

## VIRGINIA'S OPERATION RESPECT

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*Abstract:* RESPECT stands for Responsible Educated Sportsmen Promoting Ethical Conduct Together. Operation RESPECT is a cooperative program to combat unethical sportsman conduct in Virginia and offset the negative publicity generated by the anti-hunting advocates. It was founded in 1979 by joint agreement of the Virginia Division of the Izaak Walton League of America, the Virginia Wildlife Federation and the Virginia Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries. General support for the program was achieved in September 1979 at a sportsmans leaders conference. Thirteen planning strategies employed to generate momentum for the program are outlined. The Operation RESPECT Council developed after the conference. In contrast to similar programs in other states, the Council of sportsman leaders sets policy and gives direction to programs. The Education Division of the Virginia Commission and the Wildlife Extension Program of Virginia Cooperative Extension assist in educational program development and administration. Virginia's cooperative approach aims to overcome unethical sportsman conduct and anti-hunting campaigns by generating good publicity for sportsmen, strengthening more stringent enforcement of laws and regulations, and encouraging enactment of new laws to curb unacceptable sportsman behavior. The Operation RESPECT Council and the Commission are working together to greatly expand the number and effectiveness of volunteer hunter education instructors through implementation of a County Coordinator for Operation RESPECT Program. Challenges posed by citizen leadership with agency and university professionals in supporting roles are discussed.

Proc. Ann. Conf. S.E. Assoc. Fish & Wildl. Agencies 34:630-635

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### HISTORY

RESPECT stands for Responsible Educated Sportsmen Promoting Ethical Conduct Together. The acronym was born in the Education Division of the Virginia Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries. The drive to unite sportsmen organizations and the Commission to combat the problem of unacceptable behavior by outdoorsmen on private and public properties arose independently in 2 major sportsman organizations. At the January, 1978 board meeting of the Virginia Division of the Izaak Walton League of America (IWLA) a strong resolution, calling for more stringent enforcement of game laws and trespass, was proposed. At the June meeting this resolution was voted the formal policy of the Virginia Division. In April of that year the Virginia Wildlife Federation (VWF, the state affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation) held a symposium, "The Future of Public Hunting in Virginia." At the conclusion of the symposium, President Walter Leverage determined that hunter ethics would be his top priority issue for the year. A committee composed of C. H. Shaffer, Charles Bates and P. T. Bromley was appointed to develop a policy and a program on the issue. At first the Commission was willing to cooperate short of providing logistic and administrative support. Later with the appointment of James F. McInteer, Jr. as Executive Director, the Commission agreed to become a full partner with the Virginia Division and the Virginia Wildlife Federation. By early 1979 a 3 member steering committee was formed to launch Operation RESPECT at a late summer conference. Steering committee members were Robert Dennis of the Virginia Division, Harry L. Gillam, Chief of Education for the Commission and P. T. Bromley, who represented both the Virginia Wildlife Federation and Virginia Cooperative Extension.

## OPERATION RESPECT CONFERENCE

After more than 6 months of planning, the Operation RESPECT Conference was held September 14-16, 1979 at Fort Pickett, a 40,000 acre U.S. Army training facility in central Virginia. The conference succeeded in not only bringing the leaders of nearly all the sportsman organizations together with Commission officials, but also it resulted in a long term commitment to resolve the outdoor ethics problems by cooperative actions.

The conference went as smoothly and as well as the steering committee hoped, for a number of reasons. Primarily, the problem of sportsman ethics was recognized by Virginia leaders as significant before the conference. Conscientious leaders were frustrated in their attempts to deal effectively with such a difficult and significant problem. Secondly, the steering committee developed a set of working strategies during the planning sessions which guided specific decisions. The 13 comments listed below are presented here to assist planners in other states in developing their own working philosophies.

1) Endorsement at the top: The presidents of the Virginia Division of IWLA and VWF, the Executive Director of the Commission, and administrators of the School of Forestry and Wildlife Resources at VPI & SU, endorsed the conference. Steering committee representatives got excellent cooperation during the planning stages, logistic support to cover use of telephones, office work and travel expenses, and guaranteed organizational presence at the conference.

2) Lead publicity: The conference date and preliminary program were announced by mail to the designated audiences almost 2 months before the conference. Follow-up announcements were mailed to non-respondents.

3) Limited to leaders: Invitations were sent to elected leaders of statewide and known local sportsmen's clubs. Signed by Commission Director McInteer, the letter appealed to public responsibilities of elected leaders and requested their personal attendance and strong cooperation at the conference. Some 300 invitations were mailed. About 50 percent responded either yes or no, and about 30 percent eventually attended. Of those, many were contacted by phone. Without consistent personal contact with leaders, the meeting would not have been successful.

