

PROGRESS IN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ADMINISTRATION

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Progress in the administration of wildlife conservation can be measured in any organization by comparing the existing situation with a basic set of desirable standards. The measurement of progress is represented by the rate at which those recognized desirable standards can be brought into existence and followed as an accepted operating procedure.

Wildlife conservation administration might be defined as the art or science of converting funds and human energy into better hunting and fishing in the most efficient way possible. The key word in this definition is "efficient." It is a relative term, since complete or true efficiency probably does not occur in nature; nevertheless, it is a goal toward which a sincere administrator strives. How closely he approaches this goal depends on several things: his own ability, the physical and legal entities for which he is responsible, and the people to whom and for whom he is accountable.

How far have we come in the decade since World War II? What progress have we made?

Wildlife conservation is a comparatively new profession. Its development on a state and national basis has taken place within the memory of many of us. Here in the Southeastern states, I think we can look back on considerable progress. Many of us have seen an increase in revenues since the war years, and this increased revenue has enabled us to expand our conservation programs. We have seen advances in the field of personnel management, and we have found a better supply of trained personnel to carry on wildlife conservation projects. Some of us have revamped our financial systems toward more efficient operation. We have learned new concepts and techniques. It may be said without hesitation, however, that all of us still have a long way to go toward establishing the ideal wildlife conservation program.

LEGAL STRUCTURE

It may be stated without qualification that no state has the perfect legal structure for an ideal wildlife conservation program. Some have come a long way toward reaching this condition, but most administrators, at least occasionally, feel that they are hampered by an inadequate fish and game code; that the job of providing more sport for more people would be easier if the general statutes were altered.

What are the conditions for the ideal wildlife conservation administration? How far should the administrator go to attain them? It has been shown by experience that the farther a fish and game program is removed from politics without destroying democratic principles of government the more chance that program has of being successful. Several states have adopted constitutional amendments which prevent their legislatures from tossing the whole wildlife conservation program down the river with the signing of a bill. Without such a constitutional provision no program, however wisely carried on, is entirely safe from selfish interest. Several generations were required to bring our wildlife and other natural resources to their present low levels. Several more will be required to restore them to something like abundance. This restoration would be difficult, if not impossible, were conservation programs to be revised every time there is a change in governmental administration.

The existence of a conservation program based on an amendment to the state constitution is most desirable in that it guarantees program permanence and the consequent possibility of progress. But it does not guarantee progress! It can guarantee a continuance of mediocrity as well. In this situation the effect of popular demand for progressive action is minimized, and a still greater responsibility for constructive action rests on the administrator.

There is much to be said in favor of a wildlife conservation organization as a completely separate entity of state government provided that revenues received from the sale of licenses and other sources are earmarked specifically for wildlife conservation, and for that purpose only. This statement is made in full cognizance of the inter-relationship of wildlife with the other three renewable natural resources.

The ideal wildlife conservation program cannot develop without legal provision for four basic elements:

1. Commissioners appointed for staggered terms to serve as representatives of the sportsmen. These appointees should be as expert in the field of sportsmen relationship as a biologist is in the field of wildlife management.
2. Authority for the commission to set conservation regulations which carry the same weight as laws.
3. Authority for the commission to engage or dismiss the administrator.
4. Authority for the commission to plan use of funds, and to execute these plans without hindrances.

On the first point, it should be recognized that commissioners are, in a sense, political appointees. If the wildlife conservation program is to be continuous and undisturbed by changes in political administration, the terms of the commissioners should be staggered so that there will be little opportunity for a chief executive to appoint a majority of the members. The statute should also specify that commission members be interested in fish and game management and well informed on matters pertaining to wildlife conservation. This is necessary in order for them to have the best interests of the sportsmen at heart. The commission should work as a policy-making body, a team, regardless of personal or political differences. They should consider wildlife conservation matters on a state-wide rather than on a local basis.

Authority to set regulations having the force of law involves an important but necessary responsibility. Such authority permits seasons and bag limits to be adjusted to the annual harvestable supply of fish and game. It gives a flexibility which cannot possibly be enjoyed where harvest restriction is done solely by statute. This is particularly important in instances of catastrophe where fish or game populations in a given section are endangered by fire, flood, drought, or other decimating factors. A recent example of this took place in North Carolina. Severe drought had reduced the flow of water in some trout streams to the point where the fish were concentrated in pools and were highly vulnerable to anglers' lures. Under its authority the commission closed these streams and alleviated much of the danger to the brood stock. Without regulatory powers, the commission would have been helpless in this and similar situations.

In setting regulations, the commission must make adjustments between two factors which sometimes are in conflict: the desires of the sportsmen, and the welfare of the species on which seasons and bag limits are set. In North Carolina the commission formulates tentative regulations each year based on information obtained from field personnel with regard to the harvest potential. These are presented to the sportsmen of the state in a series of public hearings where interested persons are invited to express their views and comments. Official regulations are set at a later date, after consideration has been given to all of the facts and opinions involved. In a democratic form of government, public opinion must be given due consideration. No commission or individual has or should have dictatorial powers.

