

Hunter Access Program  
Assessment Survey Report  
**HIGHLIGHTS**



**Hunting Heritage Action Plan**

# Hunting Heritage Action Plan

Prepared for:  
**Wildlife Management Institute**  
**Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies**



## Hunter Access Program Assessment Survey Report

HIGHLIGHTS

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## Hunter Access Program Assessment Survey Report Highlights

This report on hunter access represents the second completed initiative of the Hunting Heritage Action Plan (HHAP). This project will result in the development of a *National Hunting Heritage Strategic Plan* (Strategic Plan) and is aimed at stabilizing and reversing the negative trend in national hunter participation. This report focuses specifically on hunter access programs being administered or assisted by state and federal agencies and other members of the conservation community.

This hunter access report and the previously completed hunter recruitment and retention report are housed on the HHAP website, [huntingheritage.org](http://huntingheritage.org). This website was designed to serve as the primary source of information and networking for national efforts aimed at preserving the North American hunting heritage tradition. All other subsequent reports associated with the HHAP will be housed on this site as well.

The origins of the HHAP stem from the Hunting Heritage Steering Committee (Steering Committee), which was created to provide national level oversight to a series of Governor's Symposia on Hunting Heritage (held on a two- to three-year cycle) that attempted to identify actions being conducted to reverse negative hunter participation trends while outlining additional actions needed. After several successful Symposia, the Steering Committee concluded that a Strategic Plan was needed.

The Wildlife Management Institute (WMI) was selected by the Steering Committee as the coordinator for the development of the Strategic Plan. In 2005, WMI obtained an Association of Fish and Wildlife Agency (AFWA) Multistate Conservation Grant to begin this effort. The funds from the grant were subsequently supplemented with additional funds to support this effort. WMI retained the services of D. J. Case and Associates (DJ Case) to assist in this effort.

It is important to recognize that future development of the Strategic Plan is only one of many efforts aimed at stabilizing and reversing the trends in hunting participation. Recent examples of parallel efforts are the National Shooting Sports Foundation's *Best Practices Workbook for Hunting and Shooting Recruitment and Retention*, the *Shooting Sports Summits* held in 2008 and 2009, and *The Future of Hunting and Shooting Sports Report* produced jointly by the National Shooting Sports Foundation and Responsive Management.

It is also important to note that the Strategic Plan is being designed to complement and supplement existing efforts, not to replace them.

While developing the conceptual framework for the Strategic Plan, WMI recognized that numerous issues needed to be addressed concurrently. These issues included: recruitment and retention, access, education, political and legal challenges, sociological and economic impacts of hunting, funding, conservation, and outreach efforts. A common denominator for all of these issues was a critical need to identify and assess existing programs.

In recent years, growing awareness of the increased difficulty of finding places to hunt has spawned an increase in activities related to improving hunting access opportunities. However, details regarding the nature or geographic extent of these activities have not been fully documented. To date, no comprehensive assessment of hunting access programs has been conducted.

In order to obtain national-scale data on hunting access activities, an assessment survey was sent to all 50 state wildlife agencies, 42 conservation organizations (NGOs) associated with hunting, and three federal agencies. Forty-nine state wildlife agencies, nine NGOs, and three federal agencies completed the assessment survey during the spring of 2009.

The hunting access assessment survey was developed as a work-product from an access workshop held at the Safari Club International Foundation's Washington office in September 2008.

The assessment survey was administered using an online survey application. The individuals that were invited to participate were identified by WMI in a pre-assessment survey request for contacts. Generally, the agency director or CEO did not complete the assessment survey directly.

Each survey participant received a maximum of three "automatic" reminder emails requesting that they complete the assessment survey. At that point in time (approximately four weeks from the initial mailing), all NGO participants that had hunting access programs were deemed to have been "captured" by the assessment survey and no additional contact was made.

However, state agencies that had not completed the assessment survey were regularly and individually contacted until a survey was completed. However, only 49 states responded. The missing state was deemed not to have significant access issues or any significant access program, so the data set was viewed complete enough to analyze and summarize.

In most situations where multiple individuals completed the survey, the individuals invited to participate pooled their knowledge with other agency/organization participants and responded on one survey. In situations where multiple surveys were obtained from an agency or organization, the information was combined by the project leader. Conflicting or unclear information from these duplicate submissions were verified with the agency or organization submitting them.

The assessment survey asked general questions about six general access program categories (public lands, corporate lands, cooperative wildlife management areas, private lands, fee title purchase and other programs) and asked detailed questions regarding six specific hunter access program-types (access easement purchase or lease [right-of-way easement purchase or lease], access leasing, block-management/landowner-customized hunter-use management, cooperative management [public and private], public-use easements and other programs). There is considerable overlap in the program-types that the survey targeted. However, this overlap was consciously retained in order to capture the broadest possible array of programs by allowing participants to self-select the program-types that their program may fall into. The final assessment survey can be found in Appendix I of the *Hunter Access Program Assessment Survey Report*.

However, in order to minimize confusion among survey recipients, detailed definitions were provided in a cover letter and as part of the assessment survey instrument itself. See Appendix I for the definitions used.

In addition to the assessment survey, a literature review of the most pertinent research pertaining to or addressing hunting access was also conducted and published in a separate report to WMI. As part of the sub-project, a selected bibliography of pertinent research on hunting access was also developed. These reports are posted on the [huntingheritage.org](http://huntingheritage.org) website.

Results are reported by state agency, federal agency or NGO group. In addition, in some situations state agency results are further subdivided and reported by AFWA regions.

## State Programs

Numerous studies have identified lack of access to hunting areas as a primary cause of hunter dissatisfaction and desertion (see *Highlights of Key Access Research* at [huntingheritage.org](http://huntingheritage.org)). Assisting hunters in finding places to hunt and providing improved access to public and private lands for hunting is a critical step in reversing the declining national trend in hunting license sales.

At the state level, the scope and variety of hunter access programs appears to be growing. A companion literature review to this report found that the number of states with hunter access programs ranged from 20 to 38 in the 1980s and 1990s (see *Highlights of Key Access Research* at [huntingheritage.org](http://huntingheritage.org)). Given the different descriptions used to define “access programs” in previous studies, the earlier reported numbers of programs are not directly comparable to the programs identified in this assessment. Nevertheless, the total number of states with formal hunter access programs has grown to 43. It is likely that the scope of individual programs within states also has grown, but the absence of baseline comparative programmatic data will not support definitive conclusions.

While there was considerable overlap among the hunter access program-types that the survey addressed, it appears that, at the state level, cumulative hunter access efforts are diverse, innovative and provide substantial hunting opportunity.

Forty-three states reported that they participated in some type of formal hunter access program. However, 49 states provided information on various hunter access program-types. This includes 46 states that reported having a fee title purchase program, 38 states having a public lands hunter access program, 37 having a private lands hunter access program, 27 having a corporate lands hunter access program, 21 having cooperative wildlife management areas, and three having some other type of access program. (Note: 21 states reported having cooperative wildlife management areas, but 22 states provided detailed information on cooperative management programs.) See Table 1 for state-specific details.