4) Not free: The conference registration fee was \$50 per person. The fee covered lodging in army barracks, food and entertainment, costs of printing literature and manufacturing special campaign hats, buttons, bumper stickers and patches, operating expenses for the steering committee member not on a public payroll, and a small profit dedicated to funding a follow-through program after the conference. Even though \$50 per person to cover 2 nights lodging, 6 meals and the RESPECT promotional materials was a real bargain at today's prices, the monetary investment made by each person attending the conference no doubt contributed to the rapt attention given each speaker and full attendance at each session. Those on expense accounts may have been reimbursed later, but they were aware that their travel budget for the year was tapped for the express purpose of dealing with sportsman conduct.

5) Location appropriate: The conference was held at Fort Pickett. The rugged but adequate facilities of the Army post set the stage for an informal but down-to-business meeting. There was no competition from night clubs—the conference was indeed the only show in town.

6) Problem well documented: Conference speakers were selected with great care to assure that each one would make a significant and unique contribution. Steering committee members worked closely with the speakers to help them define their presentations. Douglas Painter of the National Shooting Sports Foundation led off by reviewing problems the non-hunting public attributes to hunters. Commission speak-

ers, including the Director, Chief of Law Enforcement and Deputy Assistant Director for Law Enforcement, Education and Administration, spoke on the scope and origins of the ethics problem, law enforcement, and the need for firm, long-term commitment. A landowner with a distinguished background in inferential statistics and marketing, claimed prospective hunters should be carefully screened due to national averages for physical, emotional and behavioral deformities or irregularities. He further stated that hunters and fishermen had done substantial damage to his tracts over the past 20 years, as well as causing uncompensated pain and suffering to himself, his family and his tenants and their families. Chuck Bates, a forester with a large timber company, made similar remarks regarding sportsman-caused damages to roads, litter and vandalism. P. T. Bromley reviewed results of a recent doctoral dissertation by Kirk H. Beattie on how licensed sportsmen view game laws and regulations. Chester McConnell, Southeast Regional Director of the Wildlife Management Institute reviewed programs by other states aimed at curbing unsportsmanlike behavior. The combined weight and precision of the featured conference speakers left everyone in attendance with firm knowledge that the ethics problem was real, important and demanding of immediate corrective action.

7) Virginia leaders spoke: All but 2 of the speakers listed on the programs were Virginians. The leader of each statewide sportsman group, except the Virginia Division and VWF, was given the floor to describe what his organization was doing to encourage good sportsmanship. Appeals from the staffs of national sportsman organizations to present their programs as featured parts of the program were turned down. The strategy was designed to encourage Virginia commitments and initiatives.

8) Everyone polled: At the beginning of the conference each participant was given a questionnaire outlining the scope and possible solutions to the ethics problem. The responses were tallied during the conference and presented at the end of the second day. Some of the data are presented in other sections of this paper.

9) Sporting activities: Saturday afternoon from 3 to 6 p.m. was set aside for dove shooting, trap shooting, bass fishing, 4-wheel drive exhibitions and archery. The facilities for these sports were all located on the army post. Excellent cooperation was received from the Post Commander, Col. Austin, and from the resident wildlife manager, Carol Martin. Opportunity to participate in outdoor sports cemented new social relationships, broke up the tempo of the meeting, and encouraged personal commitment to rescue outdoor sports from ridicule and restriction

10) Food good: Sportsmen will tolerate army bunks, heat, dust and long hours, but woe be unto the program director who fails to provide ample and good food and drink. A highlight of the RESPECT Conference was barbecued hog hams, prepared in the North Carolina tradition. The barbecue followed the afternoon of sporting events. The evening was concluded by an important but too lengthy address by Chester McConnell. Still, the great meal added good feelings toward the program, no doubt contributing to the success.

11) Workshops directed: On Sunday morning after the bulk of the program had passed, the group was divided into subject area working groups. The leaders were chosen in advance and provided a detailed statement of objectives for their group. Some of the subjects covered were landowner's problems, law enforcement, finances, sportsman education, and future of RESPECT. Admittedly, many of the recommendations made by the workshop leaders were impractical and unrefined. However, in the process of discussing the significant problem areas, leaders came away with a better knowledge of where their colleagues stood.

12) Minimal preaching: Except for the wrap-up speech by John P. Randolph, Deputy Assistant Director of the Commission, none of the speakers dwelt on personal

responsibility in an evangelistic manner. The strategy here is linked to the reason for promoting Virginia speakers. It recognizes that commitment of a long-term nature is more likely to emerge from a personal evaluation of the ethics situation than from a patronizing appeal to join up under a national banner developed by unknown people or from being brow-beaten into submissive allegiance.

13) Post publicity: Outdoor writers from across the state attended the conference, and each published his own version of the 3-day meeting. All articles were constructive. The Education Division of the Commission hurriedly transcribed and edited tape recordings of the workshop leader reports and combined them with written copies of speeches to publish the transactions in less than 2 weeks. The transactions went to the outdoor writers, organizations and each person who attended the conference. Obviously, substantial communication with supporting organizations and leaders after the conference is required if substantial support is expected for further programs.

