The Nemours Wildlife Foundation: A New Partner in Wildlife Conservation

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Abstract: Future successes in wildlife conservation will hinge on our ability to forge partnerships, and the best opportunities for new partnerships will come from private, nonprofit foundations. The number of new foundations is growing at a remarkable rate, and the funding they provide to projects dealing with the environment and wildlife exceeds $1.7 billon annually. Additionally, these foundations are rich in scientific and educational expertise, land for study areas, laboratories, and other resources essential for scientific investigations and educational programs. Private foundations have produced many of our best scholars and professional leaders. The Nemours Wildlife Foundation, located in the coastal plains of South Carolina, was established by Eugene duPont, III, and family in 1995 and is one of these new partners in wildlife conservation. Its missions are to develop and use management practices that conserve and sustain natural resources, to develop a creditable research and outreach program, and to preserve the sport hunting heritage. The Nemours Wildlife Foundation seeks to be a partner with other natural resources organizations to ensure good stewardship of our land, water, and wildlife resources.

Proc. Ann. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies 55:575–581

New approaches to natural resources conservation are constantly being proposed, and some have catchy titles which have crept into our professional vocabulary. Examples are ecosystem management, biodiversity, adaptive management, and power testing. In some cases, these new approaches represent shifts in philosophies or changes in the ways we conduct wildlife conservation. In other cases, these new approaches simply put a title on practices many biologists were already following. Each new approach creates much excitement initially with promises of solving difficult problems, but many fade after a few years when the next new idea grabs the spotlight.

One approach that has withstood the test of time and is receiving renewed interest is the practice of partnerships. Some of the most spectacular accomplishments in natural resources conservation were accomplished through partnerships. These include the restoration programs for numerous wildlife species, the Conservation Reserve Program, the North American Wetland Conservation Act, and the many programs that have been forged between organizations like Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, Quail Unlimited, The National Wildlife Turkey Federation, and private, industrial forest companies.

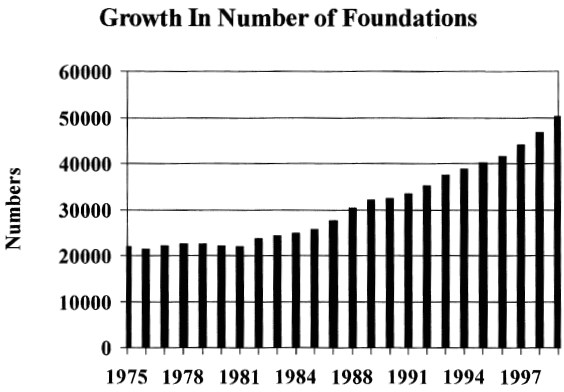

Figure 1. Annual growth in the number of foundations in the United States from 1975 to 1999 (Lawrence et al. 2000).

Yet, the full potential of partnerships has not been reached. To achieve the successes we must have in the future, we will need to increase the scale of partnerships and embrace new partners. Partnerships will be the cornerstone upon which our profession's most successful programs will be built in the future.

As the natural resources profession matures, the problems we will encounter will become increasingly complex and costly to address. These problems cannot be appropriately addressed by scientists representing a single discipline or organization. The best chance we have to overcome these problems is through partnerships which span across professional disciplines and involve both public and private organizations.

While we might all appreciate the importance of forming partnerships, there is the question of where these new partners will come from. State and federal agencies have been tremendously successful in developing a network of partnerships among their divisions, so the model for intra- and inter-agency partnerships has been well developed. However, with most budgets supported by state or federal appropriations projected to remain static or even decline, there is a need to locate new partners. From my perspective, the best source for new partners is the private sector.

The value of involving the private sector in the decision-making and implementation process of conservation programs has been demonstrated through numerous highly successful enterprises. These enterprises have been successful because they involved the private landowner, farmer, private industry, and other nonprofit organizations. Also, these collaborations have joined governmental agencies with private organizations and were completed on public and private land.

