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## THE EMERGING GAME MANAGER

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*Abstract:* Since we are entering an era of human management in the natural resources field in America, a game manager must emerge to meet the challenge of public relations in modern game management. He must have the natural ability, combined with professional training to manage people with one hand in order that they will permit him to scientifically manage their wildlife resources with the other. A smooth working relationship must be constantly maintained with both his internal and external publics if he is to successfully mold their opinions and lead them in the cause of game management. Those who are responsible for his professional training will have to envision the need for his contribution before he can fully emerge. Furthermore, it will be necessary for his field supervisors to allow him ample liberty in the execution of his professional services before he can succeed.

### INTRODUCTION

Perplexing public relations problems in game management will not be solved with better plans and programs. They will be solved by men who are trained to cope with public relations problems and who are allowed to use this training. How strange that we are constantly stretching and straining to develop better organizations for public relations when our need is for better individual relationships between game managers and the public with which they deal. Are we not over-organized already and fenced in with rules and regulations that will surely squeeze the last breath of individual initiative out of us? The history of this country reveals that the greatest achievements have been made by the individual genius of free men. Our forefathers conquered kingdoms, and alas now we have to have a permit to add a room to our house! Trained men are still the key to better public relations. If we depend upon organization to produce better public relations in game management, we will get the product of organization—a paper brigade that is not worth the match to set it afire and get it out of the way. On the other hand, if we will place the challenge of public relations on the shoulders of game managers who are properly trained and give them the freedom to release their energies and express their abilities, we will get what top professional men have always produced—a product that will make us justly proud.

In his recent book *Public Relations In Natural Resource Management*, Dr. Douglas Gilbert (1964) states that America has gone through four eras in natural resource management: namely, The Era of Abundance from the discovery of America to 1850, The Era of Exploitation from

1850 to 1900, The Era of Preservation and Production from 1900 to 1935, and The Era of Harvest and Habitat from 1935 to 1964. Presently we are entering into an Era of Human Management. Historically, there was no thought of a game manager during the Era of Exploitation; law enforcement played the dominating role during the Era of Preservation and Production; and game management and research have made history during the Era of Harvest and Habitat. Now with a surging human population explosion upon us, a new type of game manager must emerge—a man who will have to concentrate on sociological principles of human management so that the public will allow him to apply the sound biological principles that are already known and those that will be constantly discovered.

## QUALIFICATIONS OF THE MODERN GAME MANAGER

### Natural

Psychologists seem to lean toward the philosophy that a leader is born, and a sociologist would say that he is a product of his environment. Most likely the truth lies between the two viewpoints. To apply this to the game management field today, it would appear that we can safely say that a modern game manager should be an extrovert who likes people and who has an inherent ability to communicate with them. Furthermore, he must have a background that has given him an intense interest in wildlife resources, their preservation and wise usage. Many characteristics and abilities can be developed, but the basic qualities must be there to work with.

### Professional

Since he must practically be an expert in two fields, he will essentially be in need of some well-coordinated professional training. Dr. Gilbert (1964) suggests that universities should make provision for undergraduate work in natural resource management to be supplemented by numerous courses in the public relations areas. This would require flexibility in the undergraduate program to allow advanced, technical courses in natural resource management, normally required for graduation, to be postponed until graduate work. Thus, more basic courses in humanities, communications, and related public relations arts could be taken during the undergraduate period when credit can be given for them.

## FIELD OPERATIONS OF THE MODERN GAME MANAGER

### Home Base

To accomplish his task a man must have the proper tools and equipment. This is especially true of a professional man such as a game manager. Therefore, at all costs, he should build a personal reference library second to none as early as possible in his career. He must develop an efficient filing system adaptable to his needs and spend long hours of constant reading and filing of usable material. In this way he will continue to grow professionally and mature in his field as he keeps abreast with the steady flow of incoming information and data. Also, a wide correspondence with professional colleagues for advice and council is highly desirable. They will enable him to keep abreast of new developments and help him to avoid repetitious experiments and studies.

### In The Field

During a recent meeting of the Board of Directors of Lions International the chairman of the Public Relations Committee gave this definition of public relation. "Public Relations is the distribution of a good reputation" (Campbell 1966). Basically, the modern game manager must realize that a good reputation begins with his person and his home. Consequently, he must be a man of sterling character that is reflected throughout his family and their daily activities.

