

LAW ENFORCEMENTS ROLE IN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

JAMES A. TIMMERMAN, JR., Executive Director, South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources Department

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I am here today to speak on one of the most important functions of people in our business, that being, the role of law enforcement in wildlife management. Other than fiscal affairs and funding needs and problems of state fish and game agencies, I cannot think of a more important topic of discussion for those of us representing and striving for management and use of our fish and wildlife resources.

Rather than becoming too bogged down with routine law enforcement activities in wildlife management as we see it on a day-to-day basis, I feel it is more important to focus upon the overall role of law enforcement in wildlife conservation and put it into proper perspective with the total environment in which we exist. I say this because, while the basic law enforcement activity is of extreme importance, it is more important to understand and realize other things which are happening "around us" as they will impact upon the basic role of law enforcement in wildlife management in the future.

We all have old problems such as seasons, bag limits, trespassing and the like facing us. New concepts such as environmental pollution, drug smuggling, and endangered species protection, are on the horizon to deal with. All of these have implications for law enforcement's role in wildlife management. With limited (or dwindling) personnel, equipment and/or financial resources, these new concepts, or problems, will entail some costs to our basic job of wildlife management. Put simply, if we as decision-makers choose to allocate our resources in one area, the costs will be the impacts or the way another area will suffer.

Laws and regulations governing the conservation and taking of game species ushered in the modern day science of wildlife management techniques. Law enforcement's role in enforcing these laws and regulations has served as the basic reason for today's success of sportsmen having huntable game populations and for fishery resources to abound in our waterways. Numerous hunters and fishermen, however, looked upon these laws and regulations as unnecessary bureaucratic restrictions and as a challenge to outmaneuver and outwit the primary role of the law enforcement officer. The law enforcement's effectiveness was based upon number of cases made, percentage of convictions in the courts and the like.

However, times, attitudes, and the objectives of law enforcement in our modern society have changed. Modern times bring modern problems which demand new thinking and solutions. In the area of wildlife conservation, today we are witnessing a new trend which takes in the total scope of wildlife in diversity and variety from non-game, endangered species and natural areas protection to the traditional conservation of deer, turkey and small game species. Traditionally, we have concerned ourselves with a limited number of species, those with sport or economic value to man. We must not de-emphasize our objectives along these lines, but develop innovative management programs to incorporate the larger picture.

This is really not so much a response to new demands upon us, but our recognizing where our future responsibilities lie to keep pace with changing public attitudes and the diversity of interests which are developing every day. It must be emphasized that we cannot turn our backs on the enforcement of laws on basic wildlife species, but we must cater to the new clientele which is on the horizon. Increasingly, the role of law enforcement in wildlife management will deal with people problems more so than basic resource management problems. Our job will be oriented more toward resource allocation between special interest groups which are evolving as part of the total scope of variety and diversity in the wildlife conservation field. In a very real sense, this speaks well of our law enforcement and wildlife management successes. The fact that the main problem no longer concerns just the propagation and protection of wildlife species, but rather how to ensure that all groups are permitted to use wildlife species according to their own special interest means we have come a long way. Even with this diversity of use, however, we must always be on guard to ensure the resource is used in a wise manner and our wildlife habitat is protected.

Now that I have touched upon what I consider to be the broad picture of law enforcement's role in wildlife management, I would like to focus upon the basic functions of law enforcement and a brief systems analysis of law enforcement.

As I have noted already, law enforcement is not only a tool of management, but rather serves as the basic and most important management tool for wildlife conservation. To produce a sustained annual crop of wildlife for recreational and sporting use requires protection and regulation which thusly evolves from our law enforcement efforts. Without adequate law enforcement, the finest research and management programs would have only minimal impacts on the abundance and variety of wildlife species. Law enforcement affects all other management programs and should be involved in nearly every management program if they are to function in an effective manner.

