

United We Stand, Divided We Fall

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I appreciate this opportunity to speak to you because professionally managed fish and wildlife conservation is so important. Congress and other elected officials could debate until the end of time (and sometimes it seems like they have), but if you weren't there to provide scientific information and management as professionals, then our nation's fish and wildlife resources would be far worse off. But, you and your predecessors, as professionals, have provided leadership in wildlife conservation and for that the National Wildlife Federation is grateful.

Today, my colleague and I would like to address another important component of conservation, which is the theme of this morning's session—partnerships.

There have been many successful fish and wildlife conservation laws that have put the United States in a world leadership position for conservation. For example, there is the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, which we know much better as Pittman-Robertson or P-R. It was established in 1937; this year being its 60th anniversary. The law has been extraordinarily successful. In no small part, we can attribute the recovery of pronghorn, white-tailed deer, wood ducks and wild turkeys to P-R. Over \$3.2 billion in federal funds and over \$1 billion in matching dollars from the states have been devoted to conservation since P-R's inception.

Similarly, the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act, known better as Dingell-Johnson, D-J, or since amended, the Wallop-Breaux Act, was enacted in 1950. The restoration of native fisheries and the construction of boating access ramps have been hallmarks of its success. With the boost from the motor-boat fuels tax and other items, now over \$3 billion in Federal funds and over \$1 billion in matching funds have been used for fisheries conservation through this program.

Although there are many more, the third law invoking partnerships we will mention today is the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA). Enacted in 1991, it focuses on the conservation of wetlands for their myriad values. To date, in just the United States, over \$123 million in Federal dollars has been matched by over \$290 million in state and private funds to help conserve over one million acres of wetlands and adjacent habitats.

These three laws have some remarkably similar characteristics. The most important is that they have all been very successful in achieving their stated conservation goals. But why have they succeeded? It is simple; all three laws involve 'partnerships.' The partnerships require cooperation in funding, with the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration laws usually requiring at least one state dollar for every three federal dollars. NAWCA requires a minimum 50% nonfederal share, with these costs being either cash or in-kind contributions from state governments and/or private entities.

All three laws have, in a sense, legislated partnerships because no funds can flow unless there is state/federal/private cooperation. With respect to the P-R program, in 1996 there were some 14 million partners, which included every adult who hunted that year according to the 1996 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. This is nearly 7% of the adult population. When it comes to the D-J program, over 18% of the population, which is 35 million adults, were partners by their participation in fishing 1996. These hunters and anglers were partners by virtue of their purchase of fishing and hunting equipment. The excise taxes collected on this equipment is used by the states to enhance fish and wildlife conservation which in turn benefits anglers and hunters.

According to the same U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey, 63 million adults (32%) engaged in non-consumptive wildlife associated recreation in 1996. The message is clear. There is a huge potential to engage in successful partnerships for the conservation of all wildlife with the citizens who enjoy watching wildlife.

State fish and wildlife agencies initiated partnerships with citizens who enjoy watching wildlife when, in the 1970's and 1980's they established a number and variety of unique funding sources for nongame and endangered species programs. Most common was the voluntary state income tax check-offs adopted in 35 states. This was remarkably innovative, demonstrating agency dedication to conservation and a willingness to go out and seek the resources to do its job. So successful were the state income tax check-off programs for wildlife that other programs copied the idea, and implemented taxpayer donations thorough the state income tax check-off caused the funding for wildlife to plateau and even decline. Once again, state agencies are faced with a problem of how to fund conservation for all fish and wildlife.

The potentially huge constituency (63 million adults) has great potential for partnerships with fish and wildlife agencies for conservation of all wildlife. We are not suggesting that the existing fishing and hunting partnerships change or be redirected. In fact, to do so would violate the trust that has been built over the years with the anglers and hunters. What we are suggesting however, is that the wave of the future for state fish and wildlife agencies is to diversify. If they don't, their very existence and that of hunting, are at increasing risk.

The fact is that both hunters and non-hunters benefit from land conservation. Uniting both groups where they have a common interest will bring people together. It is amazing what happens when people share common values. They not only work together but, when doing so, they begin to share other values and belief systems, often gaining a better understanding and tolerance of differing views.

For example, let us point to CARE, the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement. This is a remarkable group of diverse groups with an interest in National Wildlife Refuges. Before and even after coming together, many of the groups fought bitterly with each other over guiding legislation for the National Wildlife Refuge System. But, the member groups realized that despite their large differences over guidance of the Refuge System, they all agreed that a large increase was needed in operations and maintenance for the refuges. By agreeing to set aside their differences on refuge guidance legislation, CARE members just last week secured an increase of \$41 million in the FY98 budget to \$219 million for refuge operations and maintenance. It is worth noting that these same parties ultimately agreed to Refuge legislation which passed the Congress just last month.

We propose that the path of the future for state fish and wildlife agencies leads to Teaming with Wildlife (TWW). TWW is a legislative proposal that would implement a small excise tax on outdoor recreational equipment other than hunting and fishing equipment. Whether bird seed, canoes or binoculars, the excise tax program would be administered in essentially the same manner as the P-R and D-J programs. To ensure that the tax is not a burden, it will range from less than 1% up to 5% of wholesale price (P-R is 10% or 11%, depending upon the product), with the higher priced products taxed at a lower percent. The funds could be used for wildlife conservation and education, as well as enhancing wildlife-associated recreation.

The concept of Teaming With Wildlife is so appealing that over 2,400 groups, including more than 400 businesses, have officially endorsed Teaming With Wildlife. It is significant that many conservation groups both large and small, groups with an interest in hunting (such as the National Shooting Sports Foundation which you just heard from), and a diversity of other groups are members of this coalition. The National Wildlife Federation adopted Resolution No. 12 in 1995 endorsing Teaming With Wildlife, as have 35 of our state affiliates. Our members, with diverse interests and affiliations, strongly support Teaming With Wildlife.

Teaming With Wildlife will help conserve all fish and wildlife, benefit industry and the general public by providing healthy and abundant fish and wildlife communities, while also bringing non-hunters to the table in a productive manner to work with, not against the hunters and state fish and wildlife agencies. Furthermore, it will help state fish and wildlife agencies meet their statutory obligations for managing all fish and wildlife. As professionals in the fish and wildlife community and as citizens we must set aside our differences and work together for conservation. We believe there is something to that old saying "United We Stand, Divided We Fall."