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**AN OPINION ON THE POTENTIAL FOR APPLYING
PUBLIC RELATIONS TO THE REGULATORY PROCESS**

by

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ABSTRACT

This essay deals with the regulatory function common to all wildlife resource management agencies, and addresses this process specifically from the public relations aspect. It is hoped that these thoughts will stimulate thinking on the parts of both I & E personnel and top-level administrators on how to better utilize the regulatory publication to put forward agency goals and programs.

One of the harbingers of spring, as surely as the first bouts of hay fever, is the annual duty of producing and publishing the state hunting and/or fishing regulations for the year forthcoming. Aside from the pedestrian task of printing the official, "regulations as passed" to fulfill the legality of public notice, there is often the more sinister obligation to produce a "popular guide" form of these same regulations. This popular guide is the rosetta stone by which the dreary legalese of the official form is interpreted, and thus fulfills the spirit of public notice. More often than not, these tasks fall to the Information and Education Office.

To observe that the latter project is seldom viewed with unbridled joy in the I & E shop would not be an overstatement. To the I & E Chief it is a necessary evil, a time consuming complexity which further strains the capabilities of his already meager staff. To the staffer who is stuck with the job, it seems a dreary, boring task separating him from more prestigious magazine or television assignments. Some shops may have been so fortunate as to dodge the project altogether by shifting the responsibility to management or enforcement divisions - with a hearty sigh of good riddance, no doubt.

This is unfortunate because that dull little booklet may well have the largest potential readership of any publication produced by a public wildlife or natural resources

agency. Seen in this light, its public relations potential is obvious, but seldom is it fully exploited.

Almost all state and federal wildlife agencies were initially conceived in a regulatory capacity. Since then, increased knowledge may have added important "new" directions and responsibilities, but in the broad public view, the regulatory role is still predominate. The role has, in fact, increased in importance for both managerial goals and as an area of prime contact between the agency and its supporting publics. The efficiency of the regulatory function is a prime criterion in the public's evaluation of an agency and is a cornerstone in the overall acceptance of *all* agency programs.

If the regulatory function is a cornerstone of the wildlife agency, then the regulations booklet is the mortar which joins it to a base of public support. It is also exhibit A in the court of public opinion which judges the agency. Depending on the booklet's planning, execution and effect, it may be evidence for either the defense or prosecution.

The advantages of applying public relations principles to the regulatory process seems self-evident. To some extent it already occurs, consciously and unconsciously, whenever we develop popular guide form of the regulations. However to realize the full potential of the regulations as a public relations medium, we must do more than print the booklet on nice paper after editing it to eighth-grade literacy. The effective application of public relations principles is a broad spectrum endeavor which must be planned into the regulatory process from start to finish.

What has hindered the full application of elemental public relations to the regulatory system? The aforementioned apathy on the part of I & E shop on one hand and tradition on the other. In many instances the regulatory process is regarded as more or less in the province of the law enforcement arm of the agency. This is understandable due to the historic association of regulation with the role of wildlife protector, and the power of arrest. More recently the disciplines of wildlife and fisheries management have utilized the regulatory process as a selective management tool to manipulate the controlled harvest of wildlife. From this coalition has evolved the modern concept of the regulatory system. A marriage of biological theory and law enforcement reality which governs the size and mode of the wildlife harvest.

Central to this system should be the primary goal of managing and protecting the wildlife resources from overharvest (Henry). In direct effect the regulations are people management devices which control human activity in the best interest of wildlife while allowing a healthy and safe level of harvest. As a result the initial planning and policy decisions are worked out between enforcement and biological personnel. Any alterations in deference to positive public relations are "after the fact" and largely cosmetic.

This situation is acceptable to many administrators who seem to feel that the regulatory process is technical and should remain in the venue of enforcement and/or wildlife officials. True enough that within these disciplines is found the technical expertise to formulate a workable regulatory system, but there is another factor on which the success of the system hinges public acceptance. This is what we have always believed to be in the realm of the I & E practitioner, who is said to "sell" agency programs (Fowler).

