

President's Address

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Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies 40:5-7

It is a privilege and a real honor to be your president and to have this opportunity to address the Association membership during the opening session of the 40th Conference of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies here in Baltimore, Maryland. I have one of the rare privileges of being able to address you a second time, once in Kentucky, and now here in Baltimore.

First, I want to thank Don MacLauchlan and the fine staff of the Forest, Park and Wildlife Services Section of the Department of Natural Resources for the excellent conference they have put together. It is a rare privilege for this Association to be holding our annual meeting on the banks of Chesapeake Bay. Those of us who have hunted geese, fished for striped bass, or read James A. Michener's great novel, "Chesapeake," are deeply moved to be here in an area so rich in history and tradition while still on the cutting edge of critical environmental issues, such as the effort to save the Chesapeake. It is also fitting that we are here on the east coast, the birthplace of this country, as we prepare for the year to come.

I reviewed past President's speeches and most addresses are aimed at the membership to inspire and motivate. This is important, we need to readdress who we are and what our responsibilities are. My presentation today is no different.

The annual president's address should convey to the members the status of the Association, cover its strengths and weaknesses, project the challenges of the future, and compliment those who have done outstanding work.

I am proud to report our Association is well. We are financially, structurally, and administratively sound, and our efforts are effective. The committee system and the responsiveness of your officers have been impressive and rewarding.

There are many successes I can list for you: D-J expansion, working relationships with the Forest Service, restoration of funding for the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study, Sikes Act reauthorization, emergency wetlands bill, Federal refuges to save bottomland hardwoods, and the completion of printing of the 1947-1954 Proceedings.

But more important than our accomplishments is what the future holds. We have just elected new members to the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. We will be starting a new legislative session and we will be faced with continuing

budget problems, protection of critical habitat, impacts of water development, urban sprawl, and the anti-hunting movement.

I want to stop here and reflect on the “anti-hunting” movement. There is a movement to protect wildlife and/or stop hunting. We have seen legislation to bar trapping. We have seen litigation to stop waterfowl hunting and we have seen citizens disrupt actual hunting efforts. All these things are of direct concern to us and the future recreation of our clientele.

It is all too easy to simply form battle lines, them or us, the good and the bad, the informed and the uninformed, the hunter and the anti-hunter. But this is not how we will resolve the issue and provide for continuation of fishing, hunting, and trapping.

I feel we must understand why these groups are successful. It is because the American people relate to wild animals and want to protect them. Is that so different from what we do and how we gain public support.

What is wrong with the animal protection movement is that it ignores the real needs of wildlife—those of habitat, food, and cover—and places the blame on population declines on the hunter. It is also carefully controlled not to credit the hunter with the conservation success he has had, deer and turkey reintroductions, waterfowl programs, restoration of endangered species, etc.

I believe many of those who contribute to these protectionist groups would contribute to habitat preservation and even join with us if properly educated. What we must do is provide an alternative. We must make an alternative available.

This is a major challenge of the future that cannot be ignored or minimized. We can win this challenge if we try to educate and work with this segment of our population. But we will surely lose if we continue to polarize and fail to sell our programs to all members of the public.

The way we face the challenges of the future depends on each of us. The challenges can either be stumbling blocks or stepping stones, depending on how we use them. The opportunity is there—we can grasp it and go forward, or we can let it pass us by. I hope we jump at the chance to improve our natural heritage and protect the outdoor recreation we cherish and manage.

Theodore Roosevelt said, “Every man owes a part of his time and money to the business or industry in which he is engaged. No man has a moral right to withhold his support from an organization that is striving to improve conditions within his sphere.” I believe if we follow that thinking and support the Southeastern Association, our respective employers and sportsmen’s organizations, we will succeed.

I was once told that a successful biologist’s epitaph would say he delayed development and environmental loss 10 years. This says he merely put off the inevitable. Such an epitaph is short sighted and inaccurate. A successful biologist will have educated the public, worked with the political system to change the course of history, and left a permanent legacy. Theodore Roosevelt did just that—he left the National Park System. I suggest to you similar milestones are the Endangered Species Act, the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, etc.

We, too, can be true biologists and leave a legacy. We need to work with elected officials, sportsmen's organizations, and the private sector to make conservation needs known.

The resolve we return home with and our willingness to work together will determine our success or failure.

As president, I can only point the direction we need to go and highlight the opportunities. The future will be the result of all our efforts.

Now, I want to change topics and publically thank Mr. Joe Herring for his years of service to this Association. Mr. Herring has attended all but one conference since World War II. He has served as your Secretary for five years. It was his personal interest and effort that caused the first Proceedings to be published. We are now the only Association that has all its conferences recorded and published. He has worked with all the officers and been a true supporter to the Association's goals. For these efforts, I for one, want to say "thanks" to Joe Herring on behalf of the Association.

I also want to publicly thank Dr. John Sweeney and Dr. Jim Sweeney who have served as your editors for the Proceedings since 1980. They have brought a new level of professionalism to the Proceedings. They will be stepping down following publication of the 1985 Proceedings. They will be replaced by Dr. Arnie Eversole.

I wish you success at this conference and in the year to come, and ask that as the salt air of the Chesapeake excites our blood, let us redouble our efforts to promote conservation.