Although biologists have done a good job of teaming with private organizations, the full potential of the private sector to partner with state and federal agencies has not been thoroughly exploited. Within the past 15 years, the number of private foundations has doubled from around 25,000 to more than 50,000 today (Fig. 1, Lawrence et al. 2000). The amount of money given out by these foundations has doubled within the past 5 years and now exceeds $27 billion annually (Fig. 2, Lawrence

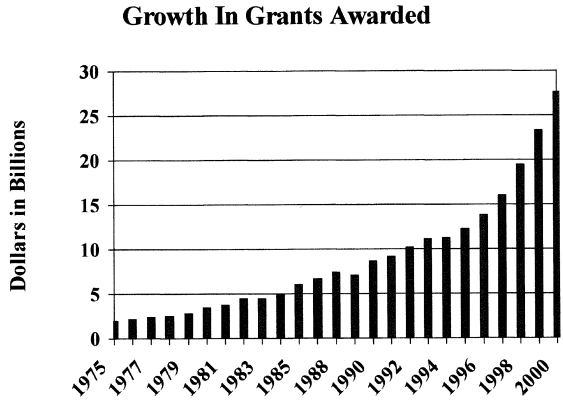

Figure 2. Annual growth in the total amount of grants awarded by foundations in the Untied States from 1975 to 2001 (Lawrence et al. 2000).

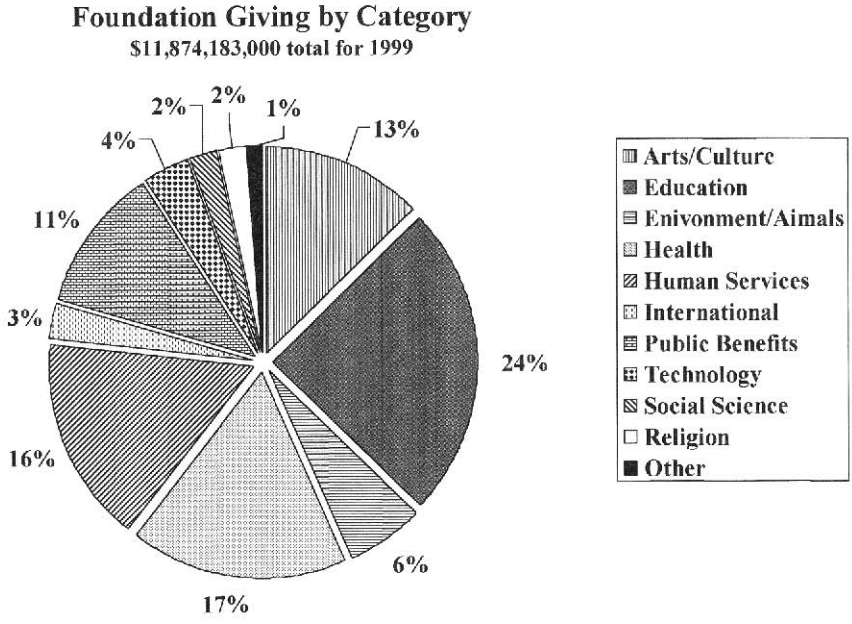

Figure 3. Grants awarded by foundations in the United States in 1999 by category (Lawrence et al. 2001).

et al. 2000). Of this money, about 6.3% goes to projects involving the environment and wildlife (Fig. 3, Lawrence et al. 2001), or approximately $1.7 billion.

The true value of these foundations go beyond fiscal resources and include a staff of scientists and educators willing to share expertise, laboratories, housing facilities, and lands for research and educational purposes. Also, these foundations are

