

State Fish and Wildlife Management- the Opportunities Ahead

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Collectively, the National Audubon Society, the Wildlife Management Institute, the Sport Fishing Institute and the National Wildlife Federation represent the overwhelming majority of conservationists in the nation, both in numbers and certainly in influence. Some of that influence has been successful on Capitol Hill where the Congress correctly sensed the American consensus on conservation and a bi-partisan majority in both houses responded with positive legislation for environmental protection and habitat enhancement. My wish is that the positive conservation agenda of the Congress would be an example that every Administration would choose to follow. Unfortunately, there are disturbing reports in Washington that rule changes in the present Administration and legislative initiatives in the lame-duck Congress may contain some things that we in the field of natural resources conservation will not like, involving Clean Air, wetlands protection, privatization of public lands, wilderness protection, and coal leasing. We expect to be very busy between now and the start of the 98th Congress in January.

Are state fish and wildlife agencies what they should be? Of course they are not. But neither are private conservation organizations, so perhaps we can all benefit from this self-examination.

In reflecting on the current state of conservation, my thoughts turned frequently to the Chinese ideogram for the word, "crisis." It is a combination of the symbols for *danger* and *opportunity*. And that's precisely what we have today in fish and wildlife management nationally, a crisis. This crisis does indeed contain the elements of danger, but also the elements of opportunity.

We are confronted with multiple problems. Loss of habitat quality is the most serious. Destruction of wetlands has been high on everybody's list of environmental assaults for years, and the assault continues despite some modest gains in public understanding of the value of wetlands. Stream channeliza-

tion, loss of top soils, the destruction of prime farmlands and choice habitat areas, conversion of bottomland hardwoods to agriculture, conversion of deciduous forests to pine monoculture or fast-growing hardwoods, and cutting of old-growth timber are examples of other areas where we continue to lose quality habitat.

A broader problem—one that is very apparent in Florida—is water mismanagement, and we all know the serious consequences for wildlife in virtually every major water project that is planned or operating. Water is nature's life blood, and manipulating the water system is an invitation to habitat disaster. Yet the federal projects continue without the benefit of rules implementing the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act and, more recently, without the benefits of formal planning procedures requiring examination of costs and benefits.

But there are great opportunities for all of these crisis situations. And, the opportunities are what I want to present.

"What are the most important factors which will impact fish and wildlife resources in the next decade?" To me, 3 of the most important factors are politics, money and public awareness. Each of the 3 are, like John Muir's universe, hitched to each other and to everything else. But they can be dealt with separately; and like the Chinese ideogram, they present both dangers and opportunities.

The danger is that the environmental politics of the Reagan Administration will continue. Many of their major initiatives have ignored the considerable body of environmental law established through decades of a bipartisan conservation consensus. Not surprisingly, many of their major initiatives have been blocked in the courts and others have been blunted by the Congress.

The funding cutbacks and budget changes in combination with inflation and the ever-increasing public responsibilities of conservation agencies have seriously crippled the resource management machinery at the federal and state levels. I know that many are feeling the squeeze, and there is little prospect for relief. Land acquisition has been slowed and in some cases stopped. Wildlife management and research programs have been cut back and enforcement staffs have been reduced.

Potentially the most important factor that will guide resource management over the next decade is public awareness.

The public is aware of the dangers in the environmental policies of the Reagan Administration, and the public resents what is going on. Every credible poll to date has confirmed and re-confirmed that the great, bipartisan conservation consensus is stronger today than ever. It was that consensus that produced bag after bag of mail and countless telephone calls to Congressmen

as they debated the wilderness-protection legislation last summer and, by an overwhelming margin, they approved a strong bill that was directly contrary to the position of James Watt and the administration. It was that consensus, heeded by the Congress, that strengthened the Endangered Species Act, that warded off major challenges to provisions of the Clean Air Act, that restored some funds in the EPA budget, that strengthened wildlife trade laws, and that protected coastal barrier islands.

Conservation is not a partisan issue, and many make a great mistake when they treat it as either Democratic or Republican or liberal or conservative. There is not a Republican way to save a wetland or a Democratic way to protect wilderness areas. Today there is strong support for sound, professional resource management, for environmental protection . . . for wildlife. There is an unusual opportunity for resource managers everywhere to seize upon that consensus and to further strengthen public support for resource-protection programs.

Unfortunately, that is not happening. The consensus for conservation too often is a mandate without direction. An opportunity is passing us by.

A second opportunity can be introduced by asking ourselves if we foresee a shift in emphasis on outdoor recreation opportunity over the next decade? If so, what will be the major factors influencing the shift?

