

The National Audubon Society- What It Is and What It Is Not

C. E. Knoder, *National Audubon Society, Washington, D.C.*

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The National Audubon Society and state wildlife agencies share common origins around the turn of the last century and have a long history of common endeavors. In at least 2 states in the Southeast Region, the National Audubon Society hired, paid and administered wardens to enforce the game laws before state wildlife agencies were created. Under what became known as the "Audubon Law"--later adopted by the Agencies after they came into being--these wardens enforced closed hunting seasons and bag limits. Some of Audubon's strongest supporters in those early days were organized sportsmen's clubs. Conspicuous among the ones that come to my mind were the clubs at Currituck Sound and Pine Island.

Another indication of common interest is that at one time the president of the National Audubon Society was concurrently president of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

When I was a state wildlife biologist, I served for many years on the Forest Wildlife Committee of the Southeast Association. I have also over the years been privileged to serve on several committees of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and am reasonably well aware of the progress the states are making in the fields of fish and wildlife. But I know, too, that some differences have arisen between us over the years and these must be addressed! frankly and openly. These differences are usually minor ones and I stress that we must approach them as differences among good friends, not as antagonists. We must always remember that what we have in common--a concern for the welfare of wildlife and wild lands--transcends any transient and trivial differences in the sometimes heated and urgent needs to find solutions to immediate problems.

As background for later discussions in this manuscript, let me describe the present day National Audubon Society, what it is and what it isn't.

First, let me clarify the Audubon name. Several years ago, a wealthy

gentleman left several million dollars in his will to "The Audubon Society." It took us several more years and hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees to convince a court that what he really meant was "the National Audubon Society"; there is no such thing as "The Audubon Society."

The National Audubon Society is a private, nonprofit citizens conservation or environmental organization. Currently, there are about 475,000 members organized in over 430 chapters in every state of the nation, plus a few chapters in other countries and a scattering of members worldwide. Our membership represents a cross section of the United States public in certain ways. For example, about 14 percent of our members buy hunting licenses; the comparable figure for fishing licenses is about 40 percent. In some other respects, especially with regard to their role as community leaders, the National Audubon Society membership is not typical of the average American citizen.

With regard to organization, National Audubon is similar to many other conservation outfits. Our central office is in Manhattan but is scheduled to move to Washington, D.C. in 1983. Our Washington office, where I am stationed, handles lobbying, legal counsel and litigation. We have 10 regional offices scattered from Anchorage to Florida, and much to their frustration, they handle every conceivable problem from cats at bird feeders to hard-ball politics passing Alaska Lands legislation. Traditional wildlife conservation programs, while still one of our largest individual efforts, is no longer the only weapon in our arsenal to conserve environmental values and manage resources. We have a large number of expert personnel and programs dealing with such issues as energy, especially nuclear, human population problems, toxic substances and pesticides, land use planning including strip mine reclamation, air and water quality, water development projects and public land policy. The list goes on. As many know, we maintain a Biological Research Department staffed by professional research biologists involved in original research projects from eagles in Alaska, condors in California to hydroperiods in the Big Cypress. We are proud of our nationwide system of Wildlife Sanctuaries totaling some 275,000 acres and the 40 or more professional managers who staff them.

Let me now touch briefly on some National Audubon Society policies. Most state fish and wildlife agencies depend upon hunting and fishing license revenue for financing, and upon hunters and fishermen for political support. It follows naturally that they are keenly interested in the attitude of other organizations concerned with these same subjects. Where does National Audubon stand?

Our policy is clear and of long standing: National Audubon neither opposes nor promotes sport hunting or fishing. We are neutral on the subject. Where these sports are conducted we fully agree with other resource agencies

that they be done within the framework of sound scientific management knowledge and policies, and using the most humane methods available.

At the same time we are mindful of and appreciate the tremendous historical and ongoing political and financial contribution license buyers have made to wildlife conservation in the United States. I want to emphasize that while the National Audubon Society is not an animal humane organization, we are quite rightly, and in common with all other wildlife agencies, sensitive to the ethical and humane issues involved in wildlife management. Yet in certain situations, National Audubon does not object to using hunting or trapping as management tools. For example, we continue to sanction the use of the leghold steel trap simply because in some situations there is no practical alternative. Similarly, we also hold hunting and trapping seasons on some of our own wildlife sanctuaries for specific management purposes. We see no contradictions involved in these policies.

In a positive sense though, what does National Audubon stand for? Concisely put, National Audubon's goal is the preservation of biological diversity-the maintenance of healthy populations of native plant and animal species throughout their natural geographical distribution. In large measure, this objective translates into habitat preservation and the maintenance of environmental quality. I found it interesting that the Kellert report shows that National Audubon, with these objectives, is in the mainstream of public values and attitudes toward wildlife.