A key factor in a successful wildlife conservation administration is the legal mechanism by which the executive director is employed or dismissed. Where the commission is given full legal authority to choose its director and to employ him as long as his services are in the best interests of the conservation program, a great deal of friction and inefficiency can be eliminated. Such legal authority should require a commission to select a man who is thoroughly trained in wildlife conservation work. Equally important, it should select a man who is free from political obligations, and who is interested in a career in wildlife conservation rather than political preference or prestige. Once having procured such a man, the commission should be free to retain his services as long as

his work is satisfactory. As has been pointed out, a sound wildlife conservation program must be a continuous one. Frequent changes in administrators obviously will interrupt continuity and may prevent satisfactory progress.

The matter of authority for budgeting and disbursing wildlife conservation funds is of great importance, and has become more so during the past few years when the sale of licenses has reached an all-time high. Under ideal circumstances the commission, with the aid and advice of the administrator, should have full authority to spend all monies received from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and other sources, provided these funds are expended in the best interests of the sportsmen and the fish and game species involved. In North Carolina all income received from wildlife conservation activities are automatically appropriated, reserved, set aside and made available for wildlife conservation purposes. The expenditure of these funds is subject to the scrutiny of the Budget Bureau and the Personnel Department as a normal safeguard of public funds. This system gives the operation of the wildlife conservation program a degree of independence from legislative appropriation and, therefore, from legislative control. It further serves to discourage possible use of these funds for purposes not in the best interest of hunters and fishermen who pay the bill.

COMMISSION-ADMINISTRATOR RELATIONSHIPS

In developing administrative procedures, it is essential that the duties and powers of the commission and its administrator be clearly defined. Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson, President of the Wildlife Management Institute, has said that the most successful commissions are those that are clearly established as policy-making and budgetary control boards, giving the responsibility for running the organization or department to the administrator, or whatever he may be called. Such an arrangement serves to make matters easier for all concerned. When the administrator is given clear-cut policies to be translated into action his course is clear. There is occasionally the difficulty, however, of over-aggressive commissioners dealing directly with department personnel, sometimes to the point of conflict with established commission policy or the ideas of the administrator as to the manner of putting policy into action. This, of course, is an unavoidable situation that must be faced tactfully and realistically.

In discussing commission-administrator relationships, Gabrielson has this to say: "The administrator, selected to carry out policies, must be willing to accept the responsibility for taking to the commission definite recommendations based on the information that has been assembled by his staff, and if his recommendations are accepted and the policy adopted, he must be willing to stand squarely behind that (policy) and accept the responsibility for it. Only in this way can he justify the confidence the commission had in his ability in selecting him."

Without clearly defined duties and powers for both the commission and the administrator, there may be a tendency on the part of the administrator to alter existing policies, initiate new policies, or tamper with budgets without the consent of the commission. Sometimes emergencies might seem to justify such action, but the conscientious administrator will at least contact his commission by telephone to secure concurrence, or request a special meeting to handle the matter.

The administrator should have authority to select and discharge personnel who work under him. He is morally obliged to select employees on the basis of their training and other qualifications; not on the basis of friendship or family ties. He must realize that his success and the tenure of his service as an administrator depends largely on the type of people he selects to carry on the work of wildlife conservation. Given this authority, he still must remember that his commissioners are especially concerned with key personnel. His relationship to his commission will be aided if he consults them on action involving key personnel.

Authority for the administrator to discharge incompetent or undesirable personnel is equally important. An efficient system of personnel selection can eliminate much of the painful responsibility for discharging the undesirable. No personnel selection system is perfect, however, and an intelligent administrator realizes that disloyal or incompetent personnel can seriously retard the most

ably planned program. Discretion will tell the administrator when to consult his commission where influential or key personnel are involved in dismissal.

Regardless of how well the basic law is written, no wildlife conservation organization can carry on a successful program unless the commission has complete confidence in the loyalty and ability of its administrator, and unless the administrator has complete confidence in the commission and the stability and wisdom of its actions. The commission can make sound policies only if the administrator keeps it completely informed on activities within the department and on matters of public opinion. If the administrator believes that the commission has reached a decision of policy on the basis of fact and sound advice, he can translate that policy into action with confidence.

ADMINISTRATOR-EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIPS

Following postwar expansion, personnel administration, employee relationships, and financial administration have become increasingly important. Many wildlife conservation departments have found it necessary to set up a special division to handle personnel records and the collection and disbursement of funds. When budgets pass the million dollar mark, accounting becomes too cumbersome for division heads to handle and can be done much more efficiently by a separate division, even though that division be small.

