

prehension founded or unfounded, and, in so doing abrogate our responsibilities.

If state game and fish commissions are to survive and continue to function as first rank state conservation agencies, then we must accept change. We must revise our attitudes, mold our philosophies and, in some instances, compromise our convictions, lest we reverse our role as the leading conservation agency in the environmental field and begin a plummet that not even adequate finances can cushion. The hours of discussions are coming to a close and only minutes are allowed for decisions.

## **GAME COMMISSION'S STAFF, A COMMISSIONER'S VIEW**

*by*

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An assessment of the activities and opportunities of professional persons in any field is a very difficult matter indeed, whether or not one is a member of that profession. It is entirely too easy to make broad statements that suffer from the over simplicity or mindless sensationalism that appear to characterize contemporary American evaluations of fields of endeavor such as medicine, law and automobile engineering to name a few. It can be said, however, that if one establishes a definition of professionalism as the degree to which a given individual in his vocation offers himself for exploitation by society, those individuals who work in the wildlife resource area compare rather well to those persons in the larger and better known professions. There are three main problems which I fear will trouble the fish and game staff member for at least the foreseeable future. The first is that he offers his services in a buyers' market controlled by government agencies at various levels where his opportunities for advancement either by extraordinary accomplishments or by changes in geographic position tend to be quite limited. Secondly, despite the educational programs offered by our state commissions and other organizations, the public still does not have a very clear understanding of the special expertise possessed by our commission staff members whatever their field of work. Thirdly, in the last twenty years, America has undergone a rapid change from an industrial society to a post-industrial, consumption oriented socioeconomic system in which our staff members will be looked upon as technicians whose job is to produce ever more recreation rather than intelligent and considered protection, management and development of our wildlife resources. They will be placed in the position of being asked to produce an ever increasing yield from a fixed or declining resource base, and will in turn be asking society to do what it has always been loathe to do: show more discipline both in reducing what it takes from the resource and in protecting it by such measures as comprehensive land and water use planning. These three factors may tend to place a game commission staff member in a less advantageous position with respect to his effectiveness and independence in the community at large, and his ability to command a salary commensurate with his experience, educational attainments and economic importance. In considering these stresses to the social, economic and professional status of wildlife professionals, it is my opinion that the greatest gains for our staff member can be made through strengthening our departments as a whole, elevating their status in the eyes of the public as independent, vigorous, responsive, and responsible agencies.

In the remainder of this discussion, I should like to consider a number of areas in which the staff functions of nearly all our departments can improve.

1. Does the external appearance of our staff member project the image we wish our department to have? I submit to you that a staff employee with an unkempt appearance will be found to have diminished effectiveness in dealing with the public. This matter has been dealt with in some length in a running dialogue in the bulletins of the American Fisheries Society and I think that it can be conceded that one's skill and dedication are not affected by external appearance; however, this is not a concept that is shared generally by the public we serve. This does not mean that one need to retain a hair stylist, accumulate a wardrobe of \$300 suits or do his field work in custom outfits from Abercrombie and Fitch. It does mean, however, that dress and demeanor should be appropriate for the occasion and project an image truly reflective of one's professional standing.

2. Are you maintaining an effective chain of command? The game commission staff member is an organization man; however, one reason young men and women choose careers in a wildlife resource commission is that they are small agencies, and staff members, whether in the field or headquarters, are given considerably more latitude in their day to day activities than in many larger organizations such as our state police. It is highly desirable that a definite and well observed chain of command be established that is apparent from both within and outside the commission. The well maintained chain of command will assure that commission policies are carried out as expeditiously as possible and will prevent the breakdowns in administrative discipline in a department which are more easily perceived by the public than one would imagine and which tend to diminish respect for your agency and subsequently for you as an individual member.

3. Do you have a mechanism for regularly eliciting staff input from all levels? It is advisable to establish formalized opportunities for staff input right from the lowest ranks. This has the dual virtue of providing very superior ideas and also a morale boost for your senior employees in the lower pay scales. One might say that the four most important words in any organization are, "What do you think?". While one may not choose to pursue more than a few of the ideas, one will lose a great deal of the benefit of having a highly professionalized resource management staff, if he never bothers to find out what all of them are thinking.

