

Teaming With Wildlife or Teaming With Taxes?

NEW CONSERVATION PROGRAMS FOR turtles, herons, otters, and frogs may sound like a good idea. But what about a new tax on backpacks, binoculars, bird food, and small boats to fund them?

This question will come before the next session of Congress when it considers pending "Teaming With Wildlife" legislation. Political watchdogs for recreational boating—notably BOAT/U.S. and the National Marine Manufacturers Association—oppose the new tax, as does Rep. Jim Saxton (R-NJ), the chairman of the Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans Subcommittee.

Proposed in 1996 by the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) and the National Association of State Park Directors, the tax would provide as much as \$350 million annually for states to spend on conservation programs benefiting more than 1,800 wildlife species not currently covered by reliably funded programs. An excise fee of 5% of the wholesale value of many recreational products would be passed on to the consumer.

"Angling and hunting user fees have fo-

cused on game species, and they're doing well," says Naomi Edelson at IAFWA. "We need funding for other species. The purpose of Teaming With Wildlife is to expand the opportunity for participants in other outdoor activities to also contribute and give something back to nature."

BOAT/U.S. president Richard Schwartz disagrees. "Boaters already give the state departments of natural resources \$200 million in federal motorboat fuel tax revenues, but it's a continual battle to get them to spend it on boating programs," he says. A more equitable solution, Schwartz suggests, is to spend a portion of revenues already collected for other outdoor funds on non-game programs.

Several legislators who oppose the tax, including Rep. Saxton, are seeking support for their "Teaming Against Taxes" initiative, which not only expresses the anti-tax sentiment of the current Congress, but is against raising prices on recreational products. "The practical effect of the policy would be to limit the number of people able to enjoy the benefits of the great outdoors," say the legislators.

For details on the proposed legislation, visit the Teaming With Wildlife website (<http://www.teaming.com>). Tax-weary opponents should write to their Congressional representatives.

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Cetewayo, a 1957 Scottish-built, Laurent Giles-designed sloop, reaches toward a second-place finish in last June's Hermes Mumm Trophy off Cowes, England.