

## Presidential Address

**Bud Bristow, Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, 4010 W. Broad St., Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230**

Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies 47:8-9

---

You know, I looked at the subject for today's talk. I spent 28 years in Arizona, and during that time the population size tripled. So, I have seen some growth and development. In Arizona during that time, a historic building was a 1950s Texaco station and an artifact became a 6 ounce Coca Cola bottle. About 1988, there was a public survey that was conducted by the newspaper. It was pretty widespread and it had good reports, good coverage. The unanimous, almost at least, opinion of most of the people, was that Arizona in the last 10 and last 20 years was a less desirable place to live, and a less desirable place to work, and a less desirable place to raise your kids. So, growth and development does have an effect, and it is recognized by the populous.

I spent considerable thought the last few weeks on the way to approach this message today. There was an earlier time when I knew all about such subjects. I had a 30-year career, however, that has been spent discovering how little we do know. Additionally, a review of old Southeast proceedings—some of the writings from the conservation movement at the turn of the century, Leopold's writings during the 1930s and then the more recent papers from the Southeastern, in fact. They have lent way to the concept that there really is no original thought but just a continuum of stepping stones of thoughts. One thought spilled on the other. I want to tell you today of some of my stepping stones in discovering really how little we know.

A young, right out of college biologist, probably today, and certainly in the 1960s when I started, they knew all about wildlife management and it was a very simple task. All you did was just utilize the scientific method, you gathered information to find the unknown and then we would make adjustments to the habitat. We would pass a regulation and we would attain instant wildlife.

That stepping stone was found unsafe when we entered the State service or the Federal service, however, and it was replaced by the realization that the public had to be supportive of any management changes to really effect successful change. The in phrase at that time was "people management and public support."

About this same time, certain growth and development in America began to be recognized for the danger to wildlife that it presented. The abandoned farms

and ranches of the 1930s and 1940s had been a bonanza for wildlife, but the new public work projects that flooded or drained everything possible created a new stepping stone for wildlife biologists. This was the time when wildlife opposition was in—opposition to channelization and dam building, i.e., the environmental movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In my limited career, those were the halcyon days of fighting the clearly identified enemy of wildlife—good versus evil.

Things aren't quite so clear today. If we examine the demographic trends, we find the change in American habitats from growth and development is more gradual really, than the change in people's attitudes and the exposure to the natural world. The average urbanite has no way to evaluate or to relate to today's wildlife problems, as he normally has no experience or any education in that field, and we, the wildlife management community are not reaching him. Our constituents are becoming a smaller and smaller percentage of the public.

A recent public attitude survey we conducted in Virginia revealed a number of facts which are only confirmation of these demographic trends. We found the usual things (i.e., the public didn't know who we were, they didn't know what we did, they didn't know how we were funded, but they adored wildlife, and they were willing to pay at the 70%–90% level.) A more and very revealing fact was the evaluation of the Department's programs by both the Department employees, and also side by side by the public. We found that the public ratings of our programs, as compared to the Department personnel ratings, were reversed in many of the cases.

Similar program ratings in other states, such as Wyoming and Wisconsin, have been successful, but today we need some new tools, we need some new ideas, we need some new programs. We need a way to fit our programs to meet these public needs. Notice we need to modify our programs. We can educate the public, we can promote our products, but in the end, the public makes the decisions. We must provide the service or the product that they desire. I predict that the *watershed research in the growth and development in the field of wildlife management* in the future is going to be in that area called human dimensions/wildlife management.

Wildlife management is a fantastic success story in America. We have more resident deer, bear, and turkey than there were present originally in Virginia. These successes didn't come without great cost and sacrifice. You people, in our profession, normally spend 50–60 hours per week on the task. From what I can decipher from the past, that has always been the case. We always did. Our agencies depend on this almost religious zeal and dedication to the resource, which in my view, is unique to our profession. We will meet these new challenges of growth and development as we always have, and I'm sure that we always will, and it is because the wildlife biologists in that profession are the best—you're the best.