

CONSERVATIONIST'S VIEW OF TODAY'S WILDLIFE LAW ENFORCEMENT

by

*Louis S. Clapper, Conservation Director
National Wildlife Federation
Washington, D. C.*

The enforcement of sound wildlife conservation law has played a pivotal role in whatever success the science of wildlife management has demonstrated in maintaining optimum numbers and variety of wildlife. The individual wildlife conservation officer, game warden, game protector, or whatever name affectionately or unaffectionately by which he is known, projects the image and demonstrates the capability of governmental agencies designated by law to manage and perpetuate the wildlife resource. Being numerically the largest division within a governmental wildlife agency, with day-to-day contacts with many outdoor enthusiasts, automatically acclaimed the law enforcement officer as the principal spokesman, public relations specialist and general image builder for his employer.

Wildlife law enforcement has come a long way from its humble beginnings of half a century ago. Initially, officers were appointed more for their demonstrated political prowess than either for their knowledge of wildlife needs or training and experience in law enforcement work. Today, however, the qualifications and entrance requirements for officers are being constantly and continually upgraded to the point that aspirants now must usually possess considerable formal education and/or experience in either wildlife management or law enforcement work. In many states, undergraduate degrees in wildlife management or law enforcement are required as a condition of participating in competitive civil service examinations.

Organizational concepts are also changing. State wildlife departments are being integrated into larger more comprehensive natural resource, conservation or environmental agencies headed by political appointees of the Governor. There has been a creeping diminution of the autonomy and independence of wildlife authority and an increasing tendency for political and emotional considerations to assume a wider role in the wildlife management decision-making process. In essence, we are drifting back toward organizational structures that were discarded 40 years ago because sportsmen with active and off-times militant stances demanded successfully that facts not politics or uninformed opinion play the pivotal role in regulation and policy determination.

The organizational structures within wildlife agencies are also changing. Less than ten years ago, most of the varying responsibilities were assigned by function on a statewide basis. Law enforcement, game, fish, information—education, and research were separately functional divisions with a single specialized authority and responsibility.

The nationwide trend now is toward a decentralized authority. Regional offices with a Director possessing all the authority of the chief executive are becoming the rule rather than the exception. Such a structure is more efficient, closer to the people served, and shortens the time and cost of resolving departmental infrastructure as well as local and regional resource problems.

The nationwide trend is toward a staff-and-line organization with a field force of highly qualified generalists capable of handling any assigned responsibility. Inflation, reluctance of state legislatures to increase license fees and/or to appropriate general tax revenues for wildlife management purposes have forced wildlife commissions to search for ways and means to stretch the value of the sportsmen's dollar. No longer can a wildlife agency afford to have specialists for every function operating on a statewide basis. Additional assigned responsibilities such as boating safety, increasing emphasis on management of non-game species, more research for better information to guide

wildlife regulation and management decisions, ever-increasing hordes of outdoor recreationists of all stripes that must be served are but a few examples of why each state must develop and train all employees to capably perform any function or assignment.

There is still a tendency for some law enforcement officers to set themselves apart and above other departmental employees. The long, irregular hours, the hazards of dealing with armed citizens, being the recipient of continual public complaint and verbal abuse, forced into the role of public relations specialist by reason of constant and continual contact with the public requiring explanations of department policy, may be some justification for such an attitude. Nonetheless, parochial superior expressions surfacing in the form of better retirement benefits and pay scales prevent the coordination and team spirit necessary for a smooth running, efficient and effective department.

While the basic entrance requirements for field positions of most agencies now require college degrees there should be little cause for alarm in the ranks of employees who do not possess college training backgrounds. Civil Service Commissions, good personnel officers and capable executive officers recognize there are at least three principal ways you can learn how to capably perform an assigned task: The printed word, as set down in writing by those with exceptional intelligence, knowledge and experience; by the spoken word of those in our institutions of higher learning; or by knowledgeable co-workers and by your own individual knowledge gained by performing assigned tasks yourself for extended periods of time. Your immediate supervisor or department head could care less how you obtain your ability and expertise. You will be judged on how well a variety of assigned tasks are performed, reflecting your own initiative in securing additional training and how capably additional responsibility is handled.