People will form opinions of an incoming game manager by what they know or do not know about him and his family before he moves to a new area. The grapevine communications system moves fast and furiously and should not be underestimated or overlooked. Therefore, to

get a factual story before the public, he should prepare publicity material for all available communications systems including biographical sketches and a recent photograph for the newspapers. The reason for his being sent to the area and his plans for the immediate future can be told in many ways to build a desirable image and influence the citizens of a community, but the surest way to start speculation and rumors is to leave an informational void.

### INTERNAL OR "PRIVATE" PUBLIC RELATIONS

One of the most important phases of the game manager's public relations is his "private" public relations. By "private" relations, I mean his own staff or field men and, yes, even his executives and directors. Nothing is more important than to earn and keep their loyalty and respect. If he expects those under his supervision to follow him, he must be an example and follow the leadership of his superiors. The following hypothetical story aptly illustrates this principle: Once a college president was talking to a chief executive of a large organization. "You can be assured, sir, that our spring graduating class will furnish your company with a host of dynamic and energetic young leaders." "Leaders!" the executive exclaimed, "Mr. President, what my company needs badly is a group of humble young men who are satisfied to be 'good followers'—we already have too many who want to be leaders!"

He does not have to be a "yes man" to his superiors to have their respect, but he must be disciplined enough to obey when required, courteous enough to reason with them on important issues, humble enough to understand their viewpoint, ingenious enough to correctly evaluate their desires, independent enough to use his own initiative to do his job efficiently, and honest enough to admit when he is wrong.

The welfare of his immediate staff should be his constant and careful concern. An "esprit de corps" so essential to a top field force can only be maintained when an atmosphere of "openness and absolute trust" is the rule. He should show the utmost confidence in his co-workers and allow them to be able to discuss anything with him. He should delegate to them increasingly important responsibilities according to their abilities and be doubly sure to give proper recognition and show sincere appreciation for their efforts. Any personal problems, the solution of which will add to their happiness and well-being, should be given his unhurried attention. These and many other details will reward him with a team of top men who are satisfied in their work and proud of what they are doing. Furthermore, this will greatly help to create a public image that will radiate throughout the entire area of operations.

### EXTERNAL PUBLIC RELATIONS

Beyond the realm of internal public relations extends the challenge of good public relations with those groups of individuals that are not a part of the organization.

Above all things the modern game manager must *identify* himself with the people of his area and become an active participant in their activities to be fully accepted. Anything that he or his department does to cause the native residents to look at him and his staff as "they" and themselves as "we" will hinder his communications with them in proportion to the psychological barrier that exists. It is essential that he have the professional training and natural ability to recognize and analyze the many specific publics with whom he will be confronted and to know how to effectively communicate with them to win their confidence, support, and cooperation.

Within every community are the personnel of communications media. They are key people, and their friendship and respect should be sought and cultivated with the utmost care, for few people have a greater potential for good or for bad. The wise game manager will not overbid his place in their scheme of operations; rather, he will gain a reputation for abiding by their rules and standards. When his patience is tried, he will not become discouraged and develop the philosophy that "no news is good news" and be like the man who tried for an hour to persuade his

despondent friend not to jump off of the bridge and then ended up jumping off with him. An informed public marching with him in wildlife management will be an ample reward for his every effort put forth in presenting programs and articles of vital interest and importance at opportune times throughout the years.

Another external public for the modern game manager to keep informed is the businessmen of the community. Wildlife resources are a valuable asset to their economy; therefore, their interest and influence is of great importance. Most of them are members of local civic organizations that provide an easy entrance for ample communications and desirable relations.

