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## ***Sport Shooters' and Archers' Attitudes on Shooting and Appropriate Behavior on Federal Lands and the Messages to Which They Will Respond***

In an effort to prevent further closures of shooting ranges and other areas open to unsupervised recreational shooting on federal lands, to protect natural areas, and to promote safe shooting, Responsive Management recently conducted a two-phase study for the Federal Lands Hunting, Fishing and Shooting Sports Roundtable to determine sport shooters' and archers' attitudes on shooting and their perceptions of appropriate behavior on federal lands. The study also examined sport shooters' and archers' reactions to various messages designed to curb problematic and irresponsible behavior by recreationists on federal lands.

Littering, unsafe target shooting, and illegal dumping have become major issues on federal lands where unsupervised recreational shooting is permitted. Some shooters leave behind fragments of clay pigeons and spent shotgun shells, as well as metal, plastic, and glass objects brought out for use as targets. Shooters get blamed for household dumping because home appliances discarded on federal lands are used as targets and left in place. Environmental and property damage (shooting at trees and signs) is also a significant problem. As a result, federal lands supervisors have closed many shooting ranges and areas open to unsupervised shooting on federal lands. These issues do not appear to be a problem at "supervised" shooting ranges on federal lands, which are mostly managed under permits held by gun clubs.

The Roundtable was formed when a coalition of groups from the American Wildlife Conservation Partners signed a memorandum of understanding

with federal land management agencies. One of the Roundtable's initiatives is to educate federal lands shooters about appropriate behavior when using federal lands for recreational shooting and keeping those areas in good condition.

The study entailed a telephone survey of sport shooters in California, Arizona, Virginia, Oregon, and Colorado, and two focus groups of sport shooters in Phoenix, Arizona, and Denver, Colorado. Funding for the research was provided by

The Izaak Walton League of America, the National Shooting Sports Foundation, the Archery Trade Association, the National Rifle Association, Safari Club International, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Forest Service.

The study revealed that littering, illegal dumping, and irresponsible behavior are persistent and fairly widespread problems at unsupervised ranges and shooting areas in the states surveyed; a majority of recreational shooters from each state, and numerous participants in the focus groups, indicated that unsafe shooting behavior, irresponsible behavior, environmental damage, property damage, shooting debris, and litter are currently affecting the quality of their shooting experiences. Among those who said that an unsupervised shooting area or range they used on federal land had been closed, litter, dumping, and property damage were among the top perceived reasons for those closures.

At the same time, participation in shooting activities on federal lands is high, and recreational shooters in the states surveyed overwhelmingly consider shooting areas and ranges on federal lands to be



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very important to their shooting participation (74–86% of shooters from the survey gave this answer, a finding reflected in the comments of numerous focus group participants).

The survey also found—and the focus groups confirmed—that recreational shooters value simple, positive messages that resonate clearly. Many of the longer messages presented to the respondents were noted for being open to misinterpretation, and most of the shooters in the focus groups lacked enthusiasm for messages they perceived as focusing solely on negative outcomes. Numerous participants in the focus groups also spoke of the importance of responsibility and the need to educate less experienced sport shooters on proper decorum while using federal lands.

The Roundtable has commissioned Tread Lightly!—a nonprofit organization that develops education

and stewardship initiatives—to use the survey and focus group results to develop a responsible shooting sports campaign. The campaign includes marketing/communication and education/outreach strategies to curtail irresponsible behavior on federal lands and to encourage those who take part in recreational shooting on federal lands to act responsibly.

The full report on the survey and focus groups, including respondents' rates of participation in recreational shooting on federal lands, their experiences with closures of shooting areas and ranges on federal lands, their opinions on how to deter unsafe shooting practices and irresponsible behavior, and the specific messages presented to the study participants, is available at [http://www.responsivemanagement.com/download/reports/Shoot\\_Public\\_Lands\\_Report.pdf](http://www.responsivemanagement.com/download/reports/Shoot_Public_Lands_Report.pdf) (994K PDF).