In addition, 25 states reported having an access easements purchase or lease program, 26 having an access leasing program, six having a block management/landowner-customized hunter use management program, nine having a public-use easement program, and 10 states having some other type of access program. (Note: only three states reported having an “other”

hunter access program, but 10 states provided detailed information on an “other” type of hunter access program.)

Table 1. State agencies within AFWA regions by specific and general program-type

Midwest	Fee Title Purchase	Public Lands Hunter Access	Corporate Lands Access	Private Lands Hunter Access	Access Easements Purchase or Lease	Access Leasing	Block Management	Cooperative Management	Public-use Easement	Other Access Programs	Total
Colorado	x			x	x	x			x		5
Illinois	x	x	x					x			4
Indiana	x	x	x	x		x		x			6
Iowa	x	x			x					x	4
Kansas	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	8
Kentucky	x			x					x		3
Michigan	x		x	x	x						4
Minnesota	x		x						x	x	4
Missouri	x	x						x			3
Nebraska	x	x		x	x			x		x	6
North Dakota	x			x	x	x					4
Ohio				x							1
South Dakota	x	x		x		x	x			x	6
Wisconsin	x	x		x		x					4
TOTALS	13	8	5	10	6	6	1	5	3	5	62

Northeast	Fee Title Purchase	Public Lands Hunter Access	Corporate Lands Access	Private Lands Hunter Access	Access Easements Purchase or Lease	Access Leasing	Block Management	Cooperative Management	Public-use Easement	Other Access Programs	Total
Connecticut	x			x		x		x		x	5
Delaware	x	x									2
Maine	x	x	x	x	x			x	x		7
Maryland	x	x	x	x	x		x				6
Massachusetts	x	x		x	x				x		5
New Hampshire	x	x	x	x							4
New Jersey	x	x			x	x		x	x		6
New York	x	x						x			3
Pennsylvania	x	x	x	x				x			5
Rhode Island	x	x		x	x		x	x			6
Vermont	x	x		x	x	x			x		6
West Virginia	x	x	x					x			4
TOTALS	12	11	5	8	6	3	2	7	4	1	59

<b>Southeast</b>	<b>Fee Title Purchase</b>	<b>Public Lands Hunter Access</b>	<b>Corporate Lands Access</b>	<b>Private Lands Hunter Access</b>	<b>Access Easements Purchase or Lease</b>	<b>Access Leasing</b>	<b>Block Management</b>	<b>Cooperative Management</b>	<b>Public-use Easement</b>	<b>Other Access Programs</b>	<b>Total</b>
Alabama	x	x	x	x				x			5
Arkansas	x	x	x		x	x		x	x		7
Florida	x	x	x	x			x	x			6
Georgia	x	x	x	x		x					5
Louisiana	x	x	x		x	x				x	6
Mississippi	x	x		x	x	x					5
North Carolina	x	x	x			x					4
Oklahoma	x		x			x					3
South Carolina	x	x	x	x		x		x			6
Tennessee	x		x	x	x	x				x	6
Texas	x	x		x		x					4
Virginia	x	x	x	x	x			x			6
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Western</b>	<b>Fee Title Purchase</b>	<b>Public Lands Hunter Access</b>	<b>Corporate Lands Access</b>	<b>Private Lands Hunter Access</b>	<b>Access Easements Purchase or Lease</b>	<b>Access Leasing</b>	<b>Block Management</b>	<b>Cooperative Management</b>	<b>Public-use Easement</b>	<b>Other Access Programs</b>	<b>Total</b>
Arizona	x	x	x	x	x	x					5
California	x	x		x	x			x			4
Hawaii	x	x	x	x	x			x			6
Idaho	x	x	x	x	x	x					6
Montana	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				5
Nevada		x		x	x*						3
New Mexico	x			x	x	x					5
Oregon		x	x	x		x		x		x	4
Utah	x	x	x	x		x		x		x	7
Washington	x		x	x		x	x	x	x		8
Wyoming	x	x		x	x	x					5
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Overall Counts</b>	<b>Fee Title Purchase</b>	<b>Public Lands Hunter Access</b>	<b>Corporate Lands Access</b>	<b>Private Lands Hunter Access</b>	<b>Access Easements Purchase or Lease</b>	<b>Access Leasing</b>	<b>Block Management</b>	<b>Cooperative Management</b>	<b>Public-use Easement</b>	<b>Other Access Programs</b>	<b>Total</b>
	46	38	27	37	25	26	6	22	9	10	246

\* Nevada is in the preliminary planning phase.

Detailed programmatic information for each specific program-type is found at the beginning of the Detailed State Programmatic Information section of the *Hunter Access Program Assessment Survey Report*.

As Table 1 illustrates, these diverse hunting access programs are relatively evenly distributed across all regions. Access leasing programs are slightly more common in the Southeast and slightly less common in the Northeast, cooperative management programs are slightly more prevalent in the Northeast, and “other” types of access programs are slightly more common in the Midwest. The acreages involved or enrolled in each program likely have greater regional differences than frequency of program-type.

In total, more than 52 million acres were reported as being enrolled in a variety of state hunter access programs. (Note: this reported total may be an overestimate of the actual total acreage involved, as some programs may have been double reported.) See Table 2.

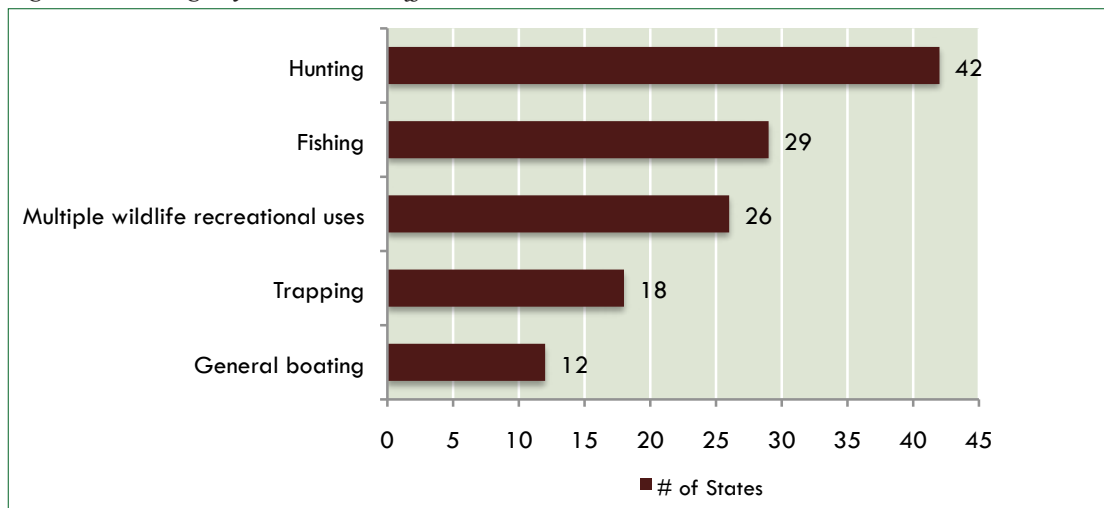
Table 2. Approximate acreage for each specific type of state hunter access program

Program	Approximate acreage
Cooperative management (public and private)	22.3 million
Access leasing	11.7 million
Block-management / landowner-customized hunter-use management	9.2 million
Access easements purchase or lease	8.8 million
Public-use easements	489,000
Other programs	373,000
Total	52.86 million

Note: These reported estimates may include multiple reporting and should be used cautiously.

