

# Anti-Hunting: A Problem in Our Own Ranks

**Michael McIntosh**, *Missouri Department of Conservation,  
2901 W. Truman Boulevard, Jefferson City, MO 65101*

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If this were a technical paper, it might be titled "Some aspects of anti-hunting as manifested in fish and game ranks" or something similar. The subject is so large and so fraught with implications that it can be treated only superficially, at best, in such a forum as this. I do not intend to offer an ultimate solution nor even a definitive statement of the problem. I have none to offer. I can, however, offer some perspective on this issue—but even this only briefly, in anticipation that all or some of you also have perspectives to share.

In approaching the matter, it seems to me that we actually are dealing with two phenomena. Anti-hunting is one. The other, as demonstrated by any number of reliable surveys, is that much of what we've taken to be anti-hunting sentiment is really anti-hunter. Both can and do exist in fish and game departments.

The difficulty in distinguishing anti-hunting from anti-hunter creates a doubly fretful situation. Distaste for the hunter can all too easily be mistaken for opposition to hunting itself. To *appear* opposed to hunting can be as damaging as being opposed—especially when it is part of a conservation agency's public persona.

The emotional content of the anti-hunting issue unfortunately does not promote subtle distinctions. But if a fish and game agency, which has at least some opportunity and certainly the responsibility to help shape public attitudes, fails to make these distinctions, then the public surely won't. So not only must we wage the hunting campaign on the one hand, but we also must take pains to keep the difference between anti-hunting and anti-hunter constantly in view. This is no enviable task.

Anti-hunting sentiment does not seem particularly likely to exist within the more traditional spheres of fish and game agency functions: in game management, in fisheries management, in forestry, in enforcement. But times change and departments grow, and as they become increasingly complex they must therefore comprise more and more peripheral functions. Not many

agencies, I suspect, now have smaller fiscal, personnel, operations or other support-service sections than, say, ten years ago. Given the rate at which computer use is growing, and given the constantly expanding burden of paperwork with which every agency must cope, the clerical and keypunch staff alone probably outnumbers the biologists in many departments.

As these fields, once almost alien to fish and game management functions, grow more and more specialized, perhaps it becomes more and more difficult to recruit employees who are good accountants and good personnel specialists and who also are committed to conservation. The sheer mass of the average fish and game agency increases the opportunity for fragmentation of purpose. It's a reality, and we must live with it.

Along with this growth has come a concern with non-traditional aspects of resource management. A number of states now support non-game management programs; these, I believe, are unquestionably necessary. The more we learn of the great web of life on earth, the less we can afford to focus only on certain parts. But here, too, is an opportunity for preservationist rather than conservationist attitudes to prosper within an agency. And an agency at cross-purposes with itself can hardly hope to fulfill either its responsibilities to the public or to the resources it manages.

None of this seems likely to prove disastrous so long as people who oppose hunting do not come to possess policy-making authority. But even so, anti-hunting sentiment can be a cancer within the body of a conservation agency. And should it come to exist within an information or education section, the corrosion can be deadly.

Similarly, anti-hunter sentiment, which can so easily be misperceived by the public as an anti-hunting attitude, is equally dangerous. And this can exist anywhere, from the farm-wife secretary whose property has been victimized by poachers or slobs, to the enforcement agent who, like a policeman, must constantly deal with people at their worst.

Such sentiment also can unwittingly become part of an agency's information and education persona. What, for example, is the obvious harm in distinguishing, as we often do, between "consumptive" and "non-consumptive" resource use? The harm, which is not obvious but which is genuine nonetheless, is that the hunter is set apart, singled out. By fostering the specious notion that an activity which doesn't involve actually taking fish or game has no impact upon the resource or the environment, we make the hunter an easy target for attack. We all are consumers, simply by our presence. Our highways and homes and shopping malls and parking lots devour more resources, by altering and destroying habitat, than all the hunters who ever lived. If we allow the hunter to take that rap, we will have much to answer for.

Another example is that we often use the word "hunter" when "criminal" is more accurate. I don't believe it hair-splitting to object to this sort of guilt by association. Newspaper stories that begin, "Three hunters were arrested Saturday . . ." make me cringe. And when such language appears in a fish

and game agency news release, I am appalled. We can and should abhor the game violator, but to make "hunter" synonymous with "criminal" is madness. Certainly, we have little or no control over how our news releases are edited or used, but we can control what we say for ourselves.

Those of us whose business is communication are well aware of the subtle but extremely powerful influences of words. The advertising industry has demonstrated beyond question that almost anything will take on almost any image according to the words we use to describe it. Our task, it seems to me, is to foster an image of the hunter as one who violates neither the law nor the ethics nor the simple human decency inherent to the sport. We must also insist that those who do are not hunters. Call them criminals or slobs or whatever names are appropriate. Anything but hunter.

If the hunter is to enjoy the respect he deserves, it is our responsibility to fly his best colors. Information and education should object at the top of its collective lungs to any agency policy, plan, program, news release, or public statement that presents hunting, either overtly or by implication, as anything other than a proven-valid tool of wildlife management or, more important, that presents hunting as anything other than a pursuit worthy of decent human beings.

A passive approach simply is not enough. Hunting deserves better, from us especially, than to be treated as an embarrassment or a necessary evil or in any way a shameful thing. There is every indication that a resurgence of anti-hunting activism is imminent. To fail to meet it aggressively is to commit a slow, subtle form of suicide. And suicide, unhappily, is final.