To those department employees who have not had the opportunity of a formal education it must be remembered that there are as many educated as well as uneducated fools. Stupidity is no respecter of persons. This disease is mostly inherent in the basic personality of the individual and inflicts the educated as well as the uneducated. If an individual can demonstrate that by his own experience and on the job training he has attained more knowledge and performance capability than his formally educated competitor, his career will be and should be advanced accordingly.

Laws and regulations governing the conservation and taking of game animals ushered in the modern day science of wildlife management. Initially, regulations prohibited the taking of game animals during their breeding seasons, limited the commercialization of many species, and restricted the legal take to rough estimates of harvestable surplus. Hunters looked upon regulations as an unnecessary bureaucratic restriction and the fee-grabbing game warden as someone to out maneuver and outwit. To break the game law and get away with it was looked upon by the hunting fraternity as unexcelled woodsmanship and demonstrated masculinity more often than not bragged about around the campfire. The law enforcement officer's effectiveness was judged by the number of poachers caught, the percentage of convictions obtained in the courts, and the severity of the penalties imposed.

However, times, attitudes and objectives change. Today, with seventy percent (70%) of our citizens living in an urban environment where the gun is associated mainly with crimes of violence there is a changing philosophy about hunting as a sport and wildlife management as a science. The ninety percent (90%) of our citizens who do not hunt are being told by a vocal, militant, careless-with-the-truth, relentless, hard core few that the only way optimum numbers and variety of wildlife can be maintained is by constant perpetual protection. Hunting is pictured as cruel, inhumane, enhancing rather than restraining the baser instincts of man's character. Federal and state governmental agencies are pictured as formulating an unholy alliance with hunters and arms and ammunition manufacturers in some sort of deep and continuing conspiracy to manage wildlife solely to kill, thereby fattening the profits of the munition cartel. Long standing and respected citizen conservation organizations such as the NWF, National

Audubon Society, Izaak Walton League of America, and the Wildlife Society are described as having contributed nothing to the welfare of wildlife.

There are doubts in the minds of far too great a number of non-committed non-hunters as to how best to manage and conserve the wildlife resource for posterity. The battle for the human mind has been joined insofar as what is best for the wildlife resource. Will we as professional wildlifers be obliged to succumb to public pressures brought about by the emotional, philosophical and moral persuasions of the complete protectionists? Do we have sufficient professional competence and basic knowledge of wildlife needs that we can successfully compete in the public opinion arena with the protectionist? Have we the capability to convince the mass communications media and public policy makers that wildlife management is both an art and a science? Have we proof that man's power to reason and manipulate resources can produce greater benefits than the nature-knows-best-if-left-alone-concept?

We have the answers to those questions but, collectively, the wildlife conservation movement has failed miserably to reach, convey and convince the majority of the non-hunting public as to the validity of those answers. This is the greatest challenge citizen wildlife educational organizations such as the NWF and the wildlife conservation officer faces in the coming decade. We can win the war for uncommitted human minds only if we recognize the severity of the problem and adequately equip ourselves with knowledge and determination for the coming battles.

Thus, the wildlife conservation officer who expects to win that war must have the following capability and equipment:

1. He must either have or acquire the capability of credibly performing any assigned task or function within his agency's authority or responsibility. Specifically he must be competent to assist the game or fish research biologist in carrying out fact finding responsibilities and, in so doing, be prepared to support and defend those findings. Specifically, he must become an information-and-education specialist and public relations perfectionist. All of the knowledge and expertise in the wildlife field is of little value unless you can sell it to the public policy makers. Know and understand that both protection and harvest are proven techniques and proper tools to perpetuate adequate wildlife habitat—the real key to variety and optimum numbers of wildlife. Know that man has so disrupted the environment with intense forestry, clean farming practices for mono-culture crops, stripmining, dredging, filling, and polluting that it will take man's power of reason and his technology to create suitable wildlife habitat to remedy the mess. Know that the problems of maintaining variety and optimum numbers of wildlife are too great to permit the philosophical and moral decisions of to hunt or not to hunt to detract us from our goal of habitat preservation and restoration. The greatest gift our nation guarantees is the freedom to choose and whether we enjoy hunting or deplore it we should not attempt to force our choice upon any wildlife enthusiast. Know that we must turn more of our attention and effort to the management and understanding of the needs of non-game species of wildlife and continue to search for ways and means to finance the increased effort. Enlist the support of the wildlife photographer, bird watcher, and outdoor enthusiast in your programs. You will need all the public support you can enlist to solve the difficult problems ahead.

