

HOW TO AVOID STRADDLING THE FENCE ON CONSERVATION ISSUES

by

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"During the past one hundred years there has been, in the western world, an emphasis on the material side of things - on quantity as against quality, on novelty for it's own sake, on control over the forces of nature as against control over our own nature, on variety and multiplicity as against unity, on matter as against mind, on technology as against art, (including the art of life), on means as against ends. This trend is taking us off the main line of possible progress".

"The space and resources of our planet are limited. Some we must set aside for the satisfaction of man's material needs - for food, raw materials and energy. But we must set aside others for more ultimate satisfactions - the enjoyment of unspoiled nature and fine scenery, the interest of wildlife, travel, satisfying recreation, beauty in the place of ugliness in human building, and the preservation of the variety of human culture and of monuments of ancient grandure". "In practice this means limiting the uses to which some areas are put." - "The values we must pursue are those which permit or promote greater human fulfilment.-(the) value goals are knowledge and interest, beauty and emotional expression, inner integration and outer participation, enjoyment and a sense of significance".

Julian Huxley, 1957

The topic of this discussion "How To Avoid Straddling The Fence on Conservation Issues", is a very large subject, and I am not at all sure that I am able to give this group which, has long been concerned with these matters, much in the way of advice. I got into this situation as the result of a request from Jay Kaffka, who commented one day, "You seem to have spoken out on some controversial conservation issues in the past, and I wonder if you might discuss how you managed to maintain an attitude on some of these things and avoid "eradication". Well, I'm not so sure I was so consistent about taking a position, nor that I have avoided "eradication". In fact, there were extended periods when progress appeared meager, and I, myself, felt the effects of a number of years of attrition. Then again, I see some changes and am glad to have had a small part in what has been accomplished by Conservation interests. It can, however, only be assumed that progress in any direction is the result of the efforts of many people who were concerned, and over a long period of time. But I am quite sure that, if we were discussing these matters person to person, we would describe some of the same kinds of experiences and express some of the same ideas.

I began this discussion with a quotation from Julian Huxley, published in 1957. I did so because I believe some of us are prone to assume the environmental movement began very recently - so recently as the first Earth Day. If any of us entertain such views we are very much mistaken. The history of environmental concern goes back many years to the days of Thoreau, Teddy Roosevelt, J. N. Darling, Charles Sheldon and W. T. Hornaday; among others, and more recently to men like Ira Gabrielson, Clarence Cottam, and those of us who continue to fight for the things they believe in, and with conservation organizations from the Izaak Walton League to the Environmental Defense Fund. In actuality, the conservation movement in this Country began with the awareness on the part of a few men that wildlife populations and then habitats were disappearing rapidly, and they began to fight to stem the tide of des-

truction. Earth Day in 1970 was a kind of final acknowledgement that things had gone far enough, that pollution, channeling of streams, losses of wetlands, the inundation of rivers behind an ever-increasing number of mighty dams, the losses of timberlands, the spewing of poisonous pesticides over the landscape, and the resultant losses of what was historically and biologically significant and scenically beautiful had degraded the world in which we and future generations must live into the distant future. Prior too and since that date, there has been an environmental movement which has reached into almost all the segments of our society. The term ecology has become a household word, but unfortunately its real meaning is not clear to most people, and its significance is downgraded or exploited by others - for their particular selfish objectives.

But I am sure that most of you who are confronted every working day with these problems know the meaning of the term, and what are the main issues. Essentially, they are the preservation of a world in which man can live "a wholesome and beneficent existence" and the perpetuation of an environment which not only furnishes food and shelter, but also those emotional, spiritual and esthetic needs which make him human. Dr. Clarence Cottam expressed the needs of the future in these terms: "Technology has but one justification; to serve man's needs for food, shelter and clothing so that he can be free to develop his unique assets - mind and spirit."

But what we as professionals are concerned about is how to stop the rampant destruction of the world we live in. R. L. Nace, in a recent paper, covered the main issues well when he said, "modern technology, employed by vast numbers of people gives man the ability to cause drastic changes in the landscape. This situation is dangerous, because this ability is not balanced by an equal ability to predict or control other unwanted or damaging changes that occur as inadvertent and unforeseen consequences of specific actions, (and this) carries with it the likelihood of making monumental mistakes."