In addition, 42 states include hunting in their general access programs, 29 include fishing, 18 include trapping, 12 include general boating, and 26 include multiple wildlife recreational uses (bird-watching and other non-consumptive wildlife uses). See Figure 1.

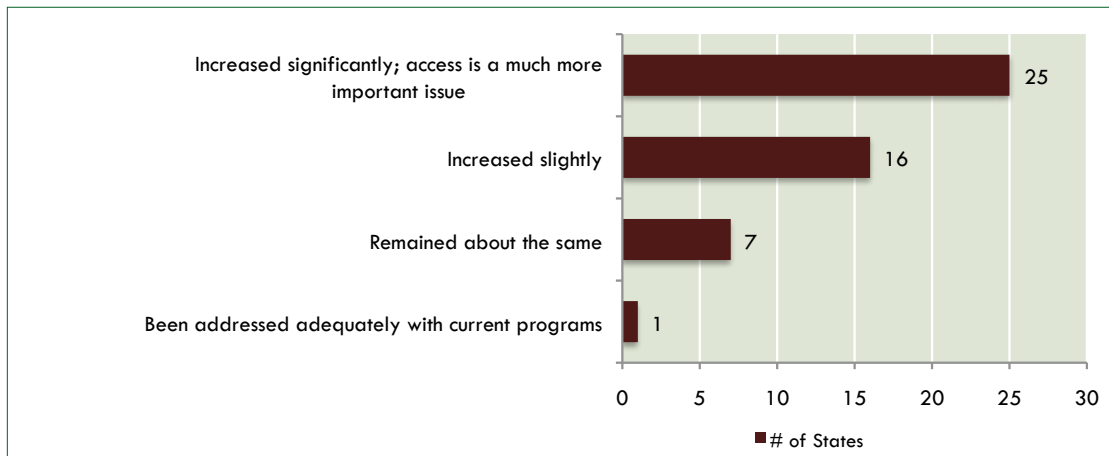
Figure 1. State agency hunter access efforts activities





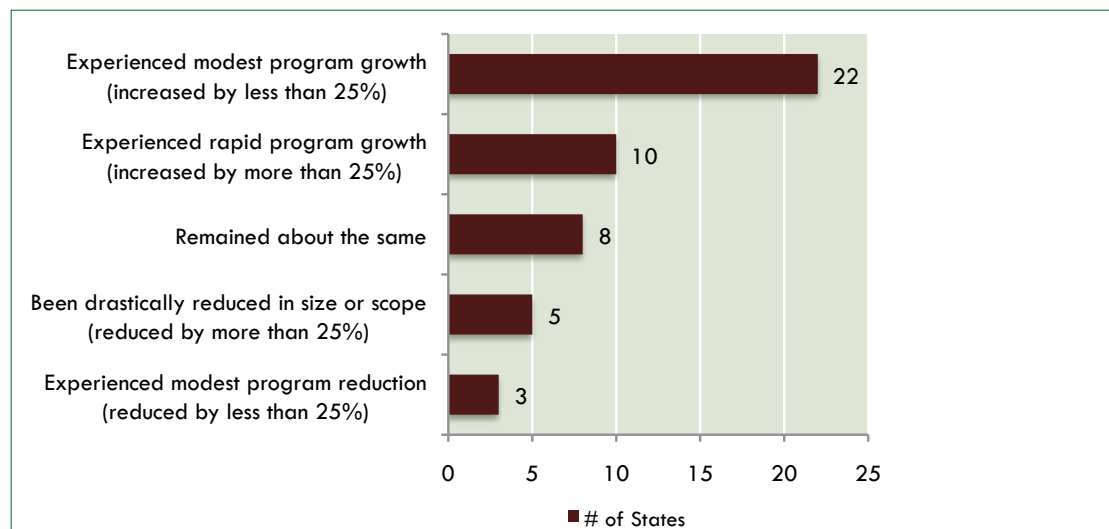
Program growth appears to be in response to the growing need for providing access. About half (25) of the states reported that in the past 10 years the need for improved access has increased significantly and access is a much more important issue to their agency. An additional third (16 states) indicated that the need for improved access has increased slightly. Only one state indicated that in the past 10 years this need has been adequately addressed with current programs. In 1986, 55% of the states indicated that access was a “major problem” (see *Highlights of Key Access Research* at [huntingheritage.org](http://huntingheritage.org)). See Figure 2.

Figure 2. Changes in state agency perceived need for improved hunter access (in the past 10 years)



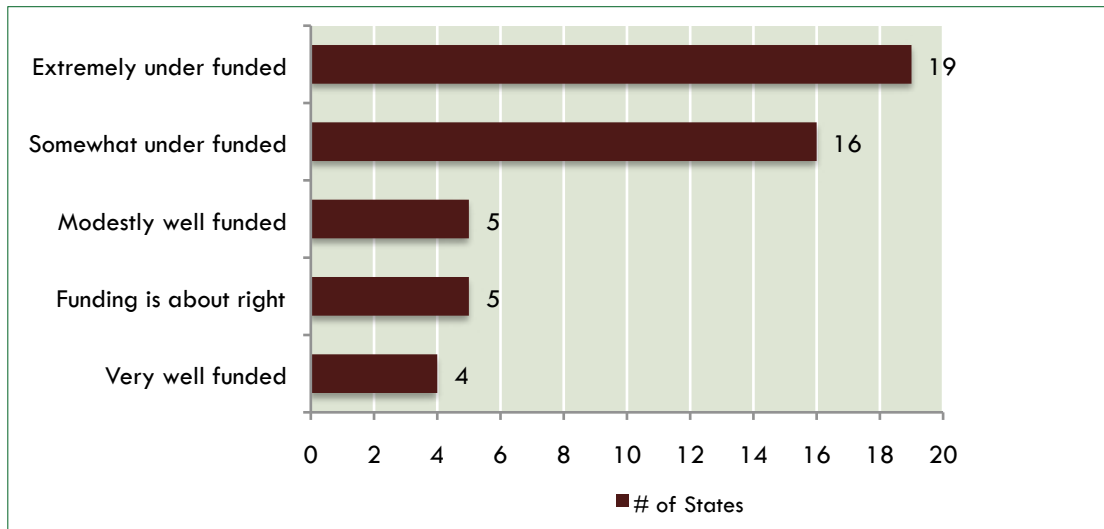
Growth in the number of states having access programs also has been accompanied by program growth within agencies. Twenty-two states reported that in the past 10 years their hunter access programs have experienced modest growth (increased by less than 25%). Ten states reported that in the past 10 years their hunter access program has experienced rapid growth (increased by more than 25%). Only three states reported that in the past 10 years their hunter access program has experienced modest program reduction (reduced by less than 25%), and five states reported that in the past 10 years their hunter access program has been drastically reduced in size or scope (reduced by more than 25%). See Figure 3.