The modern-day conservation officer is uniformed, well-equipped and is responsible for most of the activities of his (her) fish and game department in his area. His (her) basic task is to enforce all state laws and regulations affecting wildlife. In some states, officers are required to enforce other laws such as those pertaining to pollution, litter, forestry, parks and the like. In general, there is no typical day for the conservation officer as it varies with the locality, seasons, and particular wildlife-associated problems.

A main source of revenue for fish and game agency operations of wildlife management and other programs is derived from the sale of hunting, fishing and other licenses. Without general enforcement of licensing laws, funds for all fish and game agencies would be seriously curtailed and programs would be reduced.

Besides the traditional enforcement of laws affecting wildlife management, the role of law enforcement in wildlife management has expanded over the years into other areas of activity. The conservation officer is often the first to locate areas of significant wildlife value for acquisition, or easement by his (her) department. Conservation officers often provide extra protection for newly introduced species, and usually participate in follow-up of success or failure of these species. He (she) frequently gives the landowner advice on how to improve habitat for game species and he may serve an active role in predator control. One of the most common wildlife management activities of the officer is his assistance in handling wildlife

damage problems. He (she) may issue permits to the landowner to remove offending animals, trap them himself or drive them away from areas where they are doing damage.

While all of these inter-relationships with wildlife management are important, one of the most important roles played by the conservation officer is his (her) contact with the public. In most people's minds, the conservation officer is the fish and game agency as this is the employee which is on the front line and projects the agency's image to the public. These daily contacts serve to establish a valuable, acceptable (or non-acceptable) image of the fish and game agency statewide. Thus, the conservation officers' appearance, attitude and actions are of utmost importance to the fish and game agency as well as the cooperation of the public in helping provide information to apprehend violators to ensure a successful wildlife management program. In addition, as the officer becomes acquainted with business leaders, sportsmen and others, he (she) functions as an important citizen in his (her) community. With such community trust and respect, the conservation officer can function at a high professional level as the fish and game agency's local representative.

Of equal importance to the contact of conservation officers with the public, I feel that fish and game agency personnel must realize that no one person or section or division can operate in a vacuum in order to have a successful law enforcement and/or wildlife management program. Law enforcement and wildlife management are inter-related as a system which must work, and I emphasize work, in harmony with each other in order to have a successful program. Wildlife managers must determine the limits of the resources and the law enforcement officers have to enforce the limits as prescribed by laws and regulations. One of the problems which has evolved in fish and game agencies over the years has been the attitude that law enforcement and wildlife management are completely separate and apart from each other. This attitude leads to jealousy and unhealthy competition in a fish and game agency in which everyone, including the resources, eventually loses. I feel most conflicts between law enforcement officers and wildlife managers have been due to poor internal communications. It is up to mid and top-level managers to fully recognize such problems and establish good lines of communication in order to maintain an effective wildlife management program. In addition, it is also important to law enforcement officers and wildlife managers to realize their role as being part of a total system which must be managed and protected. With the broader scope of wildlife conservation we face today, which I touched upon earlier, law enforcement officers and wildlife managers must realize that they are managing ecosystems rather than just certain species. The obligation to manage all species and meet the demands of various special interest groups represents a new challenge in the diversity which we will all be facing in the future.

Another important inter-relationship of law enforcement and wildlife management which must be contended with is the current anti-hunting movement attitude across the country. Today, with a majority of our citizens living in an urban and suburban environment where the gun is associated mainly with crimes of violence, there is a changing attitude about hunting as a sport and wildlife management as a science. In addition, there are doubts in the minds of far too great a number of our non-consumptive users as to the best means to manage and conserve our wildlife resources for the future. As resource managers, we have the answers to the many