We will not dwell further on the issues which are evident to us, but in the balance of this paper we will try to point out some of the problems and the techniques for their solution.

THE PROBLEMS

The problems we face are many and diverse, but fundamentally they are based on human attitudes and principles (or a lack of them). Mitchell (1970) commented: "the crisis of the environment stems from a legacy of economic and technical premises which have been pursued in the absence of ecological knowledge." Fundamentally, many of our difficulties result from ignorance, from the failure to access all the values, and from the damaging results of the impacts of technology and its massive machines on the human habitat.

Nace referred to the three besetting sins that tempt the planner "faith in science, and technology, worship of bigness, and arrogance toward the landscape." Certainly we are well aware of the implications and results of these "sins". We have evidence all about us that these attitudes have led us into a dilemma from which we may not be able to extricate ourselves. But since this dilemma is of our own creation, and the result of attitudes and our own ignorance, I want to list a few of the concepts and "cliches" which have determined our approach to the use of the land and its resources. These common expressions sometimes mirror our positions and our failures. The following are but some examples, there are others.

1. The "fiscal yardstick" for measuring resource values, which somebody has said, "leads us into a cultureless desert."

2. "The Common good", which often leads to the "commonplace."

3. "Multiple Use" which is in essence an attitude that we can use "everything for everything." The problems were exemplified by citing the difficulties of putting a "mule, a miner and a picnicker" in the same spot at the same time.

4. "The greatest good for the good for the greatest number," and the question is - "Who makes the decisions?"

5. "Apathy and indifference" which are the main impediments to saving anything.

6. "The corporate complex"-which leads to the assumption that we shouldn't criticize anybody's right to exploit resources for financial or personal gain.

7. "The ivory tower attitude" which is sometimes prevalent in institutions of "higher" learning."

8. "Conformity" which has been called "a cloak for timid men."

9. The bureaucratic systems, which have been rooted in specializations and limited thinking, and have acquired vast sums of money to promote their particular brand of "progress"; and which, like the dinosaurs, have resisted the acceptance of new ideas and circumstances.

10. The decision making process, which has been called "Too limited for the kinds of decisions now in prospect."

This is far from a full list of indices to our way of thinking, but may suggest some of its deficiencies. But perhaps the main problem lies in our failure to expound upon or vigorously pursue those high principles to which we are dedicated. As Charter (1970) said, "Principles cannot be retained, *slightly*, anymore than a female can be pregnant *slightly*," (and) "it is possible that principles have become a burden that science can no longer afford."

We all know the main issues, although I believe those of us in management fields too often view our own specialty and product without due concern for the full sum of gains and losses. I have seen wildlifers do this in using population limits, (rather than the quality of the experience), as the sole standard for assessing the end results of their efforts and the values of the wildlife resource.

Here, again, this is in itself a large subject. I will terminate this section by quoting from a paper I prepared a number of years ago "The Obligations of The Biologist." It does, I believe, sum up some of the problems and issues; and I will, hereafter, talk about how to avoid "straddling the fence", which is also a very large subject.

"The biologist, first of all, is a member of the science profession concerned with the discovery of truth. Further than that, he is obligated to the expression of the truth. He cannot, as a scientist or as a citizen, ignore that obligation. He must, also, be willing to assume risk to arrive at the truth. He must be willing to encounter adversity. He must acknowledge error and be willing to accept criticism and ridicule. He must attempt to envision the end results of the application of his findings, be able to evaluate those results in terms of other scientific systems of analysis and other actions; and he must understand the social problems which stand as obstacles to the application of his knowledge to social betterment".

"In this complicated world the biologist must extend his knowledge to include the vast realms of scientific possibilities. He must recognize, too, that his specialty is only a segment of the whole. To quote Poincare, "We cannot understand an elephant by restricting ourselves to thin slices of him seen under a microscope."