Figure 3. Changes in state agency hunter access program efforts (in the past 10 years)



While hunter access program growth has occurred, the need for improved hunter access appears to outstrip the budgets provided. Based on the perceived need for access, 19 states reported that their hunter access programs are extremely under funded and 16 states reported that their hunter access programs are somewhat under funded. Only four states reported that their programs are very well funded. See Figure 4.

Figure 4. Relative funding level of state agency’s hunter access program based on the perceived need for hunter access



There appears to be room for improvement in the general promotion and public awareness of the lands enrolled in hunter access programs. Between 80% and 86% of the hunter access programs promote the hunting areas, have maps available or have signs posting the areas as being open to hunting. It is understandable that care needs to be taken not to over-promote areas and cause problems with crowding and/or concerns from landowners. However, it is critical that the hunting public—particularly new recruits and transient hunters—is able to locate these areas and feel comfortable that they are on the right property. This need is especially important when considering that studies have documented that lack of hunting access is one of the most important reasons that hunters no longer participate in hunting (see *Highlights of Key Recruitment and Retention Research* at [huntingheritage.org](http://huntingheritage.org)). See Table 3.

Table 3. State agency access specific program-type promotion, map availability and area signage

Program	Promoted	Maps Available	Signed as hunting area
Access easements purchase or lease (n=25)	22	22	19
Access leasing (n=26)	22	23	23
Block-management (n=6)	6	6	5
Cooperative management (n=22)	19	21	20
Public-use easements (n=9)	4	4	6
Other programs (n=10)	7	7	8
<b>Total (n=98)</b>	<b>80 (82%)</b>	<b>83 (85%)</b>	<b>81 (83%)</b>

Staffing levels are a function of funding. A review of reported staffing levels reveals that several states are creatively using part-time and seasonal employees to manage various hunting programs. However, as programs grow, there also will likely be a need for trained staff to negotiate the legal agreements necessary for acquiring hunting access. See Tables 4 and 5.

*Table 4. Number and type of staff position(s) (combined management and line/field) that are dedicated to state agency's private lands hunter access programs*

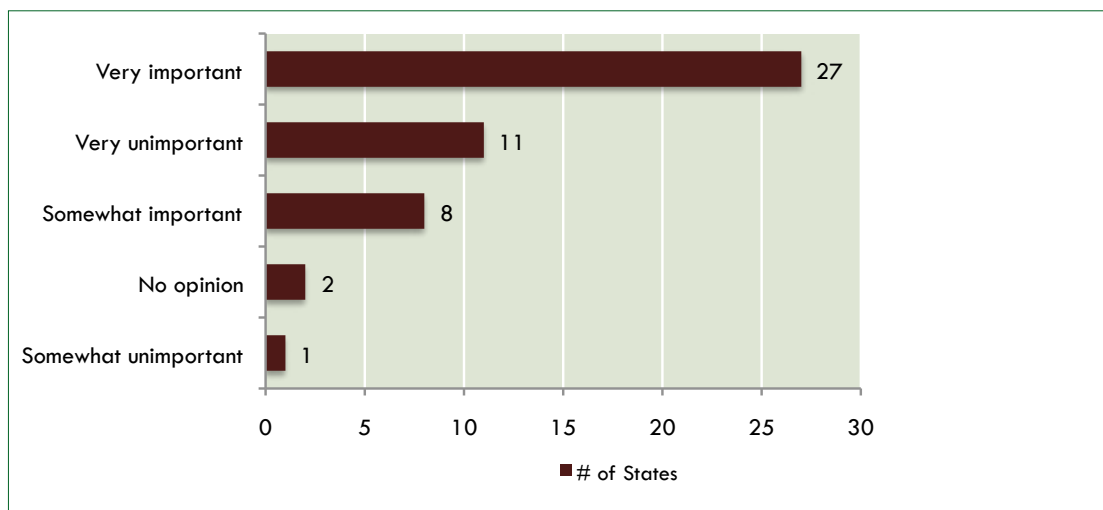
	> 10 Staff	3–10 Staff	2 Staff	1 Staff
Greater than 50% of their time	3	5	0	7
Less than 50% of their time	7	15	2	7
Part time staff	1	3	2	1
Contractors	0	2	0	2
Volunteers	2	1	0	0

*Table 5. Number and type of staff position(s) (combined management and line/field) that are dedicated to state agency's public lands management/access programs*

	> 10 Staff	3–10 Staff	2 Staff	1 Staff
Greater than 50% of their time	11	6	2	5
Less than 50% of their time	6	10	1	7
Part time staff	3	5	0	2
Contractors	1	2	0	0
Volunteers	3	1	0	0

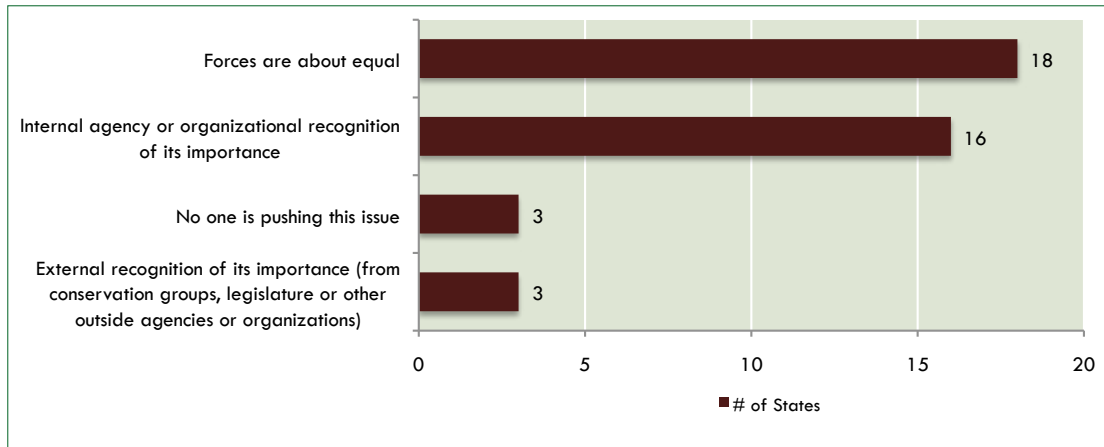
Interestingly, there was a bi-modal response to the question on the importance of hunter access programs to the future of state agency missions. Twenty-seven states reported that hunter access programs are very important to the future of their agency's mission, while 11 states reported that hunter access programs are very unimportant to the future of their agency's mission. This is similar to the response distribution obtained to a similar question asked in the Recruitment and Retention Assessment Survey and reported in a separate report. See Figure 5.