### OPERATION RESPECT COUNCIL ORGANIZATION AND PROGRAMS

It was agreed at the RESPECT conference that a follow-up effort was needed to pursue the issue. Further, it was decided to expand the steering committee to include direct representation from any statewide sportsman's group of at least 500 members. The Commission delegates were invited to attend Council meetings, advise members, and provide logistic support. The Council defined itself as a "loose hanging" assemblage of sportsman's groups dedicated to improving sportsman behavior by encouraging sportsman education, by gaining good publicity for sportsmen, by supporting corrective legislation and stringent enforcement of game laws and regulations, and by working with each other, the Commission and Cooperative Extension. Funds to support Council programs were to be generated by sale of promotional materials bearing the RESPECT logo to sportsmen and by donations. Fig. 1 shows how the Council is organized to reach the general public through the Virginia Outdoor Writers and sportsmen through supporting organizations.

Organizations supporting the Council by delegating a representative include VWF, Virginia Division IWLA, Float Fishermen of Virginia, Virginia BASS, Virginia Trappers Association, Virginia Wild Turkey Federation, Virginia Rifle and Revolver Association, and Virginia Four-Wheel Drive Association. All but the Float Fishermen are state chapters of a national organization. Nearly all of these organizations provided the Council with loans of \$350 each in order to produce promotional material. Missing from the Council is direct representation from Trout Unlimited, Ducks Unlimited, bow hunters, salt water fishing clubs, and hound running organizations, and hikers and campers. The last 3 groups are represented through the VWF.

The organizational scheme outlined in Fig. 1 is unique in that citizen leaders make the policy decisions. According to Chester A. McConnell of the Wildlife Management Institute (pers. comm.), sportsman ethics programs in Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, New Mexico and Pennsylvania are controlled by the state wildlife agency. Reliance on sportsman leaders at the Council reflects the popularity of the commission form of organization in Virginia. It also rings true with the conservative nature of Virginia leaders. When asked at the RESPECT Conference if they would rather see the Commission charge enough to run a top flight program or cut corners to save money, 98.2 percent of 82 respondents supported tight fiscal policies. Clearly, Virginia leaders were not ready to push for a Missouri-style program. The alternate to paid professionals housed in the agency is heavy reliance on sportsman organizations. Sporting organization leaders will work with the Commission to achieve their organizational goals and objectives by setting policy and supporting new, aggressive educational programs, publicity and legislation. Building and maintaining good relations between the Council and the Commission Education Division requires considerable effort from the Education Division staff, but the multiplier effect is potentially great.