Alexander, (1961)

Thus, principles and the methods for applying these principles are the main issues at hand.

STRADDLING THE FENCE

And now, after trying to set a precedent for our courses of action, we are back to where we began—the issue of not “straddling the fence” in dealing with the problems we face. All I can say about my own attitude is that I have tried to stay on whatever side conformed to the ideals all of us are pledged to support, and I have not always been successful. The preservation of a world in which quality and diversity are of major concern, and where other values beyond the “fiscal yardstick” must be recognized, determine our commitments; and I have known a lot of workers and others who did their best to adhere to these principles. Briefly, these principles necessitate a concern for the truth, a continuing quest for knowledge, and a recognition and application of the methods by which truth is expressed and knowledge is advanced. A most important element in this process is a recognition of the full sum of social needs and attitudes, and the educational, political and social processes through which objectives are achieved. Here are a few ideas. There are, I am sure, many others that are quite as valid and that work for those of you who are confronted with finding the techniques for solving our conservation problems.

We must be aware, of course, that the solutions are difficult. First of all we are dealing with ideas for which this society has no system for evaluation, and which are often not saleable (for cash) in the market place. However we may belabor the issues or try to adjust the values of such things as natural rivers, wild lands, scenic beauty or wildlife to the monetary system, I do not believe we will succeed until we come to the realization that the significance of these resources can't be calculated in dollar terms. (I've talked with biologists who were sold on the idea that we could fit anything to our monetary standards of checks and balances. I simply don't believe this is a fact.) It will require a whole new pattern of thinking to which we, as a materialist society, are not conditioned; and changing these basic philosophic attitudes is part of our job. Fortunately, I believe some changes in our attitudes are apparent. The deficiencies are evident, particularly when we look at some of the mixed-up cost-benefit systems which are used to assess economic returns in federal water projects, and the “bouncing around” of American dollar values over which we seem to have lost control.

Secondly, we must realize, as most of us do, that we are dealing with people who create circumstances which are adverse to the preservation of what we are prone to call environmental quality, and who have little or no understanding of those biological process and ecological systems which are linked in complex relationships, and about which the scientists have comprehension but limited knowledge.

Among our major objectives is the creation of a fund of common knowledge of these relationships which can be easily understood. It is also our job to use every media at our disposal to transmit this knowledge and awareness to the public and political sectors who, generally, make those decisions which have catastrophic effects on the living world around us. Admittedly, this is a most difficult task, and like any other educational system a slow procedure. It is evident that every method of presenting ideas must be utilized; and I am sure this group is as familiar as anyone with what can and needs to be done.

Thirdly, is the realization that we are dealing with political systems traditional attitudes and bureaucratic ways that are often self-centered and resistant to change. Our present approach to water management is a case in point. Nace (1964), in commenting on this aspect of our problems had this to say: “Resource management problems have political, economic, and cultural aspects as well as scientific and technological ones—no problem of people and water can be solved once and for all.”

“Current costs for water developments in the United States are about \$10,000,000,000 annually—productivity (includes) esthetic values” (and), “some sort of a scale must be found for measuring these later values because *few societies will be satisfied in the long run with eco-prosperity in a cultural limbo.*” and he comments further, “conservation has been widely misused as a label for almost any alteration of the landscape that was advocated by the promoters of special interests. The fact is that man’s attitude toward the land has been that of a butcher not a protector or conserver—the land must undergo major operations—(and these) have offset the natural forces which hold each other in check.”

In other writings, he comments upon the “North American Water Alliance” and “South American Great Lakes System”, which would inundate an area equal in size to wester Europe, and comments, “The purposes of these vast schemes are totally unhampered by any knowledge of the ecological consequences that would ensue.”

But to return to the main point of this discussion, I would note that the ingredients for promoting the conservation idea are well known—the problem lies in getting ideas across and influencing the courses of action. Since most of us, as workers in a political scheme of things, are directly influenced by political systems, the main issue is how to get our ideas across, influence the decision-making process, and survive at the same time. I don’t really have any formula, and I have been on the “receiving end” too often to feel that I can pose as an authority on getting (and staying) on the right side of the fence. But here are, I believe, a few angles.

