

General Session

Presidential Address

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Ladies and gentlemen of the Southeastern Association, I'm honored to have the opportunity to serve as your president, and I'm happy to have a few minutes this morning to share a few perspectives with you. I'm also delighted to have the chance to publicly thank Bud Bristow and his fine staff for hosting this, our 44th Conference. Many of you in this room were in attendance at the International meeting in New Orleans a few weeks ago and had the opportunity to hear Governor Buddy Roemer. In his remarks to us in New Orleans, Governor Roemer quoted Abraham Lincoln, and it was a quote that I am mindful of here this morning. Governor Roemer recalled that Abraham Lincoln had observed "that he could never remember hearing a bad short speech." There are so many things happening in our professions these days that it was difficult to decide where to concentrate the few minutes I have this morning—where to focus.

The first temptation that I resisted was to label this decade. I suspect that everybody in this room has either done that or heard it done, and indeed, it is not inappropriate. The 1990s promise to be a decade of change and challenge, but then, so were the 1960s and so were the 1970s and yes, even the 1980s. It's just that the changes and the challenges keep changing, and the 1990s probably won't be any different in that regard. It also appears to me that this could be the dawning of a new age in natural resource management. Everyone is familiar with the ages—the age of exploitation, the age of awakening, and, of course, the age of intense management and growth of our sciences. We are seeing, I think, the dawning of the age of involvement. No longer can we hide behind our scientific paradigms and expect to be accepted because we have a scientifically proven point or position.

I am reminded here of a quote of Disraeli's. He was referring to bureaucrats, but it should give scientists pause for reflection as well. Disraeli said that "bureaucrats use statistics in much the same way that drunks use lightposts—for support rather than for illumination."

It also seems to me that we are on the threshold of an age of professional integration. No longer can foresters sit in one corner and work alone, fisheries biologists sit in another corner, wildlife biologists in yet another, and so on. We are witnessing the development of a more holistic approach to the environment. As we

switch to more habitat- and community-oriented approaches, it becomes imperative that all natural science disciplines work more closely together in a coordinated approach—it is clear to me that the prerequisite of success in whatever we call this new age will be people skills. Successful people in this new age will blend science and people skills.

Having said all that let me say that what I really want to talk to you about this morning is focus—the focus of our energy in the 1990s. You recall, I'll bet, as I do, when you first learned that you could start a fire using light from the sun and a magnifying glass. I remember vividly to this day, the impression that made on me. The fact that we could take a source of energy 150 million km away and using a magnifying lens focus that source of energy to light a fire was absolutely amazing. To this day, I am impressed with that fact. It seems to me that among all these challenges we face in the 1990s, there is none more important than focus. We must focus our energy on doing a better job of getting people to understand what natural resource management is all about and to participate with us.

Remember a few moments ago when I said that all too frequently our many disciplines have been off in the corner working alone? Well, in one of these corners are the animal rights folks working diligently at trying to win the hearts and minds of the majority of the people of this country. Stop for a minute and reflect on some of the things that have happened in the past year or so.

— California has been in and out of court defending the science of its bear season.

— A worse fate befell California's mountain lion season—it ended up on the ballot and the hunting program got killed.

— In Maryland last year 35 protesters were arrested for harassing hunters at a state wildlife management area. One of the protesters decided to serve time rather than pay a fine and got gut-wrenching publicity from the *Washington Post*.

— This year the opening of bow season in Maryland was again greeted by a large group of protesters, several of whom were again arrested.

Lest the fish side of this house get too complacent, let me share another recent activity in Maryland. On August 26, we conducted a junior fishing rodeo. It was in conjunction with our "Get Hooked on Fishing, Not Drugs" program. Demonstrators showed up at each of the public locations where the tournament was conducted. In the far western part of the state the emphasis of the protesters was to "urge compassion for fish." They carried slogans such as "Don't eat our friends," "If fish could scream, your Sunday would not be so pleasant." The demonstrators at our Sandy Point State Park, near Annapolis, hit on "Worms have feelings too." The press release published by PETA, and distributed prior to the event, attacked the "Get Hooked on Fishing, Not Drugs" program by noting that giving the message to kids to replace drug abuse with animal abuse is no solution. It continued that although "fish don't express pain and suffering in ways that humans easily recognize, a fish's lip, mouth, and tongue are extremely sensitive. A Sunday morning fishing trip would not be so relaxing if

fish could scream" the release said. If you are not familiar with the PETA fact sheet "Fish: Aquatic Agony," you better be!

Does all this come from a tiny minority? I fear not. I feel that the controversy whirling around the issue of sport hunting and fishing today is being exacerbated and clouded by other issues of the day (i.e., guns, crime with guns, spotted owls, red-cockaded woodpeckers, below-cost timber sales, etc.). No longer can we sit back and comfortably assume that this is a lunatic fringe which will go away if we ignore it. It's a growing phenomenon and a wide variety of people who are concerned are getting one side of the story.

I applaud the work being done in Kentucky by Don McCormick and his folks and in the other states in the southeast who are taking a pro-active position in dealing with this whole issue. As Kentucky has, we must all recognize that we must start listening to and responding to a much wider segment of the public. We must put systems in place that facilitate citizen participation, public involvement and policy development. A wide range of people must feel part of what we do.

Most of you have heard of the program of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies: Responsive Management. It is a kind of program that we are going to have to undertake, implement, and support if we are going to survive in a world with fewer outdoor sportsmen and more resource issues.

We do an adequate—sometimes even good—job of communicating among ourselves but we do horribly at winning the hearts and minds of the majority. I recently read a speech by Jon Franklin of Oregon State University—Mr. Franklin has written and spoken extensively about the inadequacy of scientists to articulate and capture the American mind. He is considered by some to be a bit radical but he feels that there is a growing anti-science movement in this country and he cites a growing number of people who feel science and scientists are arrogant. He attributes that to the fact that science has driven so much in this country for so long and has shaped our lives so completely that "many people are rising up in defiance of everything we stand for." He noted that while science can't sing, and it can't dance; artists, film producers, songwriters, writers, and philosophers can all make us look like a bunch of idiots when it comes to influencing the minds of undecided America. There is no powerful, emotionally-compelling, philosophically-sound argument that trashes movements like the animal rights movement. He noted that scientists don't write books . . . not real books, not books you find in Crown, say, or B. Dalton's. Not books for readers. No, writing is an art, and scientists aren't artists. He concludes the paper with these words: "Books have to be written, movies have to be produced, philosophies have to be philosophized. If it is true that the arts cannot survive without science, it is also true that science cannot survive without the arts." Let's apply Professor Franklin's words to the animal rights movement.

How many people outside of our immediate group of comfort (that's the federations, the unlimiteds, the societies of science, etc.) know, for instance, that:

1. Fish and wildlife agencies were formed at the urging of hunters and fishermen who were concerned with resource abuse;

4 MacLauchlan

2. That hunters and fishermen have had a beneficial effect on the acquisition and protection of wildlands and special habitats;

3. That not a single species of wildlife has been brought to threatened or endangered status as a result of professionally managed programs; and

4. That hunters alone contributed \$517 million last year for licenses, excise taxes, etc.

We must focus our energies in an additional direction. If we're going to keep this thing we all love so much alive and well, we must get outside our present comfort zone, we must do additional things and just like that magnifying glass, we must light a fire that sweeps across this nation.