

# General Session

## Wildlife Management: Reflections and Challenges

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Dr. Timmerman asked me if I would talk about how our profession began and how we have progressed over the last 50 years. I can't do 50, but I welcome the opportunity for reflecting on the evolution and development of our field, where the profession might be headed, and some of the challenges of the future.

I have had the privilege of a variety of experiences at the state project or field level: with a federal agency in regional and Washington offices, in academia, and, finally, in a private organization. This has spanned a period of rather dramatic evolution in our field, accompanied by changing public attitudes, increasing human requirements, and intense controversy.

It is usually difficult, if not impossible, for a participant to assess the significance of events as they occur and in which the participant is involved. But the passage of time permits a historical perspective and, possibly, some clues to the future.

The profession of fish and wildlife management is young enough that it is fairly easy to trace the rather broad stages in its evolutionary development. For purposes of this discussion, I would like to break development into 3 broad periods or stages: *explorer/naturalist, management, and socio-economic.*

Before there was ever formal recognition of conservation or wildlife management as a field—or even coinage of the words—we were already well into one of its earlier phases, namely that of exploration, such as Lewis and Clark and their westward exploration, and John Wesley Powell and his explorations of the Colorado. There followed the great naturalists—the observers and recorders—Ernest Thompson Seton, Muir, and others. It really was a time of exploration and adventure, and led to some of the monumental achievements of the Teddy Roosevelt era and the beginnings of a real awareness of the need for some conservation measures as the westward expansion and resource exploitation was in full tilt.

There were many wildlife achievements or mileposts all along the way. But I want to confine my comments to wildlife management as a field.

Wildlife management, as an identifiable field or profession, came into being

during the mid-1930s with Aldo Leopold; it received its greatest impetus with passage of the Pittman-Robertson or Wildlife Restoration Act in 1937.

It is difficult to overemphasize the importance of that single piece of legislation and of the broad impact it had and continues to have upon wildlife management as a field and upon wildlife resources. It was far more important than making federal funds available to the states. It required the dedication of license revenues to the state fish and wildlife agency, the employment of professionally trained personnel, and the development of sound projects. It generated a demand for trained wildlife professionals and influenced not only the curriculum of existing land grant universities but also the development and establishment of new schools of wildlife management. More than any other single factor, it resulted in the professionalizing of wildlife management as practiced by state fish and wildlife managing agencies.

And, because of the wisdom of its early provision for federal and state custodians, it set a pattern of federal/state cooperation that worked so successfully and was defended so stoutly that it ultimately gave rise to the D-J and finally the Wallop-Breaux programs for fisheries and boating.

The early days of those programs were exciting indeed, especially the period immediately following World War II when so many veterans returned home, completed their training, and went to work with great dedication, not really realizing, I don't believe, that we were all caught up and part of a new and rapidly advancing field.

This period really marked the end of the naturalist era and ushered in the phase of management—a time of identifying the distribution and status of the major species, of developing census techniques, range and habitat analysis methods, of restocking antelope, turkey, elk, and buffalo, and of buying and developing land. It was during this period that the fundamentals of management were being developed, tested, and improved. Much of it was new ground. There was so much to be done, and so few to do it. The profession enjoyed little public attention or support and it certainly hadn't become politically popular. To the contrary, maintaining professional gains and employment of professional personnel ran counter to the patronage system; counter to the views of many sportsmen. Nevertheless, it was the time of laying the foundations for management.

With the 1960s came a period of political awakening and the awakening of the American public to problems of the environment and the establishment of an environmental ethic. Almost overnight, the long and lonesome struggle for support became a popular and persuasive political subject and there began the great proliferation of environmental organizations of every kind and variety. New laws were passed at the local, state, and federal levels. Use was made of the judicial machinery, and the mass media was brought into the fray.

Traditional fish and wildlife management began to be overshadowed and overwhelmed by broader concerns, often with more emotional public appeal—save the whales, the seal, and/or the grizzly; tropical deforestation; etc. In some quarters, management was portrayed as the villain. Nevertheless, the progress and evolution of the field continued.

Wildlife management moved into a socio-economic phase at about the same time as the "environmental era" began—roughly the late 1960s. And it brought new challenges.

One of the greatest challenges is going to be how to apply our existing knowledge with less funding and still meet the demands of our more complex human society. There are increasing demands and competition for the finite resource base and for every available tax dollar as all interests search for new sources of revenue. We will soon be at the point, if we have not already arrived and surpassed it, that it will no longer be possible to increase local, state, and federal taxes. And there is increasing competition for private sources of revenue and for private avenues of cooperation. There are going to be fewer dollars available for fish and wildlife management, no matter who wins the election the day after tomorrow—or in 4, 8 or 16 years from now.

