

Suggested Guidelines for Response to the Anti-hunting/Animal Rights Movement by Fish and Wildlife Agencies¹

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Abstract: These comments are suggested in order to cause an awareness and to deal with problems generated by activist activities in opposition to lawful hunting and trapping activities.

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During my brief time here, I will say some things you may not enjoy hearing, as each time I have made these particular remarks in the past, I received a few caustic comments. Even though I bite us a little, I think, after you consider what was said, you will privately agree it was the truth. I like to deal with the truth.

I feel strongly these things should be said because we have important work to do. We are somewhat behind and we need to catch up as quickly as we can.

I was given this assignment during the most recent Annual Southeastern Chief's Planning Conference in Frankfort, Kentucky, this past spring after it was decided this dilemma was an item of primary concern for wildlife conservation agencies and especially for first-line wildlife officers. During this planning conference, our president, Colonel Paul Oliver, leaned over and whispered, "You will do this, won't you?" and without thinking, I agreed. I have given other papers at this forum; however, the subject matter was not as complex, intriguing, and at times represented nothing less than total ad nauseam as the topic at hand. The research alone proved to be a major task. Remembering the research and the long nights spent reading, I want to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues who provided their endless personal files for my use in this study. I especially want to thank George Lapointe of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Proactive Strategies Proj-

¹This work is in response to a charge made by the Law Enforcement Committee of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to create plans and/or policy to address the anti-hunting movement. This charge also suggested wildlife law enforcement administrators make certain first-line officers are aware of the anti-hunting movement.

ect, for his assistance. This study has been a real learning experience for me. I hope each of you will take the time to review the current literature and learn as much as you can regarding this problem. All I will provide today is a cursory glance. This assignment generated a real fire in my mind, and I will admit, I started with some wet wood.

I think we will all agree hunting is an essential component of the art of wildlife management in North America, as well as a traditional form of outdoor recreation. Historically, the act of hunting was essentially a pursuit of sustenance more so than what is considered sporting or recreational activity at this time. Much the same may be said about trapping; however, the end result of trapping was, and continues to be, primarily a commercial venture.

Nevertheless, there is a movement gathering support in an effort to cause a radical departure from the long-standing and traditional ways we manage, pursue, use, and enjoy renewable wildlife resources.

Essentially, in order to counteract this movement, we desperately need to tell our side of this issue. This must be done in the best professional manner at each and every opportunity by all of us. Leaving this task to our Information and Education (I&E) staff alone will not suffice. Many I&E workers will probably not agree with me, although some have, and I will be the first to admit they do a good job of informing the public; however, they need to do much better. They need to expand their efforts in areas other than through agency hook and bullet publications. Providing information to wildlife resources agency magazine readers is no different than preaching to the choir. They need to lead, guide, direct, and convert the masses of others who do not subscribe to conservation agency magazines and other publications.

During the recent, and first, Governor's Symposium on North America's Hunting Heritage held in Bozeman, Montana, in July of this year (over 500 people from 33 states and provinces attended this conference), panelists said we need to denounce unethical hunting practices and adhere to sound wildlife management principles. I firmly believe this and I also believe we must keep Leopold's philosophy in mind, especially his words: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

We must improve and expand our delivery of these important truths as during this symposium in Montana, Roger O'Neil, Bureau Chief for NBC at Denver said "You are your own worst enemy." He compared hunters and animal activists in media sophistication, saying "you are a bunch of first graders going up against a group of Harvard Law School graduates."

Again, we all need to be involved telling our side of this—all of us, not just our agency writers. We need to do this in all of our contacts, one-on-one with the general public and outdoor users, in adult meetings where we are responsible for and present the program, and at every opportunity we have to talk to students. I believe it is up to us, as enforcement officers, to convey this message at every opportunity and we must not hesitate to generate the opportunities. My experience during the more than 36 years I have been involved in wildlife law enforcement clearly points out wildlife

officers generally do not solicit speaking engagements. This must be changed if we expect to do our part of providing information and guidance to the public we serve. The wildlife officer who bemoans public apathy or misunderstanding about anything we do, expecting others to present our message, has no cause to lament.

The conservation agency field employee, especially the wildlife officer, who does not plan time to visit with students in the classroom should start including these visits in his or her list of priorities. School visits are a part of the anti's agenda. Keep in mind the students you educate are future community leaders, conservation commissioners, directors, and wildlife officers and cooperators. The list is all but endless. In my consideration, contacts with students are extremely important and provide long-lasting beneficial effects. I adamantly believe any wildlife officer who has never darkened a schoolroom door should be replaced. Remember U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Special Agent Dave Hall's comment yesterday, "When they (students) reach age 11 we have already lost them."