We know that fishing pressure is increasing, with the number of anglers doubling every 20 years. The percentage of licensed hunters is holding steady in most states. According to a recent survey by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 83 million Americans actively enjoy the out-of-doors in a wide variety of recreational pursuits. The demand for outdoor or wildlife-related recreation will continue to be strong.

But at the same time, development patterns, agricultural pressures, urbanization and careless management practices are converging in a conspiracy of forces that, insidiously, are voiding opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts. In many regions, sportsmen know the difficulty of finding a place to hunt.

In addition, there is an increase in demand for outdoor recreation opportunities such as camping, hiking, and wildlife observation competing with the traditional forms of outdoor recreation of hunting, fishing, and trapping. The Fish and Wildlife Service survey noted that less than 40% of the recreationists are hunters and fishermen.

The anti-hunting sentiments will continue to draw attention, and this is unfortunate because it detracts from the real issues of habitat protection.

I'm a hunter, and the National Wildlife Federation is pro-hunting. That is not going to change. Those of us in the wildlife-management business must persevere through the challenges to sport hunting and seize the opportunity

to explain the remarkable resource values of the sport. I hope that we can address the issue in positive terms. We must talk about the tremendous contributions that the sport hunter makes to conservation and how these first conservationists continue to be in the forefront of the great conservation battles of our time. I hope, too, that we can seize the opportunity to form new alliances with outdoor recreationists of various interests, and forge coalitions to promote wetlands protection, water quality improvements, and controls on acid rain. We must advertise the fact that resource management and conservation are much more than promoting wildlife habitats just to enhance hunting. We know that is true, but I'm not so sure that the public always understands this.

The watchword here is to be positive when addressing the hunting issue and find areas of agreement. The deer hunt in South Florida earlier this year became, unfortunately, an event portrayed by the national media as a great conflict between the hunter and the antihunter. In reality, the hunt was a legitimate conservation tool that was necessary because of a much larger and more insidious problem of decades of water mismanagement, the "real" resource issue in South Florida.

There are other opportunities in outdoor recreation. In some areas of the Southeast and elsewhere, there is a reversal of the trend toward urbanization, and the rural life-style is being resurrected as more and more people move to homesites in the country. With it comes a renewal of kinship with the land, and greater understanding of the values of wise conservation. These new rural residents represent an opportunity for expansion of the conservation constituency in these areas.

For example, in many cities, the successes of the Clean Water Act has improved water quality to the extent that new fisheries are developing. You have heard the stories about how the Potomac River running through Washington' D.C., was so polluted that any contact with the water was potentially dangerous. Today, with a vastly cleaner Potomac, there is a renewed interest in fishing and such water-contact sports as waterskiing. And, did you know that some of the best bass fishing anywhere is reported to occur on the Potomac just a few miles downstream from Washington? Those of you who have been to Washington recently may have noticed the great number of fishermen who are lining the river's banks and the tidal pools.

This same phenomenon is being repeated in scores of cities. Several states have hired fisheries biologists to develop urban fishing opportunities and to promote the sport, to inner city residents. Fishing piers and boat landings are being installed, and activity guides are being developed to direct anglers and would-be anglers to fishing sites.

The opportunity should be clear: every kid who accompanies his par-

ents to the fishing pier is another kid who is a recruit to the corps of conservation supporters. Every person who wets a line in the city is a person who may be counted on to support strong clean water rules to maintain and enhance the fishery. We need to reach these people.

The next question-opportunity:

"How can state fish and wildlife agencies become more effective in environmental affairs affecting wildlife and what support should they expect from national conservation organizations?"

With regard to the support that the states can expect from the National Wildlife Federation:

You can count on us to be there, in Washington, promoting the cause of resource conservation in Congress and in the administrative rule-making proceedings. When we have irreconcilable differences with the administration over implementation of a resource-protection law, you can count on us to be in court.

We have a staff of over 500, several with detailed knowledge of fish and wildlife and other resource issues; we have resource specialists and we have lawyers to represent our interests in court. Our staff is busy on a variety of fisheries and wildlife related issues:

The Dingell-Johnson expansion effort, which we hope to pass in the next session of Congress.

The development of a national non-toxic shot information and education program, in cooperation with the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. To date, 24 states in 3 flyways have joined this important effort. The Federation actively participated in 3 lawsuits, which challenged the states' authority to promulgate non-toxic shot regulations-I of these states was Florida.

In the course of helping win Congressional approval for important provisions of the Endangered Species Act, the Federation took the lead in overcoming a problem that I know was troubling to all responsible wildlife managers . . . the infamous Bobcat decision.

The Federation has been in the forefront of the effort to maintain the highly important small wetlands program.

