewers to the maximum number of households.

Organizational Presentations

WSA also regularly provides presentations to various types of organizations to increase awareness and educate the public about the organization. These informative speaking engagements allow members the opportunity to directly promote the organization to perspective sponsors, civic organizations, disabled and non-disabled groups, churches, or others interested in learning more about WSA. During each presentation, members share their own special experiences and enthusiasm about WSA in their own words. In addition to inspirational member testimonials, an action-oriented slide presentation, videotapes and photography provide a first-hand look at WSA's diverse range of events and activities. Providing these presentations has proven successful in promoting the organization and its worthwhile programs and events. WSA welcomes the opportunity to speak to other organizations. For more information on our presentations, please call the national office at 1-888-832-6967.

Makin' Tracks Newsletter

WSA's organizational newsletter, "Makin' Tracks", is published quarterly to keep members informed of the latest WSA activities and organizational changes. Like the WSA organization, the newsletter's growth has exceeded members' expectations. WSA strives to make "Makin' Tracks" informative and interesting, while revealing the heartwarming aspects of WSA's mission. Each issue is filled with the latest news about WSA's upcoming and completed events, updated information on the activities of the northern, central and southern WSA districts, and touching letters and photos. In addition, each issue includes a calendar of upcoming events.

The newsletter is available at no cost to members, sponsors and anyone interested in receiving a copy. WSA mails copies to members and sponsor upon publication. To further market the organization, copies of the latest issues are available at trade shows, WSA presentations, and events.

WSA is proud of "Makin' Tracks", but at its current rate of growth, it is only a matter of time before Makin' Tracks evolves into a magazine. Therefore, WSA is now offering advertising opportunities to assist our organization with publishing costs. Ad sales

Media Coverage

WSA has developed a beautiful working relationship with the media which it is working hard to maintain. This relationship has helped WSA increase its public awareness efforts and will continue to be vital to the organization's progress and to the achievement of its goals and objectives including our primary goal of promoting the value of our organization and opportunities for people with disabilities.

WSA and its various activities have received comprehensive media coverage from a variety of print and broadcast media outlets including local, state and national newspapers, newsletters, magazines, television news and outdoor television and radio program coverage.

Individual and Group Events

A variety of exciting events is offered by WSA for individuals and groups which promote opportunities for the disabled, WSA, its co-sponsors and volunteers. Regular events which are hosted in various locations include Catfish Roundups, Fun and Learn Days and other hunting and fishing outings. There is also a Wheelin' Classic golf tournament which is held annually. And WSA continues to add to the list!

Two of our most popular events are the Catfish Roundups and fun and Learn Days. Approximately 400 disabled people—children and adults—participated in WSA's first Catfish Roundup held in 1996. WSA works closely with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and their divisions to schedule these events at sites in each state. To ensure there is no problem catching fish and enjoying the day, WSA supplies the catfish, lunch and refreshments. Each disabled participant is presented a trophy and other prizes including the fish he or she catches. Fun and Learn Days allow participants the opportunity to learn and participate in a variety of outdoor activities including archery, various types of shooting sports, and fishing. Each disabled participant has a non-disabled participant to assist them. Sponsorships are vital to the continued success of these events and are available for any of our planned activities.

Outdoor Trade Shows & Product Endorsements

WSA participates in outdoor trade shows to increase the visibility of the organization, its members and sponsors, to provide valuable communication opportunities and to further enhance opportunities for the disabled. Trade show booths are manned by highly motivated members and volunteers. WSA literature and membership information is available and show attendees are drawn to the WSA booth by photos displaying our wide range of activities, "Wheelin' Sportsmen Outdoors" show broadcast to illustrate the excitement and depth of the organization's outdoor activities and merchandise raffles, which also provide an excellent fundraising opportunity. Merchandise is also available for purchase. WSA membership is not required for show participation, which is open to all children and adults.

As a result of WSA's success, manufacturers of hunting and fishing equipment have approached Wheelin' Sportsmen of America, Inc. about product endorsements. Subsequently, WSA has developed a method of requirements to determine the selection process for endorsements. This process will be used to determine whether a product is beneficial to the needs of both our disabled and non-disabled members. WSA encourages any manufacturers, organizations or individuals interested in having WSA endorse products or ideas, which will benefit WSA members and the organization, to call the national WSA office at 1-888-832-6967.

Additional WSA Highlights

- WSA has secured approximately 13,000 acres in Mississippi for future outdoor recreational activities.
- WSA has a product line of merchandise to help in promoting the organization.
- WSA has developed a Taxidermy Referral Program to offset cost for its members.
- WSA is presently working with a National Record Scoring System in the development of a scoring system for people with disabilities.
- WSA is presently developing a Hunting/Fishing Exchange Program for its members.
- WSA is presently evaluating many additional opportunities that will be of benefit to our organization as well as our members.