I think everyone in this room will agree we are our agency's best communicators because we are in a choice position to talk to the general public. Again, we must denounce unethical hunting practices and inform the public about the necessity of adhering to sound wildlife management principles. While we are delivering this message we must radiate total professionalism, nothing less.

We should follow the timely example set by Texas enforcement officers with their first annual Texas Wildlife Expo, held during the first of this month. Activities during the Expo were directed toward recruiting and educating the next generation of sportsmen. Events included deer and turkey calling, contest shooting demonstrations, seminars, displays, wild game cooking demonstrations, and visits by celebrities. The important thing to keep in mind about this particular effort is that Texas officers perceive a real possibility we may be only one generation away from a non-hunting public. I believe it would be wise if we all adopt this thinking and follow the Texas priorities of "education, prevention, and apprehension." The Expo attracted 7,000 people, 200 of these were animal rights proponents attempting to demonstrate their views but were generally ignored—ignored because of prior planning on the part of those responsible for organizing this timely and very successful event. The key to this planning was a special area designed to accommodate and control any demonstrators.

Let me offer one example of the myriad difficulties we must deal with, a facet you probably haven't considered. The New York Department of Environmental Conservation sponsored a study where 430 licensed wildlife rehabilitators in New York were contacted and 299 (71%) responded to the survey. Approximately 75% opposed recreational hunting and trapping and 53% opposed limiting wildlife populations to reduce wildlife nuisance and damage. These same rehabilitators indicated strong interests in providing public education and the numbers reflect they are active. During 1990 they answered over 16,000 telephone inquiries. One in three provided educational messages through both the print and electronic media. One-third gave presentations to elementary schools, other youth groups, and the general public. Also, in 1990 they reached nearly 60,000 people regarding animal care,

nuisance and damage control, habitat conservation, natural history, and conservation laws. I have the feeling they are doing better than we are, but at the same time, they are probably voicing their opposition to recreational hunting and trapping.

Suggested ideas to counter anti-management problems have been developed as indicated by a recent Proactive Strategies Project Report. Some of these are simple, individual actions; others involve agency decisions, policy, and operations. They are:

—Learn everything about the animal rights movement, their agenda and leaders, especially any groups in your local area. Who has a better knowledge of the happenings in the local area than the local wildlife officer?

—Share any information regarding this movement with others, particularly within your agency chain-of-command. It is near impossible for administrators to know what is going on in your assigned area if you fail to tell them.

—Cultivate media relations to establish credibility by inviting representatives to management areas or anywhere your agency has visibly improved habitat and/or wildlife populations.

—Encourage reporters to interview agency personnel about specific issues on management policy.

—Keep the media constantly informed of agency programs, not just during crises. Do this through press releases, popular articles, editorials, etc.

—Invite the media when you talk to various groups no matter what the topic may be. Invite them each time you present a hunter education class.

—Make key legislators, the media, and the public aware of common tactics used by animal rights groups (hunter harassment, burning laboratories, raiding medical experiments). Make use of quotes by animal rights leaders while doing this, e.g., “If a cure for AIDS was found using animal experiments, we’d be against it.”

—Seek areas of common ground with all stakeholders, including animal activists. (We are all concerned about animal welfare, we disagree on ways of achieving it.)

—Explain wildlife programs and management options adequately to the public. Also, explain how the loss of wildlife management would impact wildlife populations, human populations, outfitters, sporting goods manufacturers and retailers, etc.

—Promote watchable wildlife and non-game programs with the public. The perception that agencies are dominated by a few special interest groups, and devote the majority of management efforts to bread-and-butter game species must be changed.

—Invest in information and education divisions to allow maximum outreach to the public, especially during crises. This division should be your way to reach the education community and non-traditional audiences such as garden clubs, shoppers at malls, etc.

—Pursue legal action where appropriate to counter animal rights activities that are detrimental to professional management of public fish and wildlife resources.

—Build broad-based local coalitions to support the wise, humane use of animals by humans by contacting biomedical facilities, agricultural interests, Native American groups, outfitters associations, museums, zoos, sportsmen's clubs, etc.

—Implement and promote a "biologist-in-the-schools" program, where agency representatives visit local classrooms to give slide presentations and talks about wildlife and wildlife management. If your agency currently does this, set a target for increased visits.

—Create and support continuing education courses in ecology and fish and wildlife management for elementary and high school teachers.

—Review all agency policies and actions for ethically or environmentally questionable practices.