2. He must know, understand the practice the rudiments of modern law enforcement techniques. Specifically an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. An officer who has the respect of his constituents, who can develop a dialogue that persuades the community that obedience to the law benefits everyone who enjoys nature and the outdoors, has the bulk of his law enforcement problems resolved before they happen. To those few outlaws and renegades who cannot be persuaded, he has the opportunity to enlist many eyes and ears to aid in the apprehension and increased probability for swift, sure, severe punishment to fit the crime. A good officer will understand that a record of prevented law violations or regulation infractions is a better measure of effective work than the number of violators apprehended. If the average citizen is not convinced laws are just or the intent misunderstood or inap-

plicable, the law enforcement officer's task in obtaining compliance is most difficult if not impossible.

3. Lastly, but by no means the least, the wildlife conservation officers (indeed, all department employees) must be team players. Nothing can destroy the credibility and effectiveness of a wildlife agency more than disobedience, discord and disloyalty. Be an active participant in gathering the information and facts upon which decisions and policy are based. Vigorously press your opinion within the framework of an orderly organizational structure designed to consider your views. When the decision is rendered, support it for the reasons specified even though you may personally disagree. Always remember an ounce of loyalty is worth a pound of cleverness. Elbert Hubbard described it best when he admonished: "If you must growl, condemn, and eternally find fault, resign your position and when you are on the outside damn to your heart's content, but as long as you are a part of an organization do not condemn it for if you do, the first high wind that comes along will blow you away and you may never know why."

To conclude, all of us interested in sound wildlife management work must stick together. As someone once said: to be successful, one must be tall enough to have his head in the clouds, short enough to have both feet on the ground, heavy enough to stand firm, yet light enough to move and progress. These are good guides for all of us as we work for—and with—the public.

Thank you again for the opportunity of meeting with you.

BREAKTHROUGH IN TRAINING FOR WILDLIFE LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

by

*Robert Clark Stone, Commissioner
Bureau of Training, Kentucky Department of Justice*

ABSTRACT

The wildlife officer, whether he be called a conservation officer, game protector, game and fish enforcement officer or simply game warden, must be a real professional. He needs most of the knowledge that a professional policeman needs. He also needs a working knowledge of many subjects peculiar to the out-of-doors. The breakthrough in training that has already occurred for police should be immediately extended to wildlife law enforcement officers. This, coupled with maintenance of high standards and increases in pay, should do much to professionalize this important occupation.

INTRODUCTION

A game and fish enforcement officer is asleep at home after returning from a hard day's work. It is midnight. The phone rings. A resident of the Muddy Creek community has heard shots and conversation in a wooded area near his home and has seen flashing lights. Remains of two deer slaughtered illegally a week before make the officer believe poachers are at work again tonight.

The officer dresses quickly, holsters a .38 revolver, grabs his shotgun and light and runs to his car. He knows the area, investigated the incident the previous week, and hopes he can travel the twenty-three miles to Muddy Creek fast enough to catch them this time.

Driving rapidly, alone, over the winding country road to his destination he designs his plan of action and thanks Almighty God for the training that has prepared him for this difficult and demanding challenge.

He has the general power of arrest (game and fish officers in only two states in the Southeastern Region have such authority).¹ He can assume the subjects are armed and that there are at least two of them—maybe more. He knows darkness will be a factor working against him. He knows the violation is a serious one and that his own life may well be in danger. (A fellow officer in a nearby county had been shot at and seriously wounded less than a year before.)