

## Remarks: Biodiversity, The State Perspective (Oklahoma)

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State fish and wildlife professionals agree with the premise of conservation of biological diversity. Who can be against programs to maintain the natural environment as we know it or to restore it to a better condition? However, from a state agency perspective, there are three major areas of concern about biological diversity: 1. the definition, 2. the scale of application, and 3. the impact on current programs.

Let's first visit the definition. Most state fish and wildlife agency professionals would say that conserving biological diversity means maintaining functioning ecosystems with the abundance and distribution of species of today and restoring other species abundance and distribution to practical historical levels. This is a broad definition that resource managers could work with in the field and defend in policy discussions. Does this mean we are interested in reestablishing prairie chickens in Louisiana? Perhaps. Does it mean that we are interested in trying to reestablish grizzly bears to Oklahoma? No, it does not. This is a definition of a concept only, not a road map to the end.

If you look for help in publications to find a better definition of biological diversity, things get confusing. The book, *BioDiversity*, a compilation of papers edited by noted conservation biologist E. O. Wilson in 1988, mentions biological diversity, diversity of life forms, global diversity, species diversity, organic diversity, ecological diversity, biotic diversity, community diversity, and local diversity. One author observes that "diversity often lies in the eye of the observer." Wilson, in 1984, defined biological diversity as "the variety of life forms, the ecological roles they perform, and the genetic diversity they contain."

Wilson says, "Biological diversity must be treated more seriously as a global resource, to be indexed, used, and above all preserved." This is how it should be applied from the whole, down to the sub parts.

Second, the scale of application to conserve biological diversity also concerns state fish and wildlife agencies. Do we manage for conservation of biological diversity on the basis of the world, the nation, by state, by county or parish, by section, or by acre? This may sound like a nitpicking question, but the question

about scale of application caused much controversy when the National Forest Management Act called for managing for multiple resources. That Act resulted in arguments and lawsuits as to whether the U.S. Forest Service was managing for multiple resources on almost every size piece of land where a particular group did not like the proposed management (logging, recreation, grazing, etc.).

When thinking about the scale of application of conserving biodiversity, we should not fall into the trap of being too parochial. We should be concerned with the basic status of each species, not whether species X does or does not occur on a small piece of ground in my county. We're interested in the species, but it is not practical to have all species everywhere. This will be the challenge of the future. How much do we do on each specific site?

The third area of concern is impact on state fish and wildlife agency programs. Impact on state agencies to conserve biological diversity comes from: 1) groups that think state agencies should work on nothing but conserving biodiversity, 2) changes in state authority to manage fish and resident wildlife, 3) potential impacts of federally proposed biological diversity impact assessments, and lastly, 4), from the specter of biodiversity litigation.

Those who argue that states are negligent if they don't make conservation of biological diversity their highest priority forget that state wildlife agencies also have other responsibilities. As state agencies integrate programs to conserve biological diversity, they have to do this in addition to current programs. This means that Oklahoma will manage some areas with single species emphasis (deer, ducks) at the same time other areas are managed for conserving biological diversity. We can and will do both. It is important for state fish and wildlife agencies to add new programs and program supporters to the traditional programs.

State agencies are concerned about the impacts that national programs to conserve biological diversity will have on state authority to manage fish and resident wildlife. Many proponents of conserving biological diversity are not aware, and may not care about, the difference between state and federal authority to manage fish and wildlife. We must guard against actions that reduce our management authority.

Proposed federal legislation to conserve biological diversity would require that biological diversity impact assessments be carried out on federal actions (one federal bill says all federal actions, another says only major federal actions). State fish and wildlife agencies are concerned about having to conduct biological diversity impact assessments on each and every Federal Aid Project. We are concerned about additional bureaucratic hurdles on an already burdened program. What constitutes a major federal action? Does a new interstate highway through a national forest constitute a major federal action? Probably so. Does a federally-funded liming station on a creek in a national forest constitute a major federal action? Most likely not, but some organizations would use this argument to try to stop state agency projects.

It is also likely that animal rights organizations would use this type of vague language to legally challenge many state agency projects that are federally funded. The last thing that state or federal agencies need is more "litigation."

State agencies are also concerned that programs designed to conserve biological diversity are appropriately funded. Current legislative proposals call for the appropriation of \$10 million–\$20 million annually. This may be akin to using a band-aid for heart surgery. If conservation of biological diversity is a global problem, and it is, then we need to scale our efforts appropriately.

### **The Oklahoma Example**

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has been, is now, and will continue to be in the future active in preservation of Oklahoma's biological diversity. We have been a leader in improved water quality standards and habitat protection, even before the term biodiversity became popular. Our programs speak for themselves. Most states have similar programs. Ours are:

- Aquatic education
- Forest stewardship
- Hunter education
- Project WILD (2 people)
- Nongame (2 people)
- Environmental project evaluation (2 people)
- Critters and concepts
- Reintroduction of eagles
- Nature trails
- Watchable wildlife guide
- Checklists of birds by area
- Management of lands for nongame species—VanOsdel
- Raptor nesting platforms
- Research on endangered species:
  - a. Bats
  - b. Red cockaded woodpecker
  - c. Black capped vireo
  - d. Ouachita rock pocketbook status surveys
- Reintroduction of otter
- Listing and protection of state endangered species
- Establishment of prairie dog towns
- Evaluation at sites for black-footed ferret introduction
- Barn owl nesting platforms
- American burying beetle habitat study
- Cave protection
- Status studies: cave crayfish, prairie mole cricket, Neosho madtom, Arkansas River shiner, Arkansas River speckled chub, Rich Mountain slitmouth, Neosho mucket

- Watchable wildlife area
- Watchable wildlife guides and checklists

## **The Missouri Posture**

Missouri has taken an aggressive posture. Jerry Presley states, “Our Department accepts that protection of and management for Missouri’s biodiversity are primary responsibilities.” They have participated in a state task force to define biodiversity and management actions in their state. As always with Missouri, they are doing an excellent job. They not only define biological diversity, but also cover the creation of Missouri’s present diversity, factors that impact its diversity, and how to preserve it. They are developing a manual that will tell everyone how biodiversity fits in to state programs, what will be done, and who will do it.

## **The Future**

I truly believe the states have been in the business of biodiversity for years and are capable of providing the leadership in the future. There is a critical need to be given the time to expand our programs and to obtain the funds needed to operate expanded effort. More than ever, we need the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act of 1980 funded.

The real challenge to state fish and wildlife agencies will be to take the leadership to define how biodiversity will be implemented in that state. We can define that we will work from the state level down using individual tracks to support that state effort. Or, we can let others tell us we must do every thing every where.

A quote from a leaflet produced by the Sigard Olson Institute bears repeating—  
“The first rule of intelligent tinkering is to save all the parts.”

The states are more than ready to do their part.