*Figure 5. Importance of hunter access programs to the future of state agency's mission*



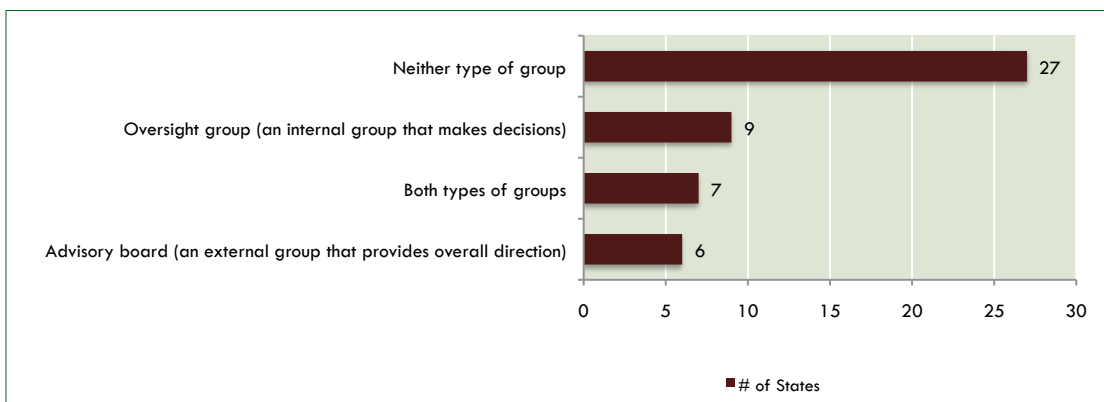
In spite of the bi-modal response to the overall question, it is clear from the programs and actions reported throughout the assessment that state agencies clearly recognize the importance of providing hunter access. Sixteen states reported that internal agency recognition [of providing access] is the primary motivator for improving hunter access, and an additional 18 states reported that both internal and external forces are approximately equal as the primary motivator for improving hunter access. Only three states reported that no one is advocating this issue. See Figure 6.

Figure 6. Perceived primary motivator for improving hunter access within state agency



While this internal recognition of the importance of providing hunter access bodes well for the future, many states are not guided by either an external advisory group or internal oversight group to assist them in addressing this need. Twenty-seven states reported that they do not have either type of group, nine states indicated that they have an internal oversight group only, seven states reported that they had both groups, and six states reported that they have an external advisory group only. See Figure 7.

Figure 7. Types of state agency hunter access program guidance



The importance of advisory or oversight groups to guide hunter access programs will likely become more important in the future, especially as specific strategies are developed to overcome the identified barriers to improving hunter access. Including broad cross-sections of agency staff and stakeholder groups in these groups will likely improve their effectiveness in overcoming the identified barriers.

In addition, there appear to be opportunities to expand coordination with others seeking to improve access. Eighteen states reported that they coordinate with all of the seven potential groups identified on a forced-choice list. Only 11 states reported that they coordinate with land trusts.

Funding was identified as the most frequent potential barrier for improving hunter access to both public and private lands. Potential barriers for improving hunter access programs were notably different between public and private lands in only two areas. The resistance by private landowners to providing access was identified by 38 states as a potential barrier to improving hunter access to private lands, but only by 14 states for public lands. Competition from others wishing to lease access rights was identified by 27 states as a potential barrier to improving hunter access to private lands, but only by 10 states for public lands. In addition, the general process of purchasing land appears to be a larger potential barrier for improving hunter access to public lands than private lands. It is important to note that political barriers to obtaining access to either public or private lands were not frequently identified as barriers to improving hunter access by states. A similar relative weight of each of these perceived potential barriers also was reflected in the responses provided by NGOs. See Table 6.

Table 6. State and NGO perceived potential barriers to improving hunter access

	# of State responses		# of NGO responses	
	Hunter Access on Public Lands	Hunter Access on Private Lands	Hunter Access on Public Lands	Hunter Access on Private Lands
There are no barriers	7	0	0	0
Funding	32	43	8	6
Legislature	8	8	1	3
Governor	1	1	0	0
Agency or organization policy setting body	2	1	2	1
General opposition of government providing access or owning land	10	6	5	2
Inter-agency or organization cooperation	6	3	3	1
General process of purchasing land	18	10	3	3
General process of obtaining non-fee title access rights	15	16	4	3
Internal resistance by agency or organization staff	5	3	2	0
Resistance by private landowners to provide access	14	38	5	6
Competition from others wishing to lease the access rights	10	27	3	5
Other	5 <sup>1</sup>	6 <sup>2</sup>	0	2 <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Five states listed additional barriers, including: limited personnel, staffing capacity and the inability to add more personnel to manage any additional landholdings; non-consumptive user groups are not willing to share access during the hunting season and a small amount of public land with many competing uses.

<sup>2</sup> Six states listed additional barriers, including: providing access is no longer a priority duty of Conservation Officers; having dedicated personnel and staff to focus on this issue; the demise of CRP may eliminate the habitat base that is a needed prerequisite for consideration and enrollment into an upland game access program; and urban sprawl.

<sup>3</sup> Two NGOs listed additional barriers, including: changing in ownership leading to fragmentation of private lands; and lease hunting by individuals, groups/organizations and /or outfitters.

Existing funding for hunter access programs is heavily weighted towards hunting license funds, Federal Aid in Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration (Pittman-Robertson), and special permits, stamps and tags. State open-space bond funds appear to be an increasingly important source of funds. However, additional funding sources likely will be needed to meet the demand for future hunting access programs. Numerous studies have documented that a large percent (but generally not a majority) of hunters are willing to pay for access (see *Highlights of Key Access Research* at [huntingheritage.org](http://huntingheritage.org)). While hunters have indicated in these studies that they are willing to pay for access, they also have placed numerous caveats on pay-for-hunting programs. Nonetheless, it is likely that additional fees derived from hunters will be part of the solution to hunter access challenges. See Table 7.

Table 7. State agencies that identified funding sources for various state hunter access programs

Program	Pittman-Robertson funds	Hunter license funds	Special permit/stamp	Other state funds	Other local funds	Other federal funds	Private funds	Other funds
Access easements (n=25)	13	15	8	9	4	3	7	0
Access leasing (n=26)	11	16	12	4	0	0	2	3
Block management (n=6)	3	4	3	0	0	0	0	0
Cooperative management (n=22)	15	18	10	7	2	2	3	0
Public-use easements (n=9)	3	4	2	6	1	3	2	1
Other programs (n=10)	4	5	3	0	0	1	3	0
Total Programs (n=98)	49	62	38	26	7	9	17	4

Funding levels for hunter access programs is also reflected in the frequency of hunter access programs having separate line-item budgets. Twenty-two states reported that their private land hunter access programs have separate line-item budgets and 20 states reported that their public land hunter access programs have separate line-item budgets.

Forty-one states indicated that hunter access is included in their agency strategic plan and 44 states reported that improving hunter access is included in their land management planning efforts. However, only seven states indicated that they had completed an *Inventory of Hunter Access Needs*. See Figure 8 and Table 8.

