



It Was A Good Day

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KUFM Editorial – March 22, 2012

Every once in a while things come together in just the right way and my faith is renewed in Congress. Passage of the transportation bill out of the US Senate yesterday was one of those rare bipartisan times where Senators from both sides of the aisle came together and agreed on what's important for this great country of ours. The transportation bill passed 74-22 with both Montana Senators voting for the measure, joining 22 republicans and all democrats. It doesn't get much more bi-partisan than that.

Contained within the transportation bill was an amendment that, for anyone who hunts or fishes, was nothing short of monumental. This amendment coupled substantial funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (Fund) with restoration dollars for the Gulf of Mexico. The Fund provision provides for \$700 million during the next two years and reauthorizes the Fund until 2022. This means large scale conservation, in places like the Blackfoot Valley, Rocky Mountain Front, and Tender Foot Creek (a tributary to the Smith River), will not only be insured, but also provide access for the average sportsmen and women, thus perpetuating our outdoor heritage that is the very fabric of who we are in Montana. In addition to large-scale conservation, the Fund also can be used to acquire fishing access sites. Almost every fishing access site in Montana was paid, in part, by the Fund. To say the least, the Fund is vital to Montana. The \$1.4 billion dollars for the Fund would be outstanding in its own right, but the amendment didn't stop there. The amendment also dedicated 80% of the Clean Water Act penalties associated with the BP oil spill back to gulf coast restoration. Without this provision, those fines would have not gone back to make the Gulf whole again, but, instead, would have vanished into the US Treasury for who knows what. It just makes sense for those fines to go back to where the impacts of the largest oil spill in US history happened. What happens down south, especially in Louisiana, is important to Montana sportsmen and women. More than 10 million waterfowl winter in the marshes of Louisiana. That's 70% of the Central and Mississippi River flyways ducks and geese from Montana. That says nothing of the fishing opportunities for redbfish and speckled trout, which are world class. This marsh has been disappearing at an alarming rate for more than 70 years and the oil spill added insult to injury. Just like the Prairie Pothole Region in the north is vital to duck populations, we were losing their Motel 6 down south. Now we have the funding to make sure we keep the "lights on."

The amendment itself passed 76-22, setting the tone for the bi-partisan nature of the bill. A total investment in conservation of \$2.8 billion dollars is now one step closer to becoming a reality and supported by not only a vast majority of Montana hunters and anglers, but also 34 national hunting and fishing organizations.

The overwhelming support for this specific piece of the transportation bill is no accident. The conservation of our natural resources is uniquely American. In these tough economic times, it's time to double down on conservation, which provides non-exportable jobs, vital annual income, and preserves our way of life. Hunting and fishing in Montana generates more than \$1 billion to our states' economy and, when you add in other outdoor pursuits, it jumps to \$3 billion. That's vital, sustainable funding we can count on far into the future.

While both Montana Senators voted for the measure, it wouldn't have happened without Max Baucus. The amendment was originally offered to just address the Gulf. It had bi-partisan support with 9 republican Gulf Senators, but didn't have enough votes to pass. It was Senator Baucus who had the idea to couple restoration for the Gulf with the Land and Water Conservation Fund, thus expanding support for the measure. And pass it did. How often do you get conservative Senator Inhofe from Oklahoma and liberal Senator Franken from Minnesota to agree? In short, hardly ever. Thanks, Max! As Chairman of the Finance Committee, Senator Baucus is in a powerful position to broker deals just like this. This is why we continue to send him to Washington, not only to represent the good state of Montana, but also to deliver the goods.

The transportation bill now heads to the House. Congressmen Rehberg, heed the advice of 22 of your Senate colleagues and make sure that funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund and restoration of the Gulf Coast are maintained. Montana hunters and anglers ask for nothing less.

This is Land Tawney for the National Wildlife Federation in Missoula.