In a functioning democracy, citizens have a very special power—they can affect policy. Unfortunately, this process is ineffective when citizens are uninformed. Wildlife policies are a case in point—outdated policies conflict with citizen’s interests and harm wildlife, yet remain in place because so few of us are aware of these policies or the damage they do. Currently, wildlife policies in the U.S. benefit hunters and trappers, harm wildlife (including bears), and are contrary to the interests of the vast majority of U.S. citizens.

**Historic Roots of the Problem**

Theodore Roosevelt claimed that hunting had a civilizing effect on men, and advocated hunting as an outlet for a man’s “virile impulses” (Kheel, *Nature* 70). For Roosevelt, the gentleman-hunter was the perfect model of manhood, wielding deadly power within the confines of prescribed rules—good sportsmanship rooted in the incongruity of “fair chase” (“History of the Boone”).

In the late 19th century, Roosevelt, complained that commercial hunters haddecimated wildlife—that a comparatively small population of “market” hunters profited while the nation was stripped of his favorite target species. To solve the problem, he founded the Boone and Crockett Club (BCC) in 1897, with the following mission: “to promote the conservation and management of wildlife, especially big game, and its habitat, to preserve and encourage hunting and to maintain the highest ethical standards of fair chase and sportsmanship in North America” (“About”). The BCC promoted laws to protect “every citizen’s freedom to hunt and fish,” and established wildlife as “owned by the people and managed in trust for the people by government agencies” (“About”). With this, the BCC put the government agencies in charge of managing wildlife on behalf of hunters: Early government wildlife conservation in the U.S. was thereby established by hunters for hunters in response to decimated “game” species (S. Fox 123).

Further sealing the fate of U.S. wildlife, Roosevelt placed his friend, Gifford Pinchot, in charge of the nation’s freshly established National Forest Commission. Pinchot’s family had earned their fortune logging; Pinchot was a member of BCC
and an avid hunter. He believed that natural “resources” should be “managed” to offer the greatest good to the greatest number. Though not explicitly stated, he was only concerned about the greatest good for human beings—he viewed forests and wildlife as means to human ends, and therefore advocated that government managed forests remain open for capitalistic enterprises. In contrast, other members of this early National Forest Commission hoped to establish government lands as “locked reserves,” where forests and wildlife would not be exploited for personal gains (“Gifford”). But President Roosevelt chose Pinchot as the first head of a newly established Forest Service in 1905, sealing the fate of U.S. National Forests as reserves for “resources” to be “conserved” for human ends.

Roosevelt also established the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) with a network of 55 “game” reserves. These “refuges” have never been places where “game” animals can find refuge—they are lands where hunter-target populations are fostered on behalf of hunters (“History of Pelican”). The NWRS website provides “Your Guide to Hunting on National Wildlife Refuges,” complete with a search engine that helps users “Find the Perfect Hunt” (“Your”).

U.S. wildlife (and wilderness reserve) management was established by humans, for humans—more specifically, by and for hunters and trappers. Consequently, individual animals—especially non-target animals—are unimportant. Wildlife is maintained for the pleasure of the hunt. Few contemporary citizens are aware that wildlife agencies and their policies are designed to aid hunters and trappers—at the expense of wildlife and against the interests of the vast majority of non-hunting citizens. Federal and state wildlife agencies have preserved this special interest focus, and have therefore shown little interest in caring for injured or orphaned wildlife.

**Power and Control Without Expertise or Responsibility**

Given the history and established purpose of wildlife agencies, it is not surprising that relations between citizens engaged in wildlife rehabilitation and employees working for government wildlife agencies have often been less than ideal. Wildlife agencies in the U.S. are not concerned with maintaining balanced ecosystems or with assisting individual animals in need—they favor the interests of hunters and trappers: Thanks to Roosevelt, our wildlife policies are specifically designed to protect and enhance hunter-target species. For example, Alaska’s wildlife management targets wolves in order to protect and bolster elk, caribou, and moose. Surveys now suggest that American black bears are killing young herbivores in Alaska, and state government agencies are looking to implement a trapping program to reduce black bear numbers on behalf of “big game” species.