

failure instead of success. The science of fish and wildlife management did not exist, and funds to better understand the principles of fish and wildlife restoration were non-existent. Little money was available to acquire land, pursue restoration work or enforce game laws.

A historic change for the better began 75 years ago in 1937, when Congress passed the Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid to Wildlife Restoration Act. The law levies an 11 percent excise tax on rifles, shotguns, ammunition and archery equipment and a 10 percent tax on handguns. The tax is paid by manufacturers, not by customers at checkout counters, so most people don't know about it. Since its passage, Texas has received more than \$300 million for wildlife research and conservation, creation of wildlife management areas, hunter education, shooting range development and related work.

Key language in the law includes "a prohibition against the diversion of license fees paid by hunters for any other purpose than the administration of said State fish and game department." With those words, the science of fish and wildlife management was taken out of the political arena. If a state wanted federal money to help restore wildlife, they had to guarantee their wildlife agency's right to use every dime of hunting and fishing license revenue to support it.

In 1950, Congress passed the Dingell-Johnson Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act, mandating a similar excise tax on fishing rods and related equipment. This has funneled nearly \$350 million to Texas for fisheries

research and conservation, creation of fish hatcheries, boater and angler education, boat ramp and marina construction and more.

These two historic laws were hard-won victories. It took years of pushing by conservation groups, and many failed attempts, before they finally passed. Federal excise taxes, along with state hunting and fishing license revenue, are the key to the North American model of wildlife conservation, in which wildlife are owned by the people, and a "user-pay, public-benefit" system taxes those who use the resources most and are willing to pay to manage them for the common good.

To study the 75-year legacy of WSFR funding in Texas is to track the state's history of fisheries and wildlife conservation. Pick any high point, any great achievement, and this money is behind it. It would take a book to cover all it has made possible in Texas over 75 years, but here are some highlights.

In 1945, Texas used WSFR funds to buy 5,335 acres for the state's first wildlife management area. Sierra Diablo WMA in far West Texas today encompasses close to 11,800 acres and is a stronghold for some of the last remaining desert bighorn sheep in Texas. This native species had van-



Jordan Cherry is shown with this huge 31 1/2 pound Blue Catfish caught at Oak Creek Lake July 15, 2012. Also shown are Jim Willson (left) and Josh Paul.

ished from the state by 1960, but is coming back across West Texas thanks to restoration work that began at Sierra Diablo WMA and continues today.

More wildlife management areas followed, all made possible by WSFR funds. In 1948, Black Gap became the state's second WMA. Gene Howe and Kerr WMAs fol-

lowed in 1950. Derden WMA near Palestine was renamed in 1952 for Gus A. Engeling, the first biologist assigned to the area, who was shot and killed by a poacher there in 1951. J.D. Murphree WMA

near Port Arthur began in 1958. Matador in the Panhandle started in 1959, and Chaparral WMA was born in South Texas in 1969.

Today there are 49 Texas (Continued on next page)

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