Figure 8. Levels of strategic planning within state agencies that includes hunter access

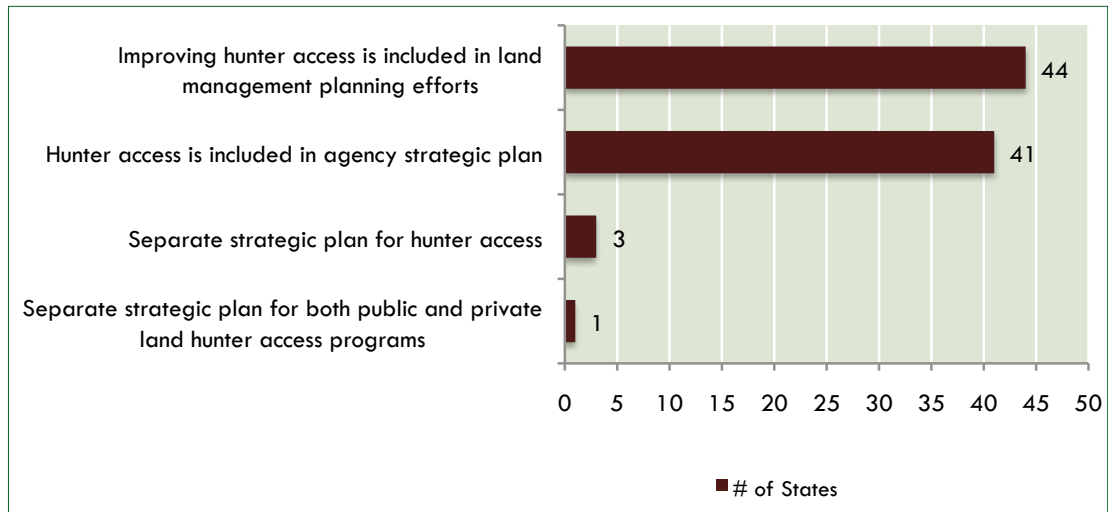
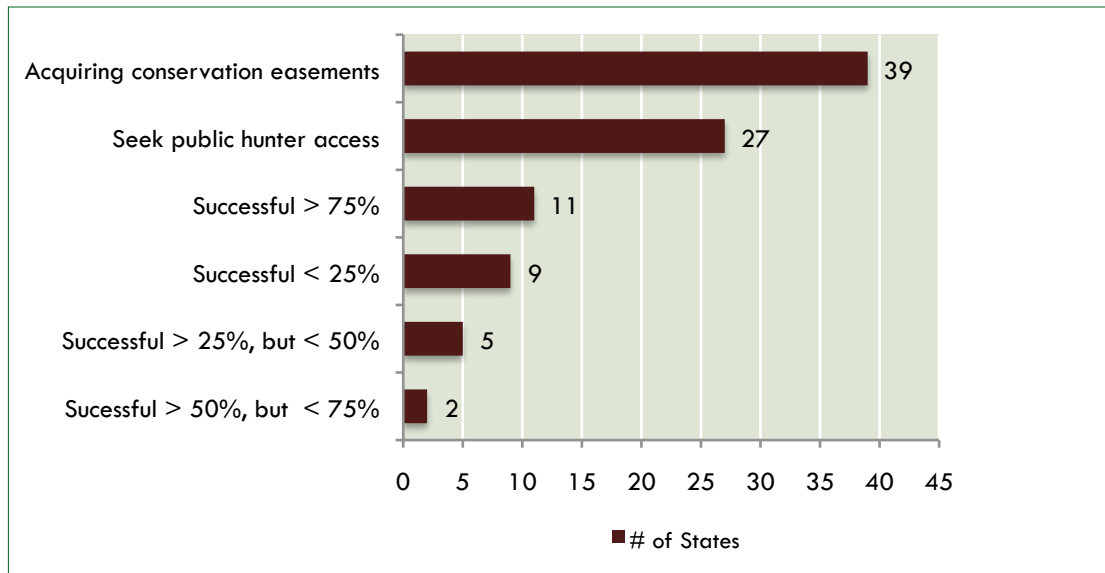


Table 8. States that have conducted an Inventory of Hunter Access Needs

Hawaii
Idaho
Nebraska
North Dakota
Ohio
Pennsylvania
West Virginia

Thirty-nine states reported that they acquire conservation easements on properties. Of these, only 27 states even attempt to acquire public access on these conservation lands. The success in acquiring public access is highly variable and is likely to have regional differences. For example, the Northeast region appears to have greater success in this endeavor than other regions. The reasons for this greater relative success in the Northeast need to be investigated. See Figure 9.

Figure 9. Number of state agencies involved in acquiring conservation easements, seeking public hunter access on conservation easements, and estimated success in acquiring public access rights



While hunter access programs appear to be growing, there also appears to be a need for program plans to guide them. At best, states reported that 50% of the individual programs within a program-type have written plans. The absence of written plans makes integrating these hunter access programs into other programs that are addressing hunter recruitment and retention programs even more difficult. Communications between staff developing and delivering recruitment and retention programs and staff developing and delivering access programs is critical for long-term hunter recruitment and retention efforts to be successful. See Table 9.



Table 9. Number of states that have written program plans, evaluations, and evaluation tools and metrics by specific hunter access program-type

	Access easements purchase or lease (n=25)	Access leasing (n=26)	Block management (n=6)	Cooperative management (n=22)	Public-use easements (n=9)	Other programs (n=10)	Total (n=98)
States with written plan for this program	13	11	2	11	3	3 <sup>1</sup>	43
States with evaluations for this program	9	10 <sup>2</sup>	1	5	0	2	27
<b>Evaluation tools and metrics</b>							
Number of acres	8	8	1	4	0	1	22
Habitat type or quality	8	5	1	2	0	0	16
Number of participants (landowners)	3	5	1	2	0	0	11
Number of participants (hunters)	4	5	1	3	0	1	14
Number of hunters per dollar spent	2	3	0	0	0	0	5
Hunter-days tabulated	5	3	1	2	0	0	11
Hunting access permits sold	2	2	0	1	0	0	5
General, unstructured feedback from hunters	5	5	1	3	0	0	14
Informal exit interviews with participants leaving the site	2	2	1	1	0	0	6
Formal exit interviews with participants leaving the site	1	3	0	0	0	0	4
Informal after-season evaluations	5	1	1	1	0	0	8
Formal after-season evaluations	4	4	1	3	0	1	13
Multi-year evaluations of participant landowners	2	0	1	0	0	0	3
Multi-year evaluations of participant hunters	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Informal qualitative evaluations based on participant landowner feedback	3	1	1	2	0	0	7
Formal qualitative evaluations based on participant landowner feedback	0	0	1	0	0	0	1

	Access easements purchase or lease (n=25)	Access leasing (n=26)	Block management (n=6)	Cooperative management (n=22)	Public-use easements (n=9)	Other programs (n=10)	Total (n=98)
Informal qualitative evaluations based on participant hunter feedback	2	0	1	1	0	0	4
Formal qualitative evaluations based on participant hunter feedback	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
Hunter surveys	6	6	1	2	0	0	15
Landowner surveys	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
Retention rate of participant landowners	1	2	1	0	0	0	4
Retention rate of participant hunters	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Geographic distribution of areas	5	4	1	0	0	0	10
License sales	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Other	0	0	0	1	0	0	1