4. Do you have an in-service educational program for all elements — fish, game and law enforcement? Are the personnel in your department advised in a regular programmed manner of experiences or discoveries made by staff members of your agency and those of other states? There is, at present, a great deal of highly significant literature in the field of law enforcement, much of it having to do with urban police but nearly all of it applicable generally to the law enforcement activities of our departments. Has this material been extracted and distributed in such a way as to bring to our field personnel the best in contemporary thought on law enforcement as well as other fields?

5. Have you established a program for motivating your staff members? I'm sure that if one looks at any one of the divisions in his department, he will find substantial disparity in the effort and initiative exhibited by individual members and this often leads to poor morale. Let's think of how many times we have seen a new staff member start his career with exceptional vigor only to find that he settles back into mediocrity when he notices that his extraordinary effort is not rewarded on a year by year basis anymore than is the inveterate underachiever. As was once said by Samuel Johnson, "He who praises everybody, praises nobody." Is it not true that in nearly all our states, merit pay raises are applied across the board without regard to performance? This tends to undermine the enthusiasm and initiative of many of our young people who cannot see any monetary reward in performing an above average or superior job.

6. Does your department give adequate consideration to dissent within the ranks? Frank Lloyd Wright once said "An expert is a man who has stopped thinking — he knows". One of the most common concerns of university students preparing for careers in wildlife is their position and possible courses of action should their department pursue policies which they feel are wrong. When asked, I've advised students to prepare a formal position paper on the matter in question for submission to their superiors. In preparing such a paper, it cannot be considered an act of disloyalty to solicit objective opinions from authorities at our universities, other fish and wildlife departments, or the Wildlife Management or Sport Fishing Institutes. The very existence of a well written, logical document with sound scientific backing is, in my opinion, the best deterrent we have to arbitrary, capricious or stubbornly negative consideration of another line of thought. There is a terrible tendency for bureaucracy, such as our agencies, to want to do business as usual, and one good measure of strength of a fish and game department is the degree of openness and objectivity with which it examines opinions from within the department which conflict with current policies or practices.

7. Does your department present a united front to the public once a policy decision is made? Once a policy is established, it is imperative that the course of action chosen be supported by all members of the department as far as the public is concerned. This does not mean that differing opinions cannot be nurtured and considered within the department, but there is nothing more conducive to a lack of respect on the part of the public for governmental agencies in general than to find that their employees do not agree about either the basic goals of the agency or the means of carrying them out.

8. Is there a tendency in your department to hide errors or problems? There is nothing more distressing to a Commissioner than to find that an attempt has been made to sweep under the rug some unpleasantness which, had it been dealt with openly at the onset, could have been managed easily. Instead, this has mushroomed into an ugly and difficult matter. As was said in the movie *The Godfather*: "Don Corleone likes to hear good news anytime but he insists on hearing bad news right away". This is an excellent rule of thumb for game commission staff members also.

9. Does your department maintain regular availability of information to the press and public? A good relationship with the press and a feeling on the part of the public that your department is an open organization lacking secrecy and chicanery is of considerable importance to the proper functioning of a wildlife resource commission. I think it is of importance that new employees receive at some time during their indoctrination some guidance as to the mechanism by which information can be transmitted to journalists. It is neither prudent nor practical to require that all information be obtained from your headquarters and it is highly desirable that among our field personnel certain persons, based on their knowledge and experience, be designated as spokesman in a given area of interest. We have found it helpful to invite outstanding outdoor journalists in Virginia to brief our staff members on press relations and to participate in establishing effective mechanisms to disseminate intelligent information from field personnel.

As far as the public is concerned, it is well to consider that the letter and intent of the Public Information Acts in most of our states require that all departmental records, other than personnel files and real estate transactions in progress, be available upon reasonable request. I certainly think it would be well for all written material in our agencies to be of the caliber and character that it could be published in a leading newspaper without embarrassment as it may well be. Additionally, there is no reason to exclude the public from observing field techniques used by our staff members and they should be continually reexamined as to their humaneness and scientific relevance.

