

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION SESSION

LOW-COST CONSERVATION FILMS FOR TELEVISION

By BOB DAHNE

(No paper available for printing)

Copies of the specialized paper and information available from Information and Education Division, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida upon request.

ESSENTIALS OF AN EFFECTIVE CONSERVATION COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM

By J. J. SHOMON

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Twenty years of close association with state and federal natural resources agencies has convinced me that much of our conservation information-education work can stand scrutiny.

Instead of coming to these conferences with pats on the back over what a marvelous job we're doing, may I suggest we occasionally gird ourselves and give our programs the real critical look. We might ask ourselves, critically: *What are we trying to accomplish in our information-education effort? What are we doing, and where are we heading?*

If we are honest—and we should be—and give these questions serious thought, then there is much that we can learn, much that we can profit thereby.

Not so long ago a well-known and accomplished administrator made this courageous statement: "Attendant to any terminology having to do with our natural resources—soil, water, minerals, timber and wildlife—it can be said with considerable factual proof that there has been a staggering amount of mismanagement, inexcusable waste and general manhandling of our resources. I say this in spite of any testimonials that may be forthcoming to the contrary."

I do not know, of course, what specifics Mr. Swift had in mind, and it does not matter. The important thing is that, generally speaking, we are not doing as good a conservation job as we are capable of doing. The criticism is not against any one state, federal agency or group. It is a general criticism and it can be supported by factual proof. Anyone who believes differently need only see for himself—need only examine present-day operations, as I have tried to do recently on my 33,000-mile study of conservation agencies, ministries, bureaus, departments, commissions, and private companies throughout the continent, a survey which took me into 24 states, most of the provinces of Canada, and the territory of Alaska. If there was anything that was made plain on this trip, it was this: That while conservationists are making headway everywhere, much improvement in management and communications can yet be done. By communications I refer to information-education processes and not equipment. The hour is short. There is no time for vacillation. If we are to win the conservation battle of our time, we've got to redirect and realign our programs in the direction of more worthy programs—programs possessed of mature judgment, humbleness, and dedicated conservation ideals.

Before I go on further, let me make clear that I am casting no aspersions on the good conservation work that is being or that has been done. God forbid. There is too little praise of good programs and conscientious effort, as it is. I only say we have not had enough o fit. We must have more. We must not be satisfied with our performance but get on with the big job that still remains to be done.

In too many of the states and areas I have visited, it is clearly evident that we are not doing as good a job as we're capable of doing, and the boys admit

it. For the sake of the record, let's examine some of the areas of weaknesses, as I have seen them.

Number one is *we're not making full use of the personnel we have*. By this I mean that departments are not always making the best use of their staffs. Often, public relations is a function of one man, one section, one division, rather than a necessary responsibility of all and a philosophy permeating through the whole department.

An example of what I mean is the average conservation officer setup. As intermediates between the front office and the public, are these men being asked—are they being helped—to do a better public relations job in their local areas? Evidence shows they are not, at least not nearly enough. The same can be said for our biologists. In many states these specialists represent a sizeable group and, when combined with the aggregate of law enforcement officers, they make up the bulk of the personnel of the department. When the whole department gets behind the communications job, you'll find your own I & E load gets that much lighter. Education in natural resources conversation is, after all, no one-man responsibility. All who work for the department must do their share.

Second, *we are not always clear in our objectives*. I say this with deepest of humility. How many of us can really point to clear objectives in our divisions, in our agencies? Can you give yours? How many of us are merely selling the department, the commission, or whoever may be the political incumbent of influence? A look around the country shows we're doing too much of this, that we're not putting enough emphasis on basics. The public senses this and when the public, which is the common man, sees through the smokescreen of press agency, it will not buy.

One reason conservation has not succeeded more in this country is because the whole aura of natural resources administration and management and communication has lacked a certain healthy climate. When the public senses that something is wrong, it grows suspicious, vacillating, unconcerned.

I have long maintained that the charge, *the public is an apathetic public*, is unjust. A well-informed public is never apathetic to vital issues. If the public is indifferent to conservation, there is a reason. Could part of the blame be that conservationists have not told their story? Instead of making conservation vital, attractive, interesting, absorbing, we have in large measure surrounded it with meaningless abstractions, bad terminology, and horrible gobbledegook. No wonder the common man refuses to get concerned. He turns a deaf ear, and for this he can't be blamed.

But it isn't just our communications that is weak. We find it too in agency objectives and policies and programs as well. Look what's happening in Congress. Read the reports in the *Congressional Record*—one conservation group fighting for one piece of legislation, another fighting to discount it. One department fighting to keep water on the land, another seeking to drain it—and so on *ad infinitum*. Can you blame the common man for being confused, for not wanting to buy a weak bill of goods? And what about the states. How much of this is true on a lesser scale in the states? In this you yourself will have to be judge.

Third, *we sometimes forget that planning should take precedence over performance*. Have you ever tried building something without a plan? A house maybe? A chicken coop perhaps? A farm pond? If you've had no plan, then I'd venture to say you've had a hard time.

Today we lack adequate planning in much that we do. I could go into details but I shan't. All of us here know full well what I mean. In state after state where I've been, I've been told that what we need in our program is *more planning*. In only six of two dozen cases officials were in a position to show proof of good planning.