What does the National Audubon Society expect of state fish and wildlife agencies? I think, quite simply put, National Audubon Society members have the same expectations as the rest of the public: they expect state fish and wildlife agencies to ensure the perpetuation of the native biota in a healthy condition. They expect or demand dynamic leadership from state wildlife agencies to ensure that programs, finances and personnel are adequate to do the job. They want to know the problems involved, financial or political, and how they can help. They are impatient with excuses or timidity on the part of public officials, sometimes unreasonably so or because of lack of political sophistication. But their concern is genuine and I, for one, am impressed with their ability to move political mountains. More specifically, I find that our members are frequently disappointed with the absence of vigorous nongame and rare and endangered species programs at the state level.

Secondly, one of the complaints I hear most frequently from our chapters is the lack of support from state wildlife agencies of their efforts to preserve wildlife habitat and to prevent environmental degradation. I am sure this situation is frequently as frustrating to our members as it is to the agencies. But I know from personal experience in a state wildlife agency how few of the public realize the minimal political clout a state wildlife agency possesses,

especially in relation to large agencies such as agriculture and those involved with big bucks associated with economic development. In short, National Audubon Society members, along with the general public, place increasingly broad demands on state agencies for use of the wildlife resource and its habitat, yet the wildlife agencies' financing remains largely tied to the narrow base of hunting and fishing license fees.

How are the state agencies meeting this situation? With 50 states involved there is, as might be anticipated, a great range of response. I have discussed this issue with most of National Audubon's regional staffs and with many of our chapter and State Council leaders. The consensus I get seems to be that by and large, state wildlife agencies prefer to remain financially and politically tied to the hunters and fishermen rather than also embracing the larger constituency represented by the general public.

This generality suffers from exceptions. Many state agencies have taken tentative steps to initiate at least token nongame and endangered species programs but with often voluntary, uncertain and inadequate funding. This is a step in the right direction. On the other hand, quite frankly, the leadership of some state wildlife agencies actively discourage participation by non-consumptive users; they do not want the general public as a part of their constituency.

I am reminded of one state in which, largely as a result of National Audubon's legislative lobbying, a 50,000-acre state wildlife refuge was created this past year. Although the refuge is open to hunting and many other forms of public use, it was created primarily to protect a nesting and wintering population of bald eagles. Simply because a nongame species was involved, the state wildlife agency disavowed the project, so the legislature placed administration of the wildlife refuge under the state parks agency. That seems to me like the ultimate "dog in the manger" attitude, but it illustrates a point.

If the state wildlife agencies do not accept the challenge of public leadership, 2 alternatives seem likely. Either another state agency will be created to fill the vacuum or these functions will gradually be assumed by the federal government. Perhaps as a straw in the wind, the federal government now outspends the combined 50 states 2 to 1 on wildlife programs. Some of our field people tell me that already National Audubon members are, out of necessity, looking to state agencies other than wildlife-such as parks, natural resources and environmental conservation-to fill their needs. To the contrary, I also know of many close and productive working relationships between our field staff and state wildlife agencies. There is still a great mix to the situation.

Personally, I think there are many compelling reasons for continuing to lodge all responsibility for wildlife in a single state agency. The wildlife agencies possess the traditions, the background, the experience, the organization

and most importantly, the wealth of dedicated, competent, ecologically-oriented personnel who are adept at making wildlife programs work. What the state administrators must provide is the leadership in building communication, knowledge and trust with the leaders of environmental organizations. The state agency executives must take the responsibility for building a bridge of confidence between the leaders of environmental and sportsmen's organizations. I do not pretend to make it appear that building this coalition will be an easy task but it can be done. If you don't believe me ask Jay Hair-he is doing it and he has one of the hottest chairs in town. But I do not know of any fish and wildlife director who is a stranger to a hot seat!

Let me close with a word on financing expanded wildlife programs. In a nutshell, Missouri has shown the way. A broad-based citizen coalition blazed the trail with a constitutional amendment that earmarked significant and realistic revenues for the conservation department to accomplish the tasks at hand. *Organized* citizen support of the type I have been discussing was the key to success. I realize some states have no provision for a similar constitutional route to funding but you *can* organize and sustain a coalition of citizen conservationists that can obtain earmarked monies for you through legislation. Further, with your leadership, your supporters can protect those earmarked monies from greedy or ignorant lawmakers during ensuing sessions of the legislature.

Let me leave you with 1 last thought, and not a particularly pleasant one at that. One of the possible consequences of resisting the constituency of non-consumptive citizen users may be to politically isolate hunters and fishermen, thus making them vulnerable to anti-hunting groups.

In closing, let me assure you of the full cooperation of the National Audubon Society as you work to achieve a coalition of hunters and wildlife oriented citizens to support sound, vigorous state wildlife programs-prgrams that are responsive to the full range of the American citizens' wildlife concerns. Your first contact should be with anyone of National Audubon's 10 regional offices.