To say that public acceptance of agency programs is important is gross understatement. This thought, in infinite variation, is recurrent throughout the authoritative literature of practical wildlife management. "Wildlife management cannot function in America without public support," according to Clarence Schoenfield, and just about everyone else. Most of these same sources also identify Information and Education personnel and programs as the primary tool for eliciting this public support. The Committee on North American Wildlife Policy concludes that public information and education play a vital part in making and carrying out natural resource policies. The same report also states that, "this field has been characterized by thinly spread support and minimum services." It is difficult to reconcile the ideal with the usual low organizational level of I & E in the administrative hierarchy (Calkins).

In this instance we in I & E have failed to communicate and by this failure are missing potential opportunity to contribute to our agency function of eliciting support for its policy and programs.

The situation is unfortunate in that it fails to utilize those individuals on the agency payroll, who are supposedly experts in analyzing and altering the public opinion. The competent I & E practitioner should be in such a position as to gauge the public temper and make a reliable professional judgement as to the effect of an agency action, policy or in this case regulation. Such a service might well avoid some of the misunderstandings that erode public confidence. In the case of an admittedly unpopular but necessary action, I & E shop, with adequate foreknowledge, should prepare a program to at least explain and hopefully win support for the action (Cutlip/ Center). According to William Towell "...most states have long recognized that expert public relations help is needed in carrying out (departmental) policy, but many have failed to involve these same experts in forming that policy."

The potential harm in this situation is fully realized when some unfortunate I & E type is handed the classic "hot potato" phone call from a disgruntled sportsman. The caller (exasperated by the inevitable phone transfers by which the secretarial bureaucracy shunts all such calls to the I & E office) wants (demands?) the rationale for a particular regulation that the caller deems unreasonable, illogical, and damn foolish.

Our hapless I & E victim is lucky if he has so much as seen the regulation, so he puts the caller on hold (once again) and seeks the answer. He now finds why he got the call--all major policy makers are: on leave, sick, at lunch, or in an important meeting. Since neither he, nor any other I & E staffer, was involved in initial regulations planning, he has not the foggiest notion of why any particular regulation was enacted. He now has two choices: 1) tell the caller he doesn't know, or 2) make up something. Our disgruntled sportsman is immediately impressed by two salient facts, the wildlife agency employs poor quality liars and is basically inept (which he already strongly suspected). Public acceptance and support slides down the hill.

Human motivation is a complex and poorly understood phenomenon. It reacts to an infinite variety and combination of subtle triggers. To say that this ambiguous drive can be controlled is open to valid challenge, but within reasonable limits it can be predicted and to some extent influenced. The profession of public relations is based on certain applied psychological and sociological principals which can be used to evaluate, identify with, and promote understanding and acceptance on the part of the general public.

There is that word "acceptance" again which in the context to this regulatory discussion might be synonymous with compliance. The acceptability of (and ultimate compliance with) any concept is directly a function of its understandability. People on the whole are much more inclined to accept that which is comprehensible and are disinclined to accept or comply with what they deem to be non-understandable (Amundson). This is the root of one of today's major regulatory problems which has a definite public relations (I & E) bearing.

More and more sportsman are, in all honesty, unable to understand our regulations in even the popular guide form. The most common complaint has nothing to do with bag limits, seasons, or any of the normal gripes, but indicates confusion with the complexity of regulation. Since he, the regulated is unable to comprehend the regulation, he may be alienated to the point of saying "to hell with it, I'll do as I damn well please." And he damn well does, as public support slips another notch.

To a large measure this complexity is an unavoidable outgrowth of too many people trying to do too much with too few resources on too little land. It is augmented by a diversity of wildlife species, geographic terrain, and modes or styles of sportsman harvest within one management unit (state). When you add to this situation the goal of maximizing recreational opportunity and set up the parameter of maximum protection of the resources, you have the seeds of an exceedingly complicated management-regulatory system. If we are to continue to do these jobs, increased complexity of regulation is one of the prices.

There are other stumbling blocks to public understanding and compliance which are just as solidly implanted. They may differ from state to state but can be lumped together for definition as, outmoded tradition, personal prejudice, and political pressures within and without the wildlife agency. These lead to local exceptions, regulations whose need has passed, and regulations whose need never really existed. They are perpetuated year after year - just because. A rationale which is difficult to explain to the general public.

