

# RESOURCES, RECREATION AND THE NON-CONSUMPTIVE USER

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State game and fish agencies are traditionally aligned with the consumptive users of resources. Sportsmen often sit on commissions or boards that formulate policies implemented by professional resource managers. Most wildlife programs are designed by hunters for hunters. Perhaps its time we asked about the future of recreational hunting.

## THE RESOURCES

Game management biologists are constantly striving to increase the production of game animals per unit of land. They have done a fine job. The return of wild turkeys and white-tailed deer to parts of their former range is living testimony to the skill of modern game managers.

Game management is an ecological operation and habitat improvement for game species often makes an area more suitable for non-game species. Look along the dikes of waterfowl impoundments and see the number of herons and other marsh birds that have been made more accessible to the general public because of funds provided by hunters.

Hunters need a place to pursue their sport. Animals need a place to live. Its that simple but its that complex too.

Public access to hunting areas is becoming more and more difficult. More hunters are hunting on less land. Areas near cities are being closed because of urban sprawl, the innate disturbances hunting activities cause and in the interest of public safety.

Agricultural practices detrimental to wildlife have been introduced to many of our farming regions. Commercial forests tend to become monocultures which favor few species of wild animals and in many instances, the hunter is unwelcome. Future hunting will retain quality characteristics only in remote areas where land use patterns remain unaltered by technological advances and increasing human population.

Some farm operators and forest managers are beginning to see that significant revenue can be obtained by exploiting game resources. Privately operated game farms and shooting preserves are ever increasing in numbers. Paid hunting is a fact of life today and tomorrow's hunter may never know the thrill of stalking wild game, the joy of the wilderness hunting experience.

## THE CONSUMPTIVE USER

Socio-economic characteristics of hunters and fishermen are now being examined. (Bevins et. al. 1968, Vermont Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin 656). Resource managers can expect some new and excitingly important information about people management.

Today the number of hunters is declining as a percentage of the total population. License sales are lagging behind the population growth. In the Southeast, the percentage of persons holding hunting licenses is a relatively stable ten percent. However, hunters make up less than five percent of our national population and this percentage is decreasing. There are many reasons for this; some have already been explored. Decreasing opportunities, the need to travel long distances, problems with gun registration, increasing costs and decreasing returns all contribute to making the hunter an "endangered species."

## THE NON-CONSUMPTIVE USER

The ORRRC report clearly points to the non-consumptive resource user as the conservationist of the future. Many factors are responsible

for this shift in citizen conservation leadership, but the most significant is increasing environmental awareness. The mass media, especially television, has brought the filth and stench of pollution into the living rooms of millions of Americans. They want to do something about it.

The outdoor recreation boom has exploded to the point where our campsites are as depressingly crowded as our cities. Millions of campers want to do something about it.

Wildlife is an important part of the recreational experience. Sales of Peterson's *Field Guide to The Birds* has rocketed from 35,000 in 1955 to 88,500 in 1968. Remember, books are not renewed each year like hunting licenses. This figure, for the most part, represents new recruits. This tremendous growth occurred despite the introduction of other field guides into this highly competitive market. The total field guide sales are undoubtedly much higher.

Individual memberships in the National Audubon Society doubled in the last four years. Once stereo-typed as a bunch of bird watchers, these people are now characterized by a strong ecological conscience and environmental awareness. They are strong allies for any conservation program.

The Department of the Interior's Hunting and Fishing Survey in 1965 showed 3.1 million persons photographing wildlife. The ORRRC report indicates that the most popular form of outdoor recreation in America is walking for pleasure. And what can make a walk more pleasurable than wildlife?

Women's clubs must have active conservation committees to obtain a charter from the General Federation of Women's Clubs. The total number of women in clubs with conservation as an avowed goal is over 12 million—a number almost equal to the number of hunters. It has been said that one group of women give more active support to conservation than ten sportsmen groups. To educate a woman is to teach a family.

There must be a tremendous increase in managing wildlife and wild lands for non-consumptive outdoor activities. Nature centers are becoming more important than game management areas. Game agencies must become natural resource agencies. Hunting licenses must be recognized for what they are . . . permits to harvest game animals belonging to everyone. They are not payments for exclusive rights.

We must not desert the hunter, for he and his dollar will be around for some time, but the non-consumptive user is making increasing demand on the wildlife resources and the organizations entrusted with resource care must meet these demands. Non-consumptive users are friends to conservation and for the most part they realize the importance of hunters to natural resource agencies and to the wildlife they enjoy.

The non-consumptive user is willing to pay for his recreational activities. The problem is simply one of how to allow them to pay.

User fees are being charged with some degree of success at state parks. A sticker is issued everyone who desires to use state owned recreational facilities. This way the cost of acquisition and maintenance is distributed to all users.

Why not a license for bird watchers and naturalists? I believe a high quality patch that could be proudly displayed on a field jacket identifying the wearer as a supporter of conservation programs would be a profitable investment. There would be no enforcement problem either. The patch would be a status symbol.

Information and Education departments have to sell a program for the non-consumptive user to their organization and to the public. I believe the rewards in starting such programs will be a more informed public, solidly supporting their natural resource agency. The results will be better managed natural resources.