We will have to make better use of existing personnel; we will have to develop improved means of cooperation among the resource management agencies and others. We can no longer afford the luxury of duplication and competition among agencies.

It also means that we will have to not only recognize but accept the fact that we can only apply fish and wildlife scientific knowledge and expertise within the existing economic, cultural, and political structure of our society. We all know that human activities have a far greater impact on fish and wildlife habitats and populations than the management activities of the most progressive and well-funded fish and wildlife agencies, state or federal. We must, therefore, learn to work with and influence political and economic policies at every level.

The greatest challenge and opportunity for the future is to learn to influence the policies and economics of these dynamic human forces and activities. These are the forces that change and shape the landscape and determine whether wildlife and its habitats shall exist.

The modern-day wildlife manager and administrator must have an understanding of human demographics and its implications in addition to his knowledge of wildlife, habitat, and management practices.

In a sense, we are moving beyond the crusade stage of the environmental movement and into the cooperation or achievement stage. We already have an environmentally-aware public with great public support for fish and wildlife; but this does not always translate into political and financial support. They are 2 different processes. A crusade is designed to alarm, awaken, and generate emotional concern. Achievement requires translation of that support into overt support for legislation and for regulatory measures, with due consideration of economic factors involved.

One outstanding example of this kind of opportunity is the Farm Bill, which comes up for renewal next year, and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. These are examples of cooperative endeavors that have the potential for influencing entire categories of land over the nation and the continent as a whole.

If we concentrate our efforts nationally and internationally on crucial habitats

or single species, we will end up with little islands or preserves for wildlife like museum pieces, mostly to be observed. We will indeed have become a "country club" or "armchair environmentalists." This is not what wildlife managers seek. We seek to make wildlife a part of the American scene, a part of our outdoor fabric on all classes of land—urban and rural, private and public—to be enjoyed by all of our citizens, whether it be for watching, for fishing and hunting, for economic uses. If we are going to succeed, we must influence the economic and cultural and political schemes so that wildlife remains a compatible part of all environments.

We need the help of the expert resource economist, the tax specialist, and others to explore the ways and means of making fish and wildlife competitive and economically attractive.

One aspect of the socio-economic phase, as well as one of the greatest social challenges facing today's wildlife manager and administrator, is the growing strength of the animal rights movement, particularly the anti-management, anti-hunting forces. That movement has emotional appeal. It enlists the support of well-known and well-intentioned people. It makes effective use of the mass media and of the judicial system. It has become very sophisticated and has chalked up some very clear victories. We have not yet developed a strategy for countering that movement and for putting our own best management foot forward.

One of the factors that has contributed to the success of the animal rights movement is the changing demographics of the human population. A smaller and smaller percentage of our population has any exposure to the out-of-doors. While fishermen and hunters numbers are increasing, they are becoming a smaller portion of the total population. Increasingly, we are dealing with a public whose principal contact with the out-of-doors is vicariously through television and the movies. That lack of exposure, orientation, appreciation, and understanding has serious implications for all resource managers and youth leaders. We are dealing with a public that is losing touch with the out-of-doors and with the resources we are charged to manage. Obviously this public has a different set of attitudes and values than was the case when America was a more rural nation. And, this change has many implications, not the least of which is license sales and support for funding.

We must also find ways of accommodating the great mass of the American people who are non-consumptive users or appreciators for wildlife. A rift has been created between the consumer—the hunter, the trapper—and the non-consumer—the photographer or watcher. This need not be so. As we all know, we manage animals or wildlife for all of its uses. The uses are or can be compatible.

My overall point is that, whether we like it or not, wildlife management must and is indeed moving into a new period. Our ability to apply sound wildlife management measures in the future is going to depend upon our skill in working with and influencing the socio-economic structure. It may not be as much fun as counting deer; it may even be foreign. But this is the greatest challenge. Wildlife management cannot exist as an island. It cannot be isolationist. It must practice what it preaches and integrate itself—in the words of the ecologist, within the ecosystem of which it is a part.

In closing, a personal comment on the profession. Would I do it again? Yes! Despite frustrations, irritations, and disappointments, I have associated with a lot of good, dedicated people, been engaged in some fine causes, and done many interesting things in interesting places. It has been rewarding and fulfilling. What more could I ask?