High employee morale is essential to a successful wildlife conservation program. The wise administrator knows that adequate salaries are one of the best morale factors. He also knows that salaries should be equitable among employees with consideration given to responsibility, seniority, and performance. Salaries should be as high as possible to secure the best qualified personnel for the jobs to be done. There is constant competition among state departments, between the states and federal government, and between the government agencies and private business for competent personnel. The administrator should realize that the success of any program depends largely upon the ability of the personnel he employs, and that his success as an administrator hinges on the results attained by the people he hires.

Whether he is a junior clerk or a division head, the average employee can do a better job if his responsibilities and duties are clearly defined and understood. Job classification and clearly outlined work specifications are a valuable and indispensable means of informing employees what is expected of them.

The administrator who is responsible for the performance of scores of employees widely scattered throughout the state cannot possibly keep his finger on the quality of work being turned out on a day-to-day basis. He will hear of outstanding work and he will hear of poor work, but by and large he needs a systematized means of rating his employees' efficiency. He should place this responsibility on supervisory personnel, using efficiency rating forms developed to fit the circumstances.

One of the most difficult tasks in administrative work is the delegation of authority. If an administrator surrounds himself with competent workers, he should be able to give these people the necessary authority and responsibility for carrying out their tasks. The chain of responsibility must be clear-cut and rigid. In a well-planned program, the administrator will determine the nature of the major activities to be carried on permanently, and give responsibility with executing authority to a division head for each activity planned. The latter, in turn, will assign a sufficient number of people to the activity to translate commission policy and administrative directives into measurable results. How the chain of command should be organized will depend on circumstances within each department, but its existence and organization will be vital to the success of the program.

ADMINISTRATOR-PUBLIC RELATIONSHIPS

We have seen that commission-administrator-employee harmony is essential to progress in wildlife conservation administration. Good administration is essential to the establishment of public confidence in state or federal programs. The extent of public confidence in any wildlife conservation agency and its personnel will largely determine the degree of public acceptance of the information-education material which is disseminated. The relationship of the public

to the administrator and the commission will be good if the organization is doing a good job and is having that job understood.

CONCLUSION

These are criteria of progress. Each agency can measure its progress by the extent to which it meets or exceeds suggested standards. Even after these standards are met the administrator has a difficult and exacting task. He has a board of commissioners, each of whom must be treated equally, and whose over-all decisions and desires are sometimes difficult to interpret. He has a hundred or more employees among whom he may show no partiality, and whose recommendations are at times impractical. Among the public, he fends off those with selfish interests on one side and the well meaning but ill-informed on the other. He often stands between pressure for obsolete "conservation" practices, and key personnel who find it difficult to carry out such practices with intellectual honesty. The compensation? He has a million or more sportsmen willing and eager to tell him how to do his job.

HIGHLIGHTS OF PROGRESS IN LAW ENFORCEMENT IN THE LAST DECADE

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INTRODUCTION

All agencies engaged in the management of Wildlife Resources recognize the basic importance of sound and adequate enforcement measures. Few Conservationists would dispute the elementary principle that without intelligent protection of wildlife species, no amount of research, development or management could materially sustain game and fish populations. Likewise, it is illogical to hold to the belief that during our generation, or any subsequent generation, education measures will accomplish in toto the feat of eliminating the need for policing our fields and streams to insure against wanton, careless and intentional slaughter of game and fish. These observations are made not in an attempt to discredit any tool employed by the several organizations concerned with management of wildlife resources, but rather to emphasize the fact that progressive enforcement needs to be recognized as prerequisite to the success of any sound wildlife management program.

Generally speaking, most laws designed for the protection of wildlife are based upon the premise that wildlife belongs to everyone alike and that the sovereign body having jurisdiction of the game is vested with the responsibility of executing this mandate. Thus, it will be found that most organizations concerned with wildlife management, contain as an integral administrative component, a well-organized and progressive Law Enforcement Section.

Intelligent wildlife enforcement is a science in its own right just as surely as we classify as scientific such techniques as the aging of ducks and geese by the bursa method or the artificial fertilization of trout eggs in a modern fish hatchery. In fact, the approach to many enforcement problems presents obstacles unbelievably difficult in their solution inasmuch as they are concerned with that most unpredictable of all reactions, human nature.

Reflect back for a moment to your childhood—to the years when, as a boy you looked forward to the time when the crop was "laid by" and Dad would find time to hunt squirrels and take you to the creek to catch a mess of fish. In those days, game and fish were plentiful and the "Game Warden" was a person you heard about but had little fear of encountering. But, back in those days, such nefarious devices and schemes as telephones or the use of various poisons, baiting, etc., had not been conceived as means for taking game and fish in wholesale lots. Such devices evolved commensurate with the growth of human populations and the resultant increased demand upon game and fish