—As an agency, clarify and identify organizational values and communicate them to stakeholders (this would include preparing agency position papers for various issues).

—Develop an agency policy on animal rights and animal welfare.

—Consider providing human dimension (sociology) skills to supplement agency employee professional training.

Along with these suggestions, there are basic measures that should be considered without delay. Any plan must include an operations outline for each and every wildlife management area, fish hatchery, state forest, shooting range, stream access, camping area, agency offices, and grounds. An employee responsible for the general operation of these facilities would most likely be the ideal liaison person between the facility and the central administration. The outline should provide for specific areas where demonstrators would be located and at the same time be separated from the designed use of the area and/or facility. As wildlife law enforcement administrators, supervisors, and officers you should encourage this planning and make certain enforcement concerns are part of any planning effort in order to insure a minimum of law enforcement problems.

My cursory research regarding the assignment to inquire into this matter clearly establishes there are two primary concerns for wildlife management agencies existing at this time.

1. A need to accelerate public education efforts regarding the role of hunting in wildlife management.
2. The development of strategies to deal with negative actions.

There is no doubt in my mind this discourse was, and continues to be, the most intricate, involved, and challenging exercise I have been involved with. It's somewhat the same as floating an unknown wilderness stream in that each new stretch of water provides something new and different, and each segment explored provides very little of what to expect next.

The paramount question in my mind regarding all of this is: Who will pay the costs for wildlife management, the many billions of dollars now being directed toward this effort, in the event the harvest of wildlife was to become a thing of the

past? What will become of the many individuals and their livelihood who are now actively engaged with providing these outdoor recreational opportunities? It is not at all difficult for me to envision the catastrophic results if the anti's are successful in ending hunting, trapping, and fishing as this will terminate the funding source for the wildlife they are attempting to protect from the rest of us.

Many differences exist in the organizational structure of the 16 state agencies within the Southeastern Association. Differences also are found in the chain-of-command responsibilities and authority of the positions within these structures. We are somewhat different, however, we pursue the same basic goals. In consideration of this, any attempt on my part to suggest an operational agenda, for these organizations, as a group, would not be in the best interest of approaching the problem under discussion.

On the other hand, as law enforcement divisions within these agencies, we are basically the same. All have first-line officers and supervisors. In my consideration, these are the agency members who, more than anyone, "manage" the general public on a day-to-day, one-on-one basis. They are the ones, through their actions and expertise, who have the ability to generate public acceptance and support of our efforts and goals. Our administrative staff, confined to their particular time-consuming tasks/offices, do not have the daily opportunities to visit with the public as we enjoy in the field.

By now, you have probably determined the direction I am going with this part of my essay; it is nothing new. If our message is to be adequately delivered, we will be the vehicle by which the great majority of the delivery is accomplished. This is true of most everything our agencies do. It is the uniformed officers on the front line, with the most contacts and where the real work takes place, and I am pleased to know we have a reputation of being effective with generating the desired results, no matter what the assignment may have been. When our administrators want something done, who do they call first? You and I know it's the wildlife officer out in the tall-and-uncut.

Let me ask a question of anyone here involved with the operation of a special permit hunt on a wildlife management area. How many times, in recent years, have you noticed less than the allotted number of hunters on the area? Did you suspect the no-shows could be the anti's participating in the drawings, for no other purpose other than to keep legitimate users from hunting on the area? A good possibility exists this is true.

In Arkansas, the animal rights movement is of primary concern although we have yet to experience any real problems. We view the charge of the Southeastern Law Enforcement Committee (to generate an awareness and develop plans and/or policy to counteract the animal rights movement) as a priority concern. At the suggestion of Chief Loren Hitchcock, we have started providing district supervisors and wildlife officers with current literature produced by animal rights activists.

To my knowledge, the only problem we experienced in Arkansas to date regarding activists was a threat to destroy a biology research laboratory on the University of Arkansas campus at Fayetteville several years ago. This involved a

student group and a national group. This raid did not take place due to advance planning on the part of faculty members, local police, and a federal law enforcement agency. This particular federal law enforcement agency considers those responsible for planning the assault to be "domestic terrorists."

Most important, forget any idea the animal rights movement will disappear on its own with the passage of time or neglect on our part. The movement in this country is alive and well, adequately funded, well organized, and is not being advocated and orchestrated by a small collection of kooks, dingbats, and weirdos. They are as serious about their agenda as we are about ours.

Yes, I did bite us a little but we didn't bleed too much.

Hopefully, all of this generated some thought on your part. If it did, our time together will produce benefits.