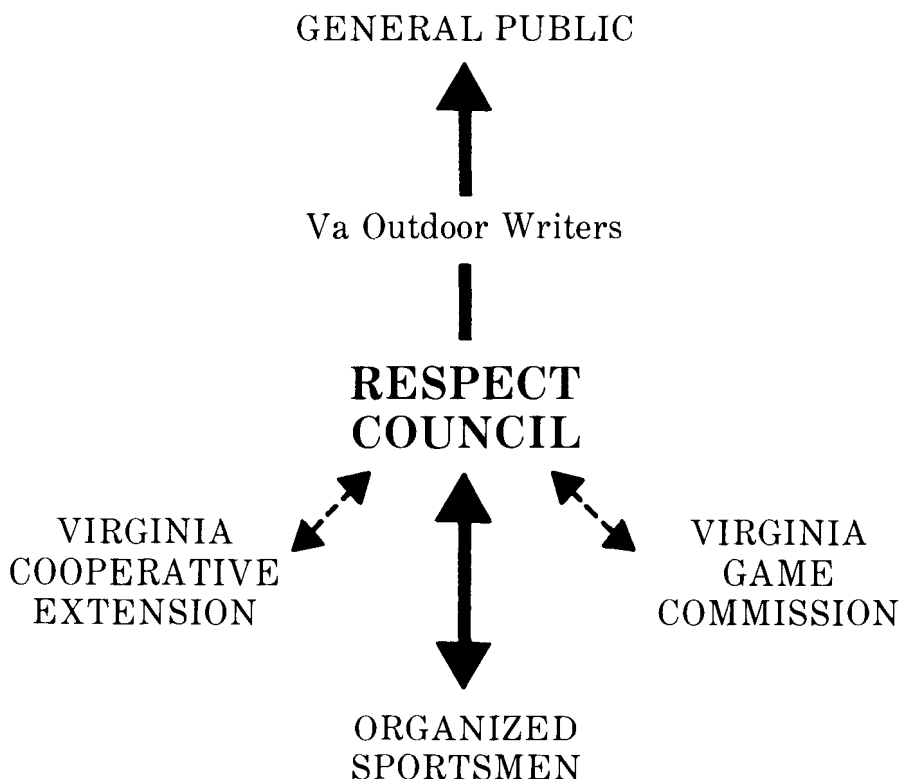


Fig. 1. Organizational Structure for RESPECT Council

By June, 1980, the Council had met 6 times since the September, 1979 conference. It supported an across-the-board increase in license fees requested of the legislature by the Commission. It publicly condemned and helped stop a contrived and carnival-like archery hunt for exotic and game farm reared wildlife. In the area of education, a cooperative effort with the Commission at the county level is developing to coordinate, promote and conduct sportsman education courses through recruitment and training of volunteer instructors. Citizen leaders who are already commission certified hunter safety instructors or who have a record of responsible leadership in sportsman organizations have been invited by the Commission to become Operation RESPECT County Coordinators. To date, about half of Virginia's 92 counties are represented to the Commission and the Council by County Coordinators. A follow-up to the 1979 conference is being planned for fall 1980 to orient the County Coordinator program. Because of its tie-in with hunter education, Commission Pittman-Robertson funds are allocated for the 1980 conference.

Cooperative Extension is working with the Council in 4 areas. Experience gained in recruiting, training and administration of volunteer leaders for the Virginia 4-H program has been shared with Commission Education Division officials at a workshop featuring Dr. Courtney Schwartz, State Leader of 4-H. Extensive dialogue focused on how to develop and maintain the county coordinator system. A slide-tape program to promote Operation RESPECT at sportsman club and civic organization meeting meetings is in production. A third area involves the development of 3 new 4-H programs. In the pilot stage is the

Virginia Young Sportsmans Club Program. Funded by a grant administered by the National 4-H Council, this project will provide experienced, adult leadership for local 4-H'ers in traditional outdoor sports, including fishing, trap shooting, trapping and hunting. In preparation for the supervised outings, the 4-H member will be taught both the skills and the ethics of the sport. The clubs will be administered on a county level by extension agents. The agents are well versed in recruiting and training volunteer leaders. Considerable interaction at the county level between Operation RESPECT County Coordinators and extension agents supporting 4-H Young Sportsmans Clubs is expected. In fact, the leader for the project, Mike Clifford, is the County Coordinator in his home county. Two other programs are in the proposal stage. If funded they will be administered by 4-H leaders on the state level. One is a version of Outward Bound, where groups of youngsters meet and overcome challenges in the outdoors. Mountain climbing, survival backpacking and whitewater canoeing are typical activities. The concept is that the conservation ethic will emerge as a consequence of gaining personal respect for the vitality and immensity of natural systems and the need for good relations with other people. The second proposed program involves developing a Virginia 4-H Shooting Sports Program, tailored after the popular Texas program. Finally, the wildlife extension specialist is assisting the Council in planning the 1980 Operation RESPECT Conference.

#### CHALLENGES TO OPERATION RESPECT

The Virginia Operation RESPECT program is founded on cooperation among leading sportsman organizations, the state game and fish agency and extension. Each major partner shares the objective of improving outdoor ethics. However, each section has other, less compatible, objectives. Further, none of the partners is monolithic. Consequently, agreement on policy and action can be difficult to reach and of limited strength when finally decided. Hesitancy or indecisiveness at the Council frustrates organization delegates. For example, the Commission desire for a license fee increase in 1980 resulted in a request for Council endorsement of license-fee bills in the legislature, but to avoid losing support for the fee increases, the Commission desired to hold off proposing potentially controversial legislation to crack down on road hunting. When an article in a national newspaper appeared which criticized unfairly both the Commission and the Council, the reporters following up on the issue were handled by Commission staff and not directed to Council delegates for comment. On the other hand, the Council fund-raising program is struggling along while the Commission Education Division has been allocated a greatly increased budget to establish an expanded hunter education instruction force through the County Coordinator system. If the Commission generates the bulk of the resources, then should not the Commission have the deciding vote in Council policy? Will Virginia's higher level of decision-making by sportsmen lead to stronger organizational commitments and programs and then to greater grass roots for support for the ethics programs? Also, are sportsman organizations able to influence the 90 percent of Virginia outdoorsmen who are not joiners?

Finally, there is difficulty addressing the issue itself. To paraphrase Pogo, 'we have searched for the enemy diligently and we have concluded that he is us.' In environmental pollution issues, the enemy of the sportsman is the polluter. It is not difficult to generate support among sportsmen to fight some corporation or public utility that has or will degrade wildlife resources. By what means can the same level of intensity and investment be brought to bear on the conduct of our fellow sportsmen or even ourselves?

The leaders of Virginia's Operation RESPECT recognize these challenges. So far, the notion that progress will result from mutual cooperation through the Council outweighs the frustrations of working with such a cumbersome process.