10. Are we doing everything possible to maintain our departments as non-political organizations? We must rededicate ourselves at all levels to the professional independence of our agencies and try to shield them from the winds of partisan politics. I do believe that a great deal of progress has been made in this regard all over the United States and that many of our younger, more progressive governors have made considerable personal sacrifices to assure that the staffs of wildlife resource agencies can be developed without regard to political considerations. Our game commissions have historically been notorious as playgrounds for machine politicians and while considerable progress has been made, not all state staffs are free from tampering from the outside. We must face the fact, however, that in many instances attempts at political manipulation of promotions really start within the ranks of our staffs and it may be helpful in many instances to discourage this by making it known that it is apparent in each individual's personnel record as to whether outside political influence has been exerted on his behalf. This has been very helpful in the military of the United States and in some of our own state wildlife resource agencies. An insidious threat now presents itself and I think it is well that I discuss for a moment the proposed environmental or natural resource management agency reorganization plans being proposed in many states. There seems to be considerable interest in reorganizing the departments in state government having to do with environmental protection and resource management into larger agencies. It is my opinion that this does not necessarily mean that the effectiveness of fish and game agencies shall be compromised; however, in many of the proposed reorganization structures the executive director and other staff members of the wildlife resource division will lie administratively in a direct line under the incumbent governor rather than being appointed and directed by an independent citizen board. I believe this trend toward placing the administration of our game commissions directly under the governors' offices is one that is not well thought through and will, if adopted widely, represent a backward step of perhaps forty years in our attempt to provide sound, apolitical, independent and scientifically based service in the wildlife management area.

11. Do your staff members alienate the public by taking a conspiratorial view of unfavorable development proposals? How often do we hear some of our younger staff members, particularly in the biological sciences, say they feel that some politician, big businessman and other entrepreneurs are conspiring to do untold harm to our natural environment, usually for considerable private gain. I submit to you that this expression of a conspiratorial view of history is one that tends to diminish the creditability and authority of our environmental protection system and is one which does not correspond with the facts. I think if you review in your mind situations that have occurred in your own states, most of our problems with elected officials, federal development agencies, or large businesses come in large part because of inertia, lack of understanding or premature commitment on their part before considering the end result of their course of action. This is not to say that we do not have substantial difficulties at times, particularly when politics and business mix, but a thoughtful, balanced and scientific approach certainly will be highly more effective than rhetoric. One should bear in mind that one of the greatest threats to the reputation of an elected official, a large corporation, or another public agency which claims to be a conservation organization, is a persuasive, well-based argument that the course they are pursuing is one of environmental abuse or natural resource degradation.

12. Are you learning how to talk money? One area of activity with great potential which our game commissions have been slow to learn to use is that of expressing the importance of the resources for which they are responsible in terms of cold hard cash. The corp of engineers, developmental corporations and agricultural interests have learned this many years ago and this is one of the

reasons that we have so many monumental impoundments and drained wetlands. I do think our game and fish divisions are learning rapidly and an excellent example of this is shown by the fine work done in Louisiana by the game commission there in conjunction with the statistical department at North Carolina State in demonstrating the economic benefit of the natural eco-systems of the Atchafalaya Basin. It was clearly shown that the maintenance of the natural system, without artificial drainage for use as agricultural land, is providing far greater economic benefits than any possible manipulation of the environment. This stopped another public agency in its tracks and preserved permanently one of the most valuable natural places in Louisiana. I suggest to you that our field personnel should begin to accumulate data on the economic benefits of the natural systems that are under their stewardship. Much of the material can already be obtained from the Chamber of Commerce, businessmen's associations, sportsman's groups, and other interested parties. It is well to start this now and to establish and maintain this data, as it can be exceedingly difficult and expensive to derive in the short term. If this can be done, as part of one's month-to-month work, the majority of it can be accomplished without special financing and the very fact that such data exists may even discourage any proposals for modifications of these invaluable natural systems.