Fourth, *we lack an understanding of, an appreciation for, techniques*. This is not a universal criticism but it is one that applies in many cases. I'm talking about communications media—press relations, the elements of a good conservation magazine, the techniques of good radio and TV programming, the essentials of a good movie. I am also talking about the techniques used in preparing exhibits, displays, general printed matter, and about good contact work in public relations.

Again, time does not allow me to go into details. Perhaps someday we can have a symposium on the media and see what makes them tick. Meanwhile it might be well for each of us to re-examine our techniques, study new ones, visit other agencies and establishments and firms and get new slants. Workshops are good places for ideas and don't forget that there's value in "brainstorming" sessions even among our own staffs.

Fifth, *there is need for a better administrative climate*. This is next to my last point. It is a very important and sensitive point. What I mean here is that in most agencies we can stand a better "internal" working atmosphere.

When morale is bad, when teamwork leaves much to be desired, when suspicion and jealousies and general discontentment pervade an organization, you have only one thing: an unhealthy situation that can raise havoc with any program.

Now I'm not going into the various ramifications of what makes for good administration, for it is a subject complete in itself. But allow me to say this: I & E is a function of administration, and if you will strive to put your own division or section in good order, you'll get more done. Too, if your agency needs a better administrative climate, a healthy situation in one division may point the way to improvement in another.

If any of you are interested in pursuing this element further, I suggest you read and study Schmidt and Buckman's book *Teamwork*. It is well worth the time.

Finally, sixth, *there should be more periodic evaluation of our work; otherwise how do we know where we're heading*. Unless we occasionally look back over the furrow and see what we've plowed, examine it, reflect it, how can we be expected to turn out a better furrow? I say, look back frequently. Evaluate your programs in terms of objectives, see your mistakes, make plans for improvement. This we're not doing enough today.

Up to this point, I've been pitching inside and tight. There's a reason. We need occasional curves and drops and sliders in our style if we're to appreciate good pitching. It's like the question the cub reporter put to his old editor: "Why is it," he asked, "that we have so many scandal sheets among newspapers today?" And the answer was: "We have to have lots of lousy newspapers in order to appreciate a few good ones."

Well, there is some excellent I & E programming going on. One cannot look over the activities of North Carolina, Texas and Missouri without going away vastly encouraged. In Tennessee, I was impressed with the activities in television, particularly in film production, and with the leadership taken in water safety. Arkansas, besides having a model building to work in, certainly has demonstrated what can be done in good exhibit planning. Florida's work with schools and motion picture films is to be admired. Though I have not actually visited departments in South Carolina, Louisiana, Mississippi, nor our host state, Alabama, one can see by their annual reports that progress is being made in I & E. Georgia and Maryland also have activities to be commended. In Virginia, we've come a long way in the last ten years.

This is all to the good but, as I have said in the beginning, my thesis is we need more sober re-appraisal. We need more constructive criticism and the courage to take this criticism and come up with something better. Money and men are not enough. We need greater sensitivity toward our jobs and better performance. The conservation package we are selling must have better content. Preachment is not enough. It must have a fuller basis. Now, when for the most part we are getting fairly good budgets and sufficient staffs, we need to examine ourselves with a critical eye—perhaps even to get others to inspect us. Only by careful evaluation of what we're doing, where we're heading, can we discharge the full responsibilities entrusted to us.

We conservationists have assumed a great responsibility in the United States. We have it within our power to lead the citizenry toward the pathways of higher destiny, to aid our free people in achieving a yet higher social and ethical society. Or, we can refuse to take constructive action and help the causes of gradual social disintegration. Never before in American history has such a great responsibility been assumed by a group of human beings.

During these times of important decisions, when events move swiftly and dangerously, when brainpower must somehow be channelled into ethics and conservation ought to be accepted as a new social process, it would do well for us to pay attention to the words of the poet, Rabindranath Tagore, who sounded this wonderful creed for all men.

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow
domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms toward perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the
dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever widening
thought and action—
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

BETTER WILDLIFE RANGER-NEWSPAPER RELATIONS

By CHARLES R. SHORT

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished guests, and members of the Southeastern Association, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Brother George Kyle, the program chairman for this session, for the kind invitation to appear here today.

This old, old question of whether or not wildlife rangers and field personnel should dabble in public relations work has been kicked around even more than that football used during last year's Georgia Tech-Tennessee game.

During the past few years, people in our business have grown to depend upon them more and more to make our Education and Information programs more successful. In Georgia, we are very dependent upon our rangers. We feel as if our program could not operate objectively without their help.

For example, less than four months ago two rangers from each of Georgia's eight enforcement districts were given instructions on the use of motion picture projectors, films, and slide equipment. Each district was provided with enough equipment to operate.

Since then, 13,861 men, women and school children have been made more aware of the need for conservation and better schooled in principles behind sound game and fish management through wildlife rangers.

But the field of audio-visual education is not the only part of an Education and Information program where wildlife rangers can fit snugly.

They can also be of great assistance in dealing with newspapers in the areas in which they work.

A few years ago, the press gave no extra effort to find and print conservation news. Now, though, hunting, fishing and conservation have become an intergal part of every newspaper.

Although in some cases it is not treated as such, hunting and fishing news ranks right along with football and baseball and other competitive sports in the minds of readers.

And wildlife rangers can provide a sure-fire method of getting news and feature material to newspapers.

Newspaper people in our state agree, and most of them are always glad to get any story with a fresh, local angle. In this area, wildlife rangers are unsurpassable.

As the Education and Information Division's part at ranger school this summer, we asked an experienced newspaperman to instruct our field personnel