<sup>1</sup> Program numbers include one state that indicated they were in the process of developing a written plan for that program

<sup>2</sup> Program numbers include one state that indicated they were in the process of developing an evaluation for that program

In a similar vein, it appears that increased efforts to evaluate hunter access programs are needed. Overall, only 26 of 98 specific program-types reported having any evaluation component. See Table 10. At best, nine of the 25 states (36%) reported that they are evaluating their access easements purchase or lease program. While it is recognized that in some cases informal or intuitive assessments are made and that more objective evaluations can be expensive and/or difficult to conduct, structured, periodic evaluations are critical in order to measure program outputs and outcomes. However, if the community is not willing to ask hard questions about existing programming, then it will be nearly impossible to change the direction of the current hunting recruitment and retention trajectory.

Table 10. State agencies within AFWA regions by evaluations for program types

Midwest	Access Easements Purchase or Lease	Access Leasing	Block Management	Cooperative Management	Public-use Easement	Other Access Program	Total
Colorado							0
Illinois							0
Indiana							0
Iowa							0
Kansas	x	x <sup>1</sup>					2
Kentucky							0
Michigan		x					1
Minnesota						x	1
Missouri				x			1
Nebraska	x						1
North Dakota	x	x					2
Ohio							0
South Dakota		x				x	2
Wisconsin							0
TOTALS	3	4	0	1	0	2	10

<b>Northeast</b>	<b>Access Easements Purchase or Lease</b>	<b>Access Leasing</b>	<b>Block Management</b>	<b>Cooperative Management</b>	<b>Public-use Easement</b>	<b>Other Access Program</b>	<b>Total</b>
Connecticut							0
Delaware							0
Maine	x			x			2
Maryland	x						1
Massachusetts							0
New Hampshire							0
New Jersey							0
New York							0
Pennsylvania							0
Rhode Island							0
Vermont							0
West Virginia							0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>

<b>Southeast</b>	<b>Access Easements Purchase or Lease</b>	<b>Access Leasing</b>	<b>Block Management</b>	<b>Cooperative Management</b>	<b>Public-use Easement</b>	<b>Other Access Program</b>	<b>Total</b>
Alabama				x			1
Arkansas							0
Florida							0
Georgia							0
Louisiana							0
Mississippi	x	x					2
North Carolina							0
Oklahoma		x					1
South Carolina							0
Tennessee		x					1
Texas		x					1
Virginia							0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>

Western	Access Easements Purchase or Lease	Access Leasing	Block Management	Cooperative Management	Public-use Easement	Other Access Program	Total
Alaska							0
Arizona							0
California	x						1
Hawaii							0
Idaho							0
Montana			x				1
Nevada							0
New Mexico	x	x					2
Oregon							0
Utah		x		x			2
Washington				x			1
Wyoming	x						1
TOTALS	3	2	1	2	0	0	8

Overall Counts	Access Easements Purchase or Lease	Access Leasing	Block Management	Cooperative Management	Public-use Easement	Other Access Program	Total
	9	10	1	5	0	2	27

<sup>1</sup> Program numbers include one state that indicated they were in the process of developing an evaluation for that program.

Having a greater and more in depth understanding of hunter and participant landowner expectations and motivations for participating in a program will be particularly important to grow program participation. As discussed in the *Highlights of Key Access Research* (available at [huntingheritage.org](http://huntingheritage.org)), understanding landowner motivations and values is critical in designing a hunter access program that meets their needs.

A review of the metrics and tools currently used in program evaluations reveals that most measure program outputs, such as number of acres enrolled or number of participants involved, rather than outcomes, such as landowner or hunter satisfaction with the program. In addition, relatively few are directed toward participating landowners. See Table 9 for summary details.

In addition, only 10 states indicated that geographic distributions of the areas were used in their specific hunter access program evaluations. Admittedly, the assessment survey did not specifically focus on this aspect of providing hunter access. However, because of the growing urbanization of hunters, it stands to reason that additional effort should be focused on providing

hunter access near urban populations. While doing so may be more difficult than providing hunter access in very rural areas, the need for convenient hunter access is more critical around urban areas. More research needs to focus on the importance of the geographic distribution of hunter access programs. However, it appears that states probably need to focus additional efforts on securing hunting areas located near human population centers. See Table 9.

## NGO and Federal Programs

Only a few of the 42 non-government organization (NGO) members of the American Wildlife Conservation Partnership participated in the assessment, and only one provided responses to the detailed programmatic questions. While few in number, the NGOs that have active hunter access programs often provide an invaluable service to advancing the cause of improving hunter access by acting as a bridge between private landowners and government agencies. In addition, NGOs, in general, often provide valuable political support on a wide range of hunter access issues beyond having a physical hunter access program. The National Wild Turkey Federation was the only NGO that provided programmatic details on their hunter access program. A narrative summary of their program can be found in the NGO Results section of the full *Hunter Access Program Assessment Survey Report*.

At the federal level, federal agency access programs target general multiple-use public access, but are not specific to hunter access, per se. In most cases, the federal agencies are interested in acquiring fee title purchase or in-perpetuity easements as real-property rights. As a result, the spectrum of federal hunter access programs is much more limited.

It should be noted that the public land holdings of federal agencies provide millions of acres of public hunting opportunity. Studies have documented that most of this land can be accessed with minimal or no barriers (see *Highlights of Key Access Research* at [huntingheritage.org](http://huntingheritage.org)). However, there are numerous examples where there is inadequate access to public lands.

Because all of the three federal agencies included in the assessment have de-centralized management/administration, their decisions regarding which properties or easements to purchase are localized. While these decisions are guided by various national-level planning documents, there appear to be opportunities for improved coordination among and between state agencies and local units of federal agencies regarding public access to federal public lands.

## Conclusions

Awareness of the critical role that providing hunting access plays in reversing the downward trend in hunting license sales appears to be increasing on a national scale. This increased awareness is reflected in an increasing number of state agencies that have public land and/or private land hunter access programs, as well as an increasing diversity of hunter access programs.

The majority of state agencies clearly recognizes the importance of providing hunting access and is developing innovative programs to meet this need. While outside influences are increasingly working to resolve this issue, 81% of states that responded to the question reported that internal recognition of the importance of providing hunting access is the driving

force for improving access. Improved access program development will play a critical role in preserving the North American hunting heritage tradition.

Hunting access program-types are fairly uniformly distributed across the country. The most common types documented by this assessment are access leasing programs, where hunting rights are acquired by agencies for the public (26 states), access easement (purchase or lease program) (25 states) and cooperative management programs (22 states). In addition, 38 states have a public lands hunter access program, 37 have a private lands hunter access program, and 27 have a corporate lands hunter access programs.