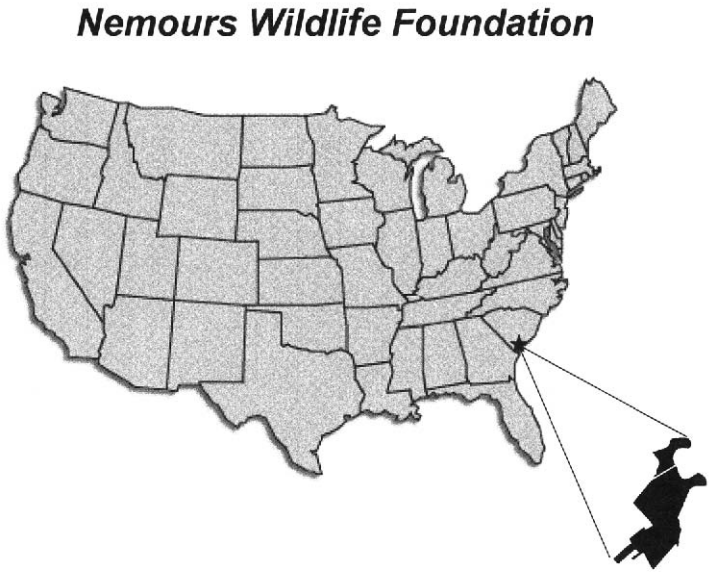

Figure 4. Location of the Nemours Wildlife Foundation in South Carolina.

not tied to political processes and have leaner bureaucracies allowing them to operate in ways governmental agencies cannot.

There are several good examples of private foundations which support active programs in wildlife conservation. Some of the longer established programs are the Welder Wildlife Foundation near Sinton, Texas, established in 1954; the Tall Timbers Research Station north of Tallahassee, Fla., established in 1958; the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation near Dundee, Ill., established in 1962; and the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Institute in Kingsville, Texas, established in 1981. A more recent addition to this group is the Jones Ecological Research Center near Newton, Ga., established in 1991. The contributions of these organizations to wildlife conservation through research, education, and outreach have been tremendous. For instance, the Welder Wildlife Foundation has supported research projects that have led to 870 publications and 267 theses and dissertations. The Tall Timbers Research Station has supported work that has led to 914 publications and 32 theses and dissertations. Many of our best scholars and professional leaders have been affiliated with these foundations at some point in their career.

Growth in the number of these foundations will likely continue as Americans make their estate planning decisions. My purpose in this presentation is to introduce you to a new foundation that has been established along the coast of South Carolina that is seeking to become one of the new partners I have described. This new partner is the Nemours Wildlife Foundation (hereafter Nemours) located in Beaufort

County, S. C. (Fig. 4). Nemours was established by Eugene duPont, III, and his family and came into existence in February 1995 upon the death of duPont.

DuPont was a very avid sportsman and particularly enjoyed hunting and fishing. Through a lifetime of activities, DuPont left an impressive legacy in wildlife conservation. He was particularly active in Ducks Unlimited and served as a state chairman, a national trustee, vice president of the South Atlantic Flyway, and a member of the board of trustees and executive committee for the organization. In South Carolina he was a strong advocate for sending a portion of the revenue from nonresident license sales to wetland and waterfowl restoration in Canada. I believe his most lasting and important contribution, however, will be establishing the Nemours Wildlife Foundation.

Nemours is housed on the Nemours Plantation purchased over several years by DuPont beginning in 1960. The 4,000-ha Nemours Plantation consists of several smaller plantations which go by names like Clay Hall, Green Point, Nieuport, Newberry, and Bonney Hall, and it is situated on the southern bank of the Combahee River. Like most coastal plantations, the Nemours Plantation was heavily involved in rice farming during the 1700s and 1800s. After the Civil War, many of these plantations were purchased by rich industrialists from the north who kept the properties intact. Through time, the primary use of these plantations shifted from agricultural and forestry production to recreational activities like hunting.

Although most of the land has been used in some form of agricultural production during the past several centuries, many natural plant communities are still represented on the plantation. Dr. Richard Porcher, a noted botanist teaching at The Citadel in Charleston, S.C., inventoried Nemours in 1998–1999 and delineated 35 plant communities (Anon. 1999). These ranged from communities greatly influenced by humans such as pine (*Pinus* spp.) plantations to more characteristic natural communities such as water tupelo *(Nyssa aquatica)* and bald-cypress *(Taxodium distichum)* swamps and maritime forest.

An elaborate network of water control structures and dikes built for rice farming provide abundant opportunities for wetland and waterfowl management on 810 ha of mostly brackish water wetlands. Additionally, the upland habitats are diverse and include pine plantations, pine savannas, and hardwood flats which make up the largest habitat type on the plantation. The remaining agricultural fields are being managed to provide early successional habitats.

