

Call of the wild

A Tory MP wants a non-partisan 'outdoors caucus'

BY COLIN CAMPBELL • For Conservative MP Garry Breitkreuz, the former Liberal government's controversial gun registry is becoming a fading memory. "It's going to be history," he says. "We don't even have to think about it." Nowadays, the long-time gun registry critic from Yorkton, Sask., is busying himself with a new initiative that he says might help put a more positive spin on hunting in Canada—a new, non-partisan "outdoors caucus."

Two weeks ago, Breitkreuz circulated a letter to MPs and senators inviting them to join a caucus of like-minded outdoor enthusiasts. Its goal, he explains in the group's mission statement, "is to entrench in law fishing, hunting, trapping, and shooting sports as acceptable, traditional, environmentally sustainable outdoor heritage activities." The caucus is, in many regards, the antithesis of the gun registry—something to openly promote the hunting and outdoors industry, rather than constrain it, says Breitkreuz, a lifelong deer hunter and well-known figure within the hunting and fishing industry.

The idea of an outdoors caucus is not new, though generally a caucus is built on regional or party lines. The previous Liberal government had a fledgling outdoors caucus, but it was partisan and largely ineffective. This outdoors caucus, which Breitkreuz hopes will cross party lines, is being initiated by the Tories' best-known anti-gun registry man, and is being widely embraced by hunting groups, most of which have been lobbying for this kind of coalition for several years. "It's loosely based on the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus in Washington, the largest caucus on Capitol Hill," says Phil Morlock, who represents the Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association and is the director of environmental affairs at Shimano Canada. Morlock envisions the caucus playing a big role in environmental preservation laws, as well as helping get information about the hunting and fishing industry into lawmakers' hands. Hunting groups also hope it will lend a voice to hunters in a country that lacks a strong lobby like the National Rifle Association in the U.S.

"We've been too defensive," Breitkreuz says, about Canada's approach to hunting and fishing—things that are "vital components of our culture and heritage. We've got to start promoting one of the real strengths of our country." So far, he has about 10 names ready to join, including at least one NDP member and a few cabinet ministers, he says.

"There are all sorts of issues that the outdoors caucus would be dealing with," says Greg Farrant, the manager of government relations for the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. "Everything from chronic wasting disease to invasive species. They are all outdoor issues." The hunting and



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fishing industry, which is worth about \$10 billion annually in Canada, is "something Parliament needs to pay attention to and through the outdoors caucus that will become possible," Farrant adds.

Despite Tory promises to scrap the troubled gun registry, issues surrounding firearms

HUNTERS HOPE IT WILL PROVIDE A STRONG LOBBY, LIKE THE NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION DOES IN THE U.S.

legislation will also likely remain one of the top issues on the caucus's agenda. Others might include species at risk legislation, and even questions about the seal hunt. "I want to make sure that we have a positive aspect to legislation that we pass in Parliament," says Breitkreuz. "This is going to be one way to do that." M