While the increasing number and diversity of hunter access programs bodes well for the future, budgets for these programs do not appear to be keeping pace with the need. New sources of funds will be needed to allow programs to grow in order to meet the anticipated demand.

Studies have documented that most federal public lands can be accessed with minimal or no barriers (see *Highlights of Key Access Research* at [huntingheritage.org](http://huntingheritage.org)). However, there are numerous examples where inadequate hunter access to public lands exists. This will require continued focus and effort.

Access challenges to private land appear to be greater than those on federal lands and are considered to be getting worse (see *Highlights of Key Access Research* at [huntingheritage.org](http://huntingheritage.org)). State agencies are responding to this trend by developing innovative programs that provide landowners with considerable flexibility in designing public hunter access programs.

While this assessment did not inquire about any specifics regarding the geographic distribution of hunter access program lands, it did ask if geographic distribution was used in evaluating hunter access programs. Only 10 states reported using it. It is difficult to draw conclusions from this information; however, it may be surmised that directing additional effort, or developing a specific strategy that addresses the need for providing hunting access near human population centers, will pay long-term dividends in supplying future hunters with places to hunt.

The potential barriers identified to improving access on both public and private lands were largely financial and cultural, not political. Therefore, while funding and cultural barriers may still be formidable, it appears that their resolution may be pursued directly without having the added burden of negotiating adverse political policies. This likely will allow for more creative solutions that involve landowners in a negotiated process.

However, the cultural parameters that guide landowners' decisions to grant hunter access on private lands has changed dramatically during the past few decades. Past or perceived bad behavior by hunters, liability concerns, and leasing hunting rights are a few of the contextual cultural changes that have occurred (see *Highlights of Key Access Research* at [huntingheritage.org](http://huntingheritage.org)). These cultural issues must be factored into any future access programs.

State agencies would likely benefit from the creation of oversight and/or advisory groups that would guide their access efforts. At present, 22 states report that they have either an external advisory group and/or an internal oversight group and 27 states report that they do

not have either type of group. The establishment of these groups could help ensure that the cultural, demographic, and management issues regarding access are integrated into new access programs.

Many states have developed innovative programs that are adaptive to landowner desires. These programs appear to be growing. This implies that states have a working understanding of the motivations of both hunters and landowners that encourage participation. However, a need exists to improve program evaluations for access programs currently in place. Improving our knowledge of landowner motivations and values will be critical as established programs grow and new programs are developed in the future.

The need to exchange information within and among agencies regarding which agencies and organizations are conducting programs, who their partners are, and how well their programs are working also remains critical. In some cases, knowledge about what their own agency or organization is doing does not appear to be readily available to others. This awareness gap within and among agencies and organizations may be symptomatic of a general lack of awareness of the critical role that providing access plays in recruiting and retaining hunters.

Current hunting access programs are funded largely by hunting license funds, Federal Aid in Sport Fish and Wildlife (Pittman-Robertson), and special permits, stamps and tags. Additional funding sources will likely be needed to meet the future demand. Current strategies include state open-space bond funds that are being effectively used by some states to address this need.

Outside of the narrow scope of this assessment, the hunting community would benefit from recognizing that the need for hunter access is not limited to hunters or hunting. A broad coalition of outdoor recreationists is beginning to coalesce to push for reauthorization and full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. If successful, the reauthorization and enhanced funding levels could provide much needed financial support for a broad array of outdoor recreations, including hunting.

## Recommendations

- State-level access oversight and advisory groups should be created. Ideally, these groups would include a broad cross-section of agency staff and stakeholders. Non-agency staff could include commission (agency policy oversight group) representatives, private landowners, representatives from hunting groups, conservation organizations, land trust organizations and possibly representatives from the legislature and/or governor's office.
- An *Inventory of Hunter Access Needs* (or a broader access needs inventory) should be conducted by each state to guide future program growth and administration. This inventory should also be developed with input from other state and federal agencies, NGOs and other stakeholders.
- At the state level, develop and share written hunter access plans among all of the stakeholders and agency partners. Having written plans will assist the inter-agency coordination of providing hunter access. States with plans should make them available to other states to assist them with plan development.



- Develop line-items within agency/organization budgets specifically to support hunter access efforts.
- Continue to explore and innovatively apply the “user-pays” philosophy to providing certain types of hunter access. However, agencies need to be mindful of the potential economic impacts that may result by having hunters pay additional fees for access.
- Improve coordination among and between state and federal agencies regarding public hunter access to federal public lands. Decisions regarding hunter access to federal lands often are made at the local level, so state agencies and their partners should cultivate relationships with local federal agency staff. Conducting the inventory of access needs with input from others will help improve coordination.
- Improve the promotion and public awareness of lands enrolled in access programs. General promotional efforts include diverse, coordinated and strategic advertising, providing maps of the areas and having the areas identified with signs. Obviously, facilitating users in finding and feeling comfortable that they are on the correct property will help them enjoy a positive hunting experience.
- Develop specific strategies directed toward meeting the need for improved hunting access convenient to human population centers. Assemble case studies of current successful efforts and distribute to state agencies interested in replicating these efforts.
- Improve efforts to communicate with new, existing, transplanted and recently lapsed hunters regarding places to hunt.
- Aggressively pursue acquiring public access as part of conservation easements, as appropriate.
- Continue to address situations where inadequate public hunter access to public lands exists. Revitalization of BLM’s Access, Transportation, Rights-of-Way (ATROW) program, with an emphasis on recreational rights-of-way, is one example of a potential mechanism to achieve this goal. Similar focused mechanisms should be developed for other federal agencies to provide better public hunter access to public lands.
- The hunting community should join the growing coalition of outdoor recreationists to push for reauthorization and full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund.
- Provide additional training for land management staff to ensure that they have the skills necessary to address and incorporate the cultural issues regarding hunter access while they negotiate the legal agreements necessary for acquiring hunting access.
- Conduct additional social research regarding the cultural parameters and circumstances that guide landowners’ decisions to grant public hunter access to private lands. The results of this research should be used to design and improve hunter access programs.
- Direct additional resources toward evaluating current hunter access programs. The results of these evaluations should be incorporated into an internal feedback loop that flows into improving current programs and assists in designing new ones. The most effective evaluations are designed during the planning process by initially setting

measurable objectives. This will likely require developing new, easy-to-use and cost-effective tools to assist the hunting community in program evaluation efforts.

- The hunting community will likely need to be much more strategic in determining desired program outcomes and how to measure the success of those outcomes. To accomplish this, the community will need to integrate its thinking about providing hunting access with other recruitment and retention programs.
- Improve the hunting community's ability to share information regarding access program efforts and effectiveness.
- Continue to develop the National Hunting Heritage Strategic Plan. An element of this plan should be the creation of a national web site where details regarding specific hunting and shooting programs can be posted and shared.
- Incorporate *Best Practices for Hunting and Shooting Recruitment and Retention* (NSSF 2008) into all hunter access programs, as appropriate. Some of these best practices address the access issue specifically, and many more address effective processes for designing, implementing and evaluating programs of all types.