

Remarks: The Preservation of Biodiversity

Robert M. Brantly, *Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission,*
620 S. Meridan St., Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600

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Biodiversity. intriguing and elusive. What is it? Why is it different things to different people? In literal definition a combination of "bio" ("of living things") (Garulnik 1970) and "diverse"(ity) ("having varied form") (Morris 1982).

Perhaps the most cogent of the definitions encountered in review of the technical literature was that provided by Salwasser (1987) in an editorial in the journal, *Conservation Biology*: he describes biological diversity as ". . . the full variety of life and life's processes from gene systems to ecosystems" (Salwasser 1987).

The emphasis on preservation of biodiversity as the avant garde primary goal for conservation effort seems to have arisen in conjunction with the evolution of conservation biology as a discrete professional discipline. The zeal for preservation of biological diversity evident in that movement is an outgrowth of the perception that the world faces an "extinction crisis"—defined by the belief that the majority of the world's species will become extinct during the next 50–100 years (Soule 1986, 1987). Interestingly, the term "biodiversity" does not appear in the glossary of Soule's book "conservation biology: the science of scarcity and diversity" (1986), a publication viewed as a philosophical cornerstone of conservation biology. Soule does, however, speak extensively of "diversity" and "biological diversity," and the term "biodiversity" no doubt arose in reference to "biological diversity" as discussed by Soule and his contributing authors.

The preservation of biological diversity, "the full variety of life and life's processes," (Salwasser 1987) is motherhood and apple pie. Governmental agencies—state, federal, and provincial—even those agencies whose responsibilities and activities have historically been viewed as antithetical to fish and wildlife conservation, cannot help but subscribe to such a noble goal. Why then, have the conservation agencies, their collegial associations (including the southeastern association of fish and wildlife agencies), and state, federal, and provincial governments been so reluctant to embrace the preservation of biological diversity as a formal objective?

I submit that the answer to this question is "fear and uncertainty":

—Uncertainty about the definition of biodiversity.

—Uncertainty about the scope, scale and implications of a commitment to preserve biological diversity.

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—Fear of the interpretation the courts will ultimately render on the implications of laws mandating preservation of biodiversity, and the effects of such interpretations on natural resource management programs (G. J. Taylor, pers. commun.).

—Fear of the goals, motives, intentions, and agendas of those who advocate the preservation of biological diversity as a national policy.

—Fear of the fact that various groups, with varying agendas, maybe even conflicting agendas, advocate preservation of biodiversity as a national policy in pursuit of what I believe to be radically disparate objectives.

The fires of fear and uncertainty are fueled by the considerable disagreement within the society for conservation biology regarding pursuit of the preservation of biological diversity as a necessary goal of mankind. Member authored editorials in the journal *Conservation Biology* reflect a wide range of philosophical approaches, from advocacy of a three-tiered approach which would be very accommodating to other resource management objectives (Salwasser 1987) to a “neocolonial ‘we know best’ ” approach likened by one author to pronouncements from “eco-ayatollahs” (Deshmukh 1989). The fires of fear and uncertainty are further fueled by the controversy and uncertainty surrounding implementation of the National Forest Management Act of 1976, to the best of my knowledge the only federal legislation specifically requiring conservation of biological diversity (Waller 1988).

I believe that this association, and ultimately the entire fish and wildlife management community, supports the notion that conservation of biological diversity is a necessary and worthy objective of mankind. Wildlife agencies must not allow themselves to be perceived as opposed to biodiversity or as an obstacle to its achievement. It is, and indeed has been, an important element of fish and wildlife management from the outset. What we have yet to work out are the details and an understanding of how and to what extent a national or state policy statement on biodiversity accommodates and can be accommodated by fish and wildlife management goals and objectives. Hopefully, the dialogue we will undertake today will contribute substantially to resolving these outstanding issues.

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