1. We must work at this job rather constantly. The idea that some beginning biologists have that they are entering into a perpetual vacation system is quite erroneous.

2. We cannot be conformists, and it is essential that we take risks. This is as much as part of our job as it is for the soldier or the man entering upon a shaky business venture.

3. We must learn as much as possible about the political system and how it works, since it is essential that we infiltrate our ideas into this system.

4. We must be willing to accept adversity. In fact, I think it is an advantage to be somewhat masochistic and derive some satisfaction from the pains to which we are often subjected.

5. We must constantly seek knowledge and the truth. We must have the facts when we present our case. Unfortunately we are short-banded in comparison with the many thousands of workers in bureaucratic systems which, each day, are developing plans which may be adverse to the conservation objectives we support.

6. We must seek out our compatriots and work with them. They include the numerous conservation groups such as the Wildlife Federation, Sierra Clubs and others. We cannot only help them, but they have even larger capabilities for helping us, and include many dedicated people in their memberships.

7. We must understand that our specialities are only part of the whole picture. Scientific facts, for example, are essential, but there are social, economic and other disciplines with which they must be integrated.

8. We must constantly seek to develop and effect legislation which protects our resource interests. For example, the “Environmental Policy Act” of 1969, provides opportunities to comment on developments inimical to our interests, but this legislation is only a beginning and has flaws which make it only partly effective. The “National Water Commission Report” recommended changes in cost-benefit systems, laws, and project review methods. We must understand and pursue certain of these goals if we are to protect and enhance our interests and this means development and promotion of effective legislation.

These are a few of the things about which we must be concerned. But as far as tactics are concerned, we must continue to look for new ones and use any ethical means that comes to hand.

We are in an environmental crisis, and the issues effect our very survival on this planet. Our professional goals call for dedication, wisdom and knowledge, and constant effort. I do not have many of the answers, but would add that what we commonly call "guts" is a useful ingredient. Perhaps I can best terminate this discussion with a review of some of the processes and tactics which lead to preservation of the Buffalo River in North Arkansas. (Discussion of actions leading to preservation of Buffalo River in Arkansas.)

Finally, I think I can best sum up the issues by quoting the conclusions I arrived at in the paper "The Obligations of the Biologist" Alexander, (1961). They sum up my thinking on this subject.

"In summation I wish to observe that the biologist or other scientist can no longer separate his science or his purposes from those of other men. He must recognize that his knowledge presents only a partial view of life. He must know that the pursuit of truth is not enough, and that he is personally responsible, as are all men, for the application of knowledge to the ends as well as the means of life. He must recognize that his science in itself is amoral and has no particular virtue; that without its application to the ethical concepts of goodness and beauty it may serve for either good or evil. The biologists must recognize that his concern with living things must encompass the understanding that the products of technology are not enough to satisfy all man's needs, and that appreciation of esthetic values and moral truths are essential to the perpetuation of the environment in which he must live. He must apply his knowledge of these complexities of environmental relationships to preservation of a world in which man can live out a wholesome and beneficial life.

He must recognize, finally, that he is not only a scientist but also a man with moral responsibilities. He must have the moral courage to say what he knows so that other men can profit from his special knowledge. He cannot hide behind that "cloak of conformity" which serves as a refuge for timid men, and he can no longer stand aloof from the affairs of other men, but must come forth from the narrow niche of his specialities, and lead the way.

The white light of the hydrogen bomb, which glows over the horizon and threatens man's very survival, has seared into our consciousness the awareness that material progress is not enough, and that the uses of science depend, finally, on the moral precepts which form the ethical codes, which govern the affairs of men."

Finally, I want to advise you to get on whatever side of the "fence" your principles lie. Mark Twain once said that he couldn't decide whether he wanted to go to heaven or hell "since he had friends in both places." You will probably catch a lot of hell on the side of the fence you choose, but you'll find some friends there, and, anyway, is more comfortable than setting astride a picket fence.

Thanks for listening. Keep up your efforts and keep going.