We like to think that our relationship with state wildlife agencies is unique. One of the primary reasons the National Wildlife Federation was formed was to assist professional wildlife managers in protecting and enhancing wildlife populations. That continues as a major goal today.

Feel free to call on us whenever you think we can be of some help to you on a resource-management problem. Call us in Washington, or call any

of our regional resource centers, our regional executives, or our state affiliates.

We are planning on more activity at the state level from our state affiliate organizations. More than 6000 local sportsmen's clubs including well over 1 million individual hunters, fishermen, and other outdoor recreationists are members of these state groups. We've undertaken an aggressive program aimed at providing more assistance to these groups in the form of organizational development programs that will help them realize more of their potential. Our affiliate program includes leadership development, membership recruitment, fundraising, financial management, communications and the other nuts-and-bolts aspects of successful organizations. It also includes regional workshops on lobbying and legislative activities, cooperative legal centers around the country, and joint public relations efforts that promote the viewpoint of the Federation and our affiliates. If we are to be successful in maintaining what is left of the wildlife heritage of this nation, it must be through strong, vibrant local citizen organizations that are effective enough to influence the resource use decisions you face every week. I can assure you that an important portion of the National Wildlife Federation's resources will continue to go into the improvement of our abilities to protect wildlife values at the state level.

The final opportunity arises from the question "how can state fish and wildlife agencies become more effective? or, "what role should state fish and wildlife agencies play in environmental protection, and how should they pursue this role?"

As I see it, there are 2 critically-important needs to enhance the missions of the state agencies:

1. Seek every opportunity for creative financing to off-set funding and program cutbacks.
2. Greatly expand your educational and your public affairs efforts so that the growing conservation consensus can be directed to the benefit of the resource.

All of us are aware of the serious funding problem that is confronting resource managers in every state agency and at the federal level. I hope we can count on the states to talk with local Congressional delegations about the need to restore budget cuts for federal resource programs, including those that involve cost-sharing with the states. The Federation will continue to work hard for the restoration of deleted funds and, of course, for expansion of Dingell-Johnson, and other continuing programs.

Several states are proceeding with creative plans to finance resource-management programs. According to the "Nongame Newsletter," 20 states now have wildlife-related check-off provisions on tax forms, and a survey of

12 states showed that such systems raised \$3.3 million this year alone. In Missouri, $\frac{1}{8}$ % of the sales tax collected is ear-marked for conservation programs, and at least 1 state, North Carolina, has issued life hunting or fishing licenses for trust-fund investments. Other states have enacted tax incentives for maintaining wetlands or other wildlife habitats.

These programs work, and I hope that more of you can convince your legislatures to enact similar means of creative financing.

The public-education effort is the second major need to enhance the missions of the states, and over the long term the investment in the educational effort will payoff again and again.

For years, wildlife managers have pleaded for public support of their efforts . . . and too often we have felt lonely in our professions. That began to change with Earth Day in 1970, and it has been changing steadily over the last dozen years. Today, the conservation cause enjoys what many believe to be its greatest level of public support and by every measure, that support is growing.

The opportunity for conservation education has never been better.

Expand your public affairs efforts. I believe the state wildlife agencies need more **PR** people to tell their story, and more importantly, every employee of every agency needs to recognize the value of telling the agency's story to as many people as possible. The conservation story must be told through the print media, the broadcast media, through the schools, and through community involvement programs.

But hear what I am saying . . . good **PR** isn't just hiring a writer to churn out press releases. That's a small part of the task. Good **PR** is telling the conservation story through a variety of mediums, and it is telling the story often. Participating in programs, appearing on radio and television talk shows, conducting special-interest programs for school children, providing expert witnesses at government hearings, and working with journalists and editorial page writers to spread the message. It is old-fashioned public-relations, and it works.

Too many of us have used the brush fire approach of waiting until an issue is out of control and then fighting a defensive action. It's time that we take the offense.

Being out front of public opinion and leading it isn't the easiest thing to do, but it is critical if professional management efforts are to be successful. If we don't carry public opinion with us and tell people what must be done to wisely utilize their resources, you can be sure that the other interests will be standing ready to sway public opinion in a different direction.

We all will face some difficult situations like the one Bob Brantly recently went through in Florida. All of us can learn from Bob's fine example

of how to deal with a sensitive problem. I have seen the tapes and the press accounts. Bob and his staff presented an extremely professional position to the public through the media. His professional stature prevailed, and public opinion was brought to the side of the agency. A well-prepared staff with sound and credible arguments was able to take advantage of the opportunity in a crisis.

I encourage all of you to learn from the fine example of the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission. If we work now to build our public support and lead public opinion our professional efforts will be far more effective, and effectiveness on behalf of resource conservation should be the top priority of every state fish and wildlife agency.