

**Testimony of Lt.Col. Lew Deal, USMC (ret)
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“Expanding Access to Federal lands for People with Disabilities”

**Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
United States House of Representatives**

24 July, 2008

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify before this Subcommittee today. I will be short and to the point.

I have been involved with providing outdoor recreational opportunities for disabled individuals for a number of years. In 1993 at Marine Corps Base Quantico, VA, I initiated a fully integrated hunt program for disabled veterans. This program allowed mobility impaired veterans to hunt the entire season from specially constructed ground blinds in specifically designated areas. Later, we were able to improve the program with a mobile elevating stand. From this experience I then went on to help with drafting and the passage of the *Disabled Sportsmen’s Access Act* of 1998 (Public Law 105-270). I am currently working with the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the Armed Forces Foundation, and the North Carolina Handicapped Sportsmen’s Association to continue providing disabled individuals with outdoor recreation experiences.

There are many topics that could be addressed in these hearings. I would like to focus on just one key element in providing recreational access for disabled individuals. The use of adaptive equipment can be the critical component in a successful and safe outdoor program. The main emphasis of our programs over the years has been on hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing. I view adaptive equipment as the critical bridge between accessibility and participation in traditional outdoor sports for the physically challenged.

For fishing: A wheelchair accessible pontoon boat has proven to be the best choice. Not only does it provide a stable platform, it also allows the wheelchair individual the opportunity to pilot the boat. Providing independence and mobility on the water! There are also numerous wheelchair accessible fishing pier designs available. MCB Quantico has an excellent wheelchair accessible facility.

For hunting: There are a variety of blinds and stands that can be utilized. However practical experience gained from hunts across the nation, a mobile **and** elevating stand provides the best option. Since the passage of the *Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act*, the Paralyzed Veterans of America have been donating a device called the Huntmaster to military bases, state wildlife agencies, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Wildlife Refuge System. The fully enclosed compartment goes from ground level to twenty-one feet. It is mounted on a trailer and can be easily towed. This inherent mobility allows for relocation as conditions change and leaves no permanent ground signature. There is room for two individuals in the weather proof compartment: a very desirable capability with young hunters. As an added bonus, this type of equipment can also be used for wildlife viewing.

I have seen first hand the importance of participation in outdoor activities has on disabled individuals, especially our wounded service members. It is more than just recreation--it is rehabilitation. A major goal in accessible outdoor recreation is to foster independence in our disabled Americans. The introduction of adaptive equipment can allow for a safe and rewarding experience for all.

Thank you for allowing me to be here today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