questions being raised by these non-committed, non-consumptive users. We must prepare and equip our law enforcement officers and wildlife managers with the answers in order to maintain a viable, effective wildlife management program. As I mentioned earlier, the conservation officer is on the front line with the general public and an important role in the future will be to inter-relate effectively with this non-committed group in our society in order to persuade them to support our position. By showing more responsibility to the diversity of interests in resource management which abounds, law enforcement officers will be able to gain support for basic wildlife management programs. This responsibility to diverse interests must, however, be a total program for a fish and game agency and part of a "team" effort. While the conservation officer will be faced with the primary contacts from the general public, he must be equipped with adequate public relations tools and support, and have the necessary data and research findings to support basic wildlife management practices. No one person or section in any agency can accomplish this responsibility alone as it takes a total agency effort in order to be effective and persuasive. The manner in which conservation officers handle the questions and attitudes of non-hunting, non-consumptive users will determine how modern day wildlife management will be sustained in the future. It is not the hunter or the anti-hunter who will determine the future of hunting and wildlife management practices in this country, but the great number of those in the middle, uncommitted to either side. These people will decide the future. Thus, the role of law enforcement in this aspect of wildlife management must not be taken lightly by top-level management in state fish and game agencies.

The fact that law enforcement is the primary tool of wildlife management cannot be overstated. I have attempted to point out the rudiments of enforcement's role in wildlife management as well as the diversity of the role which the conservation officer plays. The effectiveness of the law enforcement function is not without its various problems, though, which must be faced on a day-to-day basis by top-level management. Many state fish and game agencies are now faced with hard financial times which means that important resource allocation decisions must be made regarding law enforcement personnel and equipment which impacts upon wildlife management. With the diversity of special interests and a broader role of wildlife conservation, we are facing times when we are being asked to do more with the same or less funds. Thus, the allocation decisions made will certainly impact upon wildlife management. In addition, at the federal level there are certain moves afoot to shift certain federal responsibilities to the states which create further pressures on resource allocation. Of particular interest and concern at this time is the economic push of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to undergo further reductions in special agent personnel and funding levels. This is of such concern to fish and game agency directors across the country that the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies adopted a resolution last month at its annual meeting "opposing any further reductions in staffing and funding levels of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service special agents, and encouraged the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to maintain the special agent forces at a level where they can adequately accommodate their mandated responsibility for federal wildlife law enforcement and retain an acceptable level of cooperative enforcement with the state and other wildlife conservation entities."

In each state fish and game agency, there are various unique problems in law enforcement which impact in one way or another its role in wildlife management. Poor internal communications and coordination often times creates problems which have to be worked out. Competition between enforcement and resource management personnel may be another stumbling block. In some instances, officers may be tempted to become involved in illicit or illegal activities due to the nature of the job and contacts which are made. Good management of personnel and providing advice at the proper time are important in helping overcome some of the problems. In addition, we are all faced with the various problems of politics, be it internal or external, which have a bearing upon law enforcement's role in wildlife management.

It is often difficult to measure the effectiveness of law enforcement's role in wildlife management as there are few measuring devices upon which to properly gauge performance. I feel effectiveness and performance of law enforcement is closely related to selection procedures for personnel hired, training provided to do the job and the public's attitude or response to overall performance of the wildlife management program. If the best personnel are hired and given the proper training in enforcement techniques and concepts of wildlife management, then it is up to the individual to perform in a professional manner so as to maintain a healthy public perception of the job being performed and to develop an overall public attitude that the agency is acting in the best interest of resource management and providing service delivery. Of course, the basis for accomplishing this goal is having a fundamental management of personnel and directing activities of these individuals working in the wildlife conservation field.

While law enforcement and scientific wildlife management are the cornerstones to sound modern wildlife programs, resource management personnel must be good at public relations and education of the public to meet the new challenges which lie ahead in a broader arena of wildlife conservation. The conservation officer's responsibility does not end with basic law enforcement. All phases of wildlife management depend upon his (her) efforts and are enhanced by his performance. The day-to-day contact with the public will serve to establish an acceptable (unacceptable) image of wildlife conservation and management programs in the future. Key decision-makers in state fish and game agencies need to recognize the importance of the law enforcement role in wildlife management so that their enforcement program can be tailored to meet the challenge ahead. The future of wildlife conservation in our time and our children's time depends upon it.

With these ideas in mind, I wish you all a pleasant and productive conference.