As previously noted, our regulatory system is increasing in complexity out of necessity and is likely to continue in this direction. The maintenance of outmoded and unenforceable regulations only compounds this complexity, and may have other more damaging, effects. Their presence without real meaning undermines compliance with *all* regulations. F. H. Davis, speaking in 1959, identified this problem. "If a law or regulation is on the books, it should be strictly and vigorously interpreted. Failure to enforce one law breeds contempt for the whole system and agency." Our "sacred cows" have been around a long time and only long and diligent effort will remove them, but this is another valid exercise of public relations principle.

There is a more positive side to the application of public relations to the regulatory process, which deals with the dissemination of information. One idea is the use of the regulations booklet as an information medium that goes beyond the presentation of seasons, bag limits and things you can't do. Something even beyond the little epigrams about littering, trespass, poachers, etc. This field has, in recent times, been scarcely plowed.

Conservation information developed and tailored for the specific audience the booklet reaches could go far in explaining agency policy. There is a degree of "guaranteed readership" in the regulations publication. The individuals who participate in a regulated activity are anxious to know when that activity is legally permissible, at the very least. This is an aggressive readership which would respond to allied information conveniently presented. Thus the booklet could become a viable communication channel to an identifiable and significant public.

The application of public relations principles is no panacea which will solve all problems immediately. Neither will it sell a basically inferior program. These and other miracles are not in the province of professional public relations. The PR man is not possessed of any black arts or mystic crafts; he is, however, trained in a professional discipline which is just as much a specialty as wildlife biology or criminal science. A specialty which is peculiarly applicable to the people management aspect of wildlife regulation. When both the professional I & E practitioners and top level management realize this, perhaps there will be an enhancement of both the I & E role within the agency and of the agencies efforts in wildlife regulation.

In the meantime, let me urge I & E Chiefs and supervisors to take a serious look at the public relations potential in agency regulation publications. An agency magazine may win an AACI award and a film receive plaudits from OWAA, but if Joe Peckerwood can't understand the regulations we are failing. Failing to do the job his license dollars are paying us to do, and failing to build grassroots support for our agency.

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THE IMPACT OF THE "ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT" UPON HUNTING AND FISHING

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ABSTRACT

Data available in the four national surveys of fishing and hunting (1955, 1960, 1965, 1970) were used to identify how participation in fishing and hunting has changed during the recent environmental movement. Participation in fishing has increased in nearly all segments of the population while participation in hunting has remained the same or may have decreased slightly. Participation in small game hunting decreased while participation in big game and waterfowl hunting increased. A decrease in participation in hunting was most notable in rural areas among farmers and farm laborers. The data in the national surveys did not indicate that an increased environmental awareness has influenced participation in fishing or hunting any substantial degree.

INTRODUCTION

When North America was first settled, wild game and fish were abundant throughout the land. Hunting and fishing were often necessary activities for survival and contributed to the early economy. With few exceptions, hunting and fishing were not pursued as sport or recreation.

As time went on man's influence over the land intensified because of the expanding population and increased living standards. The seemingly inexhaustible supply of game became depleted first in the east and then this depletion extended westward across the prairie into the mountains. Rivers and streams became polluted by man's activities.

By the mid-19th century a few individuals began to voice concern over the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources. George Marsh was one of the early leaders advocating a new land ethic. In his book *Man and Nature*, written in 1864, he expressed the concern that to disturb the balance of nature without knowledge of the consequences was to invite disaster. A new movement in American history gathered momentum which was aimed at protection through preservation and regulation.

During this first wave of the conservation movement, areas of public domain were set aside for the public interest. Theodore Roosevelt recognized the need for new concepts of resource management and used the power of the federal government to protect the land and its wildlife. The passage of the Lacey Act in 1900 was the first of several laws which provided protection through regulation.

The wildlife resources were at a low ebb at the turn of the century. Population a major game species such as deer, wild turkey, bear, elk and antelope were but a fraction of their original level. Small game fared a little better but was beginning to decrease