13. Are we looking hard at ourselves as a possible source of anti-hunting sentiment? We have heard in recent years at our fish and game conventions of the threat posed by anti-hunting forces. I ask you to consider that some of the greatest threats come from the activities of some sportsmen, and some of our own agencies. Clearly, the basic tenets of wildlife management as proposed in the original North American wildlife policy and the principles by which our state organizations operate are highly defensible in a scientific, humane and political sense. These basic tenets have also been upheld recently in our Federal courts. It does, however, behoove us to constantly examine the programs within our states to assure ourselves that the activities that we are monitoring and supporting are humane and constitute an intelligent, measured and carefully controlled harvest of a renewable natural resource carried out in a sportsmanlike atmosphere. We have had proposals in our state for what amounts to put and take black bear hunting. I can think of nothing that would play more into the hands of the anti-hunting lobby.

14. Are we doing anything to broaden our constituencies? Our agencies have of course been supported for years by the license fees collected from the hunting and fishing public and this system has, in general, served us well. We are looked upon, however, by the public at large as a group of technicians essentially employed by a minority to produce the maximum yield for consumptive sport from the renewable resource of game animals and fish. This is not necessarily the public image which will serve us best in the future, particularly when we are beset with anti-hunting pressure and trying to involve the general public on broad problems of serious environmental concern. Expansion of our staffs' interest in activities in the nongame area will diminish the image of our field personnel as being concerned only with huntable species broaden our public base of support and permit us to speak with more authority on environmental matters. We believe in Virginia that this can be done at least for the foreseeable future without special funding or personnel.

15. Are you streamlining your professional meetings for maximum benefit? I'm pleased to see that the time accorded each scientific paper appears to be shortened this year. This will permit the presentation of a greater number of papers in a succinct form where the major points are not lost in meaningless anecdotes or confusing statistics. Hopefully, this will also allow more time for panel discussions and committee meetings on problems and opportunities common to game commissions in our area. I have the feeling that we are not ex-

changing enough information on experiences in our states and much of what has been presented in the scientific papers is best studied in print.

16. Is your staff asking enough assistance from your commission in resisting pressures for inappropriate action? To my mind one of the most important functions of a commission is to defend its staff against pressures brought by outside groups such as those sportsmen clubs with narrow and specific interests. A commissioner as a citizens representative has more credibility than bureaucrats who tend to be viewed as evasive and self serving by the public.

17. Do you have a purposeful plan for the most effective use of your management facilities? In visiting game farms and fish hatcheries in many states, I'm disturbed to find there are often no coherent, long or middle range plans for the most effective use of the facilities. Perhaps this indicates a deeper problem that we are simply not thinking beyond next spring and it certainly would do our staffs well to prepare a plan for exotic introduction extending over the foreseeable future. We have done this in Virginia in fisheries and it clearly showed us the need for changes in techniques, added production facilities and additional expertise.

18. Are we overemphasizing artificial introductions in our public information programs? We are all interested in presenting our departments in the best possible light and indicate a pattern of vigorous activity on behalf of better hunting and fishing recreation. It is always easier to describe massive stocking efforts rather than careful and intelligent nurturing of our invaluable natural systems. We have produced in this manner a "stocking mentality" among our sportsman which has not and will not serve our total programs well.

19. Are your staff members overcommitted to certain policy positions? We do not have an enviable record in maintaining our senior staff members in office. The turnover rate of directors is entirely too high and I'm sure has hurt our total effort. There are many factors included of course which are uncontrollable. However, in reviewing the reasons our directors have been relieved, we often find problems evolving from overcommitment to or identification with a particular policy posture. There are very few individual issues of such importance that it is necessary or desirable for our staff members to climb way out on a limb. One of the benefits of the commission type of fish and game agency is the commission itself can take responsibility for a particular point of view, obviating the necessity for staff identification with a policy that may prove unpopular or in need of change in the near future.

In discussing the game commission staff from a commissioner's point of view this morning I have suggested a number of wide ranging questions which each staff might ask itself, and since a detailed summary would be repetitious I will not offer one. In conclusion I would simply urge that the key to continued improvement is continuous self-evaluation, because if actual or potential weaknesses are first noted from the inside they can be converted into pillars of strength, but it is the faults first perceived from the outside that really threaten the structure.