Nemours Plantation supports a rich array of wildlife, including 159 bird, 19 amphibian, 29 reptilian, 22 mammalian species. There are 8 bald eagle *(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)* nests on the plantation with 2 nests dating back to 1977 when the first eagle survey was conducted in the state.

Nemours is located within the Ashepoo, Combahee, and Edisto (ACE) rivers Basin, one of the largest, undeveloped estuaries on the east coast. This 142,000-ha estuary has been listed as one of the last great places by The Nature Conservancy.

The ACE Basin is internationally recognized as a model for what can be accomplished when public and private organizations join for a common cause. The ACE Basin Task Force, of which Nemours is a member, represents a partnership of public

and private organizations that have worked during the past 11 years to protect 57,000 ha within the ACE Basin through conservation easements and land purchases. The ACE Basin provides a tremendous outdoor laboratory and teaching environment.

The vision for Nemours is to be a good steward of our natural resources and a leader in the discovery and dissemination of the knowledge needed to conserve, manage, restore, and sustain our wild populations and their habitats. This vision can only be achieved by partnering with other organizations sharing an interest in wildlife conservation. Furthermore, Nemours has dedicated leadership among its board of directors and scientific advisory panel consisting as of 2001 of Drs. Lindsey Boring, Larry Marchinton, Richard Noble, Richard Kaminski, and Jim Teer.

The board of directors has identified 4 missions for Nemours. The first mission is to develop and use management practices that conserve and sustain natural resources. To accomplish this mission, projects are underway to monitor impacts of forest and wetland management on wildlife populations, water chemistry, and plant communities. Many of these projects are designed to be long-term studies to investigate changes that may be evident only after many years. A 40-year timber management plan has been developed that will guide timber operations and ensure sustainability of forest resources.

The second mission is to develop a research program in partnership with public and private organizations that improves understanding of wildlife populations and their habitats and leads to their sustainability. Cooperative research projects are underway as of 2001 with scientists from nearby Clemson University with Nemours providing partial funding and logistical support for 2 graduate student projects. These students are investigating the impacts of the red imported fire ant *(Solenopsis invecta)* on bobwhite quail *(Colinus virginianus)* and herpetofauna. Nemours also provides funding support for other projects that do not necessarily occur on the Plantation, but are projects that will enhance stewardship of natural resources in South Carolina.

Besides these cooperative projects, in 2001 Nemours has 2 biologists on staff who have research projects underway ranging from examining songbird community structure in hardwood stands undergoing different silvicultural treatments, to studying response of old-field plant communities to disturbances such as prescribed burning and disking at different seasons of the year.

The third mission is to develop an outreach program that conveys to the public the need to conserve wildlife and their habitats. Nemours co-hosts several workshops and field days annually for the public. These workshops bring together landowners, managers, and biologists to exchange information and discuss issues relating to natural resource management. Nemours hosts classes from the University of Georgia, Clemson University, and the University of Tennessee and have an undergraduate internship underway.

The fourth mission is to preserve and sustain the sport hunting heritage and promote hunting sportsmanship. Nemours Plantation, like countless others in the Southeast, exists today because its recent owner loved to hunt. This history should not be ignored. No one can predict the unclear future of hunting, but whatever happens to

the sport, I suspect effects will first be felt on public lands. Thus, private areas such as the Nemours Plantation someday may be the last place where the American hunting heritage can be practiced and taught. Nemours Plantation embraces this heritage and has developed educational programs promoting hunting and sportsmanship.

Organizations in the private sector, such as Nemours, make important contributions to the overall conservation effort in this country. These organizations complement activities by state and federal natural resources agencies and fill niches these agencies cannot. Given the growth of private sector organizations in number and wealth, their impact in the natural resources conservation arena will grow. The questions facing us today in wildlife conservation are too complex and too large to pursue alone, but in partnership we can accomplish much. The Nemours Wildlife Foundation looks forward to being one of those partners.

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