Ranchers and farmers own most of the land that supports wildlife in Texas, and the modern game manager should be a man who can speak their language and gain their respect and trust. They should be made to feel that they are participants in the making of game laws and regulations rather than targets for the department to shoot at when levying game laws. Reluctance to readily accept a sound management principle should always be met with wisdom rather than emotion and verbal argument. The game manager cannot afford to be like the woman who lived happily with her hard-working husband in a little cottage beside a beautiful river in the hills. One evening when he came home tired from the day's toil she handed him a pair of scissors to trim her new tablecloth. He promptly laid the scissors down and took out his pocketknife and began his task. "Don't touch my beautiful tablecloth with that old pocketknife," she yelled. "I'll cut it with this knife, or I won't cut it," he stubbornly mumbled. A hot argument ensued and finally the mad husband grabbed his screaming wife and threw her into the river to cool her off. As he turned to go into the house and finish his job, she struggled to the surface and gurgled out, "You cut that tablecloth with those scissors!" And behold as she was sinking for the third and final time, the last he could see was her waving hand with two fingers snipping like a pair of scissors! Thus, a last word is likely to drown all possible public relations, and the chance for the social actions within the cultural system to gradually become convincing. Seriously, the game manager should initiate his program with the most progressive men in the community who can develop an *awareness* in the minds of the reluctant which will in time become an *interest* that will lead toward an *attitude* which will evolve into an opinion on the matter that will finally be settled by a *belief* in the practice that is producing desirable results for their neighbors. When leaders are convinced, other members of the group will be less formidable. To be successful, constant communication between the game manager and landowner is essential.

No doubt the harvesters of wildlife are one of the most valuable, yet the most difficult publics to handle. Their investment in the resource makes them feel, and rightly so, that they should have an important voice in the way things are managed. Of course, their cultivation, indoctrination and education is a monumental departmental job, but the game manager and his staff can do their part. Disagreements and the multitude of questions should constantly be met with plain, simple facts which will cause those concerned to go away thinking constructively, even if not completely and immediately satisfied. Interested individuals should be treated with courtesy and respect, and, at opportune times, challenged to help bring about desired legislation. In this day of power displayed by minorities, the modern game manager must be diplomatic and fair with all groups.

Often, management personnel will be called upon to act as the "middle man" in attempting to settle a conflict in landowner-sportsmen relations. Of course, this is a delicate affair and takes some masterful diplomacy, well seasoned with practical experience. The main thing is to stay in the middle. However, positive efforts with groups can motivate men to harness the influence of their clubs and organizations to promote better understanding and cooperation between public forces. Every possible effort should be directed toward keeping the landowner from excluding the respectable majority because of actions by the rude and counterfeit minority.

Even though they are not harvesters, many people in our land are vitally interested in wildlife resources for their aesthetic value. The modern game manager should explore ways to lead these wildlife enthusiasts toward sound conservation efforts. Generally, many in this public are very influential and can exert great influence when aroused to do so. Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson once made the statement that he would rather have one woman's group behind him than 10 sportsmen's clubs! (Gilbert 1964.)

The youth and their school teachers will provide the modern game manager with an opportunity that will mean more to his cause through the years than any other external public. Young people are the easiest of all to educate, and most teachers are interested in the out-of-doors and will respond to further training.

The wise game manager who takes time to teach this public to appreciate and practice good game conservation principles will soon find himself surrounded by ex-students who have become leaders and who are his most informed, loyal supporters.

Psychologists and sociologists will both agree that religious beliefs greatly influence the actions of people. Therefore, the modern game manager will not overlook this vast public of organized religion. He will take advantage of the fact that practically all true conservation can be boiled down to moral issues and lay his cause heavily upon their consciences. By influencing this public and gaining their support, he will be leading them by the strings of cultural principles that are as deep as the roots of America itself.

In meeting and dealing with these various publics the modern game manager will realize that he is not the only conservation leader in his area. The Soil Conservation Service, the Forest Service, County Agents and many others form a vital public that he should cooperate with and help lead into a close cooperative unit for the cause of well-balanced conservation and game management.

In addition to the principles for working with specific publics, there are points of public relations that pertain to the general public that a game manager should strive for.

He and his staff should be known for their impartiality toward all groups. People should look upon them as law abiding citizens who respect both private and state property. Through tact and friendliness they should never tire of selling themselves as capable friends of the people and wise game management. For, to paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed. Consequently, he who molds public sentiment goes (far) deeper than he who exacts statutes or pronounces decisions for he makes statutes and decisions possible or impossible to execute.

#### CONCLUSIONS

1. Knowing the ingenuity of the American people, I am fully confident that a game manager will emerge to meet the challenge of public relations in modern game management.
2. He must have the natural ability, combined with professional training to manage people with one hand in order that they will permit him to scientifically manage their wildlife resources with the other.
3. Those who are responsible for his professional training will have to envision the need for his contribution before he can fully emerge.
4. His supervisors will have to allow him ample liberty in the execution of his professional services before he can succeed.

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