



# Become a Citizen Lobbyist for Wildlife

## *Your guide to meeting with your elected officials*

**Why be a Citizen Lobbyist for Wildlife?** Keeping our elected officials informed and in tune with what their constituents want is an important part of keeping them accountable for their actions (or lack of action).

**A personal visit with your elected officials or members of their staff is one of the most direct ways to defend wildlife – and can have an enormous impact.** From your local city council members to your Members of Congress, meeting with your elected officials is a lot easier than you might think. Remember, they work for *you* – and it's their *job* to listen to your concerns.

### Setting up a Meeting with your Members of Congress

You don't have to travel to the nation's capitol to meet with your Members of Congress. You can set up a meeting with your elected officials while they're visiting one their district offices or meet with members of their staff who are responsible for keeping their bosses up to speed on what their constituents care about.

### Scheduling Your Meeting

- Submit a written request to the appropriate office and follow up with a call to the Scheduler. Remember to mention that you're a constituent.
- Suggest specific times and dates that you (or your group) are available to meet.
- Identify the issue or legislation (reference the bill number if possible) you'd like to discuss.

### Preparing for Your Meeting

**Know your stuff.** Check the Defenders website for materials. We have loads of information to help you develop talking points for your meeting and downloadable materials that you can leave behind. Learn more about our campaign priorities and how you can help advocate for them with your federal officials at [www.defenders.org/topcampaigns](http://www.defenders.org/topcampaigns).

**Identify your group.** Keep your group small (groups of more than 4 or 5 tend to be difficult to coordinate) but, if possible, include people who represent different groups that have an interest in the legislation or initiative.

**Have a game plan.** Make sure your group is on the same page about the points you want to make during your meeting. It's hard to be persuasive and clear about what you're asking if you can't agree!

**Practice makes perfect.** It's easy to get nervous in a meeting, and time is limited, so make sure you know what you want to say, who's going to say what, and in what order – in advance.

**Pick a clear and achievable goal.** What exactly do you want your elected official to do -- vote for or against a bill? Agree to introduce or co-sponsor legislation? *You should be able to articulate your goal in one sentence.* Try it.

### During Your Meeting

**Be on time and be patient.** Elected officials operate on tight schedules. Show up 5-10 minutes before your meeting is scheduled and be flexible – it's common for officials or staff members to be late or to have your meeting interrupted.

**Stay "on message."** You will have limited time, so try your best to stay on topic and focus on your goal.

**Make it personal.** Start the meeting by introducing yourself (or your group) and thanking the official or staff member for taking time to meet with you. If you have any connections to the official, mention them. Provide personal details and examples of local wildlife that are or will be impacted by the issue or legislation to make your argument more compelling.

**Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."** You don't have to be an expert to meet with your elected officials. If you don't know the answer to a question, be honest and tell your legislator that you'll do some research and get back to him or her with more information – a great opportunity to contact them again to remind them that their constituents care about this issue!

**Set deadlines.** An official who hasn't taken a formal position on an issue or a piece of legislation won't typically commit to one in the middle of a meeting. If he or she has to think about it, or if you are meeting with a staff member, ask when you should follow up with them.

### **After Your Meeting**

**Take stock.** Immediately after your meeting, go to a quiet location with your group and compare notes – but be aware of who's around you. Make note of any action your elected officials (or their staff members) committed to take and write down any follow up information you promised to send to them.

**Follow up.** Write personal thank-you notes while the meeting is fresh in your mind. Remind the official of any promises made at the meeting!). If you promised to send additional information, try to follow up as soon as possible. Let us know if you need help answering a question by sending us an email at [citizenlobbying@defenders.org](mailto:citizenlobbying@defenders.org).

**Be persistent.** If the official or staff member doesn't meet the deadline for action you agreed to during the meeting, follow up and request a firm commitment.

**Tell us how it went!** Defenders would love to hear what happened. Email us at [citizenlobbying@defenders.org](mailto:citizenlobbying@defenders.org) to let us know which points seemed to impress your elected officials, which issues seemed important to them, and what promises they made (or didn't make). This information will help us coordinate our efforts to make the world a better place for wildlife.

### ***Additional Resources***

#### **Federal Officials**

**How to contact your members of Congress:** You can contact your Members of Congress in Washington, D.C. by calling the **Capitol Switchboard** at (202) -224-3121 or visit their website to find their local office information.

Don't know who your **U.S. Representative** is? Find out at <http://www.house.gov> - Enter your ZIP+4 in the top left hand corner of the page.

Don't know who your **U.S. Senators** are? Find out at <http://www.senate.gov> - Locate your state in the drop down menu in the top right hand corner of the page.

#### **State Officials**

**Find your state elected officials – including your Governor, your state senator and your state representative:**  
Visit <http://www.congress.org/congressorg/dbq/officials/?lvl=L>

#### **Local Officials**

**Contact your local elected officials:** Visit [http://www.usa.gov/Agencies/Local\\_Government/Cities.shtml](http://www.usa.gov/Agencies/Local_Government/Cities.shtml) and click on your state, then on your town or city, to find out who your local elected officials are and how you can contact them.

***For more information, check out our website at:***  
**[www.defenders.org/actlocal](http://www.defenders.org/actlocal)**