



The Strength of Hunter and Angler Voices in the Climate Debate

Those who hunt and fish Arizona lands and waters have stake in ecological health

As someone who was born and raised in Arizona and taught to hunt and fish from an early age, I have a deep connection with the outdoors. That connection is one that all hunters and anglers have. The excitement of a first hunt, of going fishing so early in the morning it's still dark out, of silently watching for a deer at dusk, of waiting for that slight tug on the fishing pole — these are the moments outdoor children remember. When you spend that much time out in the deserts, forests, and grasslands looking for wildlife, you will forge an unbreakable bond with the natural world.

When threats to Arizona's wildlife and wild places mount, they are a threat to that connection and a threat to the heritage of hunting and fishing. Drought, habitat degradation, species decline, and forest fires threaten the very way of life of outdoors-people.

Changes to our climate have arrived in every nook and cranny of the desert, every hunting camp, every fishing hole and every duck blind. There's no two ways about it — things are changing and it's affecting our ability to hunt and fish. Ask nearly any outdoors enthusiast you meet on the street if they are seeing the impact of drought. They certainly have stories. They will tell you of ducks that used to arrive during the season that no longer show up. They will tell you of old days when deep snows in the mountains didn't melt all summer but are now gone in May. They will tell of species they love being replaced in their favorite spots by invasive species and non-natives that are better able to adapt to changing conditions. They will tell you of lifelong hunting spots being closed and severely damaged due to wildfire. They will tell you about places where they used to fish all day in trout streams where now they must stop in the early afternoon, or not fish at all, because water temperatures are too tough on the fish.

Arizonans know this predicament well. We have been in a drought for over two decades and have experienced so many forest fires that it's easy to lose track of them. Rising temperatures and water loss threaten critical species like the Apache and Gila Trout, Pronghorn Antelope, deer, and many other iconic game and nongame species. Forests are drying out earlier in the year, leading to less forage for big game and longer and more intense wildfire seasons.

Whether it is the drying up of our favorite fishing streams, wildfires that close down our best elk spots, or suddenly absent quail flushes, we know that it isn't a matter of if, but when, climate change will find our favorite spots and change our sporting lives.

Here's the good news: outdoors-people know Arizona and they know what has changed from their years of experience outside. They are the best folks for the job. Recent laws passed over the last year — including the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act — have provided significant funding for wildlife, fighting drought, and improving forest health. These new policies promote clean water, improve habitats for species like deer, reduce wildfire risk, and reduce harmful pollutants that harm game and nongame species all over the U.S.

All of the benefits of these investments will be felt by hunters and anglers in upcoming years and these changes could not have happened without their input, passion, and stewardship of wild places. Hunting and fishing are very often generational. They were generational for me and they had a profound impact on how I see the outdoors of Arizona. To keep that legacy moving forward, we have to take necessary steps to protect the foundations upon which it relies; our public lands, our wildlife, our state.

Still, climate impacts are accelerating and the problems are becoming more complicated to tackle.

Let's meet the challenges and carry on our long-standing conservation traditions of creating better outcomes for fish and wildlife. Future sportspeople will thank us for it.

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