

POLITICS AND THE WILDLIFE PROFESSION

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Thomas Carlyle, the Scottish essayist, probably did as good a job as could be done to keynote your meeting when he looked at nineteenth century United States and a population of 25 million and said:

"You won't have any trouble in your country as long as you have few people and much land, but when you have many people and little land, your trials will begin."

It is safe to say our trials have begun.

As professional biologists and resource managers, you in the Wildlife Society and the American Fisheries Society know this better than anyone. Within your ranks is a great deal of knowledge about the solutions to many of the resource problems that beset us as a people and a nation. One of our greatest challenges is to communicate that knowledge to a public that is fast awakening to environmental problems.

We have already identified many of the problems, and during your meetings you will hear more about them from the experts. My job is to talk about possible solutions and discuss your organizations' roles in achieving them.

I don't want to become involved in a statistical dirge, but I do think we need to look briefly at the staggering dimensions of the problem our exploding human population poses both for man and our wildlife resources.

The California Department of Agriculture reports that agricultural and open land in this state is disappearing at the rate of 400 acres a day. That's 150,000 acres every year! One need not be a trained ecologist to see at a glance that this cannot continue without serious consequences not only for wildlife but also for our human population. A 1966 land use study showed that in Los Angeles County alone, 70 square miles of land is being withdrawn for new residential and business expansion each year.

We're not talking here about the quality of the habitat--the condition of the air, water and soil--but about the very existence of open land. The California

Fish and Wildlife Plan, now five years old, properly stressed habitat as the key to the future of our fish and wildlife resources. It also properly identified fish and wildlife as monitors of human environment. Mankind is, at last, recognizing this relationship which probably is the reason the resources are finally getting the public attention they deserve.

Our State Finance Department, whose past projections have been too close for comfort, looks for a population of some 26 million in California in 1980 and 38 million by the turn of the century. Compare this with our problems of today with only approximately 20 million people. There is little doubt that the total human population of the earth will double at present birth and death rates in as little as 30 years and no more than 90 years.

No species can continue to expand forever without destroying itself or the habitat upon which it depends for food, shelter, and reproduction. With his greater intelligence, man has so far found ways by which he can avoid the diseases, famines, and other disasters which normally control over-expanding animal populations.

Today, however, biologists throughout the world are beginning to question man's ability to continually solve these problems through technological advances alone. As a matter of fact, our highly advanced technology is itself causing environmental degradation. We do not have to look far for evidence of our power to destroy ourselves.

In the not too distant past, from Sacramento, we used to see the Sierra Nevada and the Sutter Buttes on quite a few clear days. Today, at certain times of the year, we often cannot see the Capitol from the Resources Building a block and half away. In addition to our air, we know that most of our larger rivers and bays are polluted; we observe soil eroding away; we see and feel how compaction of humanity causes so many social problems in the urban areas; we hear all about us that newest form of environmental contamination called "noise pollution." We litter our land with physical and chemical waste and find it increasingly difficult to avoid being buried under accumulating solid debris. San Francisco even proposes a train wryly called the "Excess Express" to haul its garbage to Lassen County, apparently on the assumption that the high desert country is only good for deer, chukars, quail, sage grouse, and coyotes anyway. Pesticides are contaminating our atmosphere, and here in California we already have seen several dramatic examples of the effects of accumulated chemicals on our environment.

There are encouraging signs, however, as we start a new decade. I believe 1970 will be The Year of the Environment in California from the standpoint of political action, and I am hopeful that the 1970s will be Decade of the Environment for our nation.

It's often said that the people and the political machinery in a democracy seldom can be roused to action until a problem has become critical. This is as true of the environmental crisis as it is of any other great problem.

The job of the professional fish and wildlife manager and biologist won't be made much easier even if all these problems are solved, for there remains the overriding problem of population and some psychological hangups such as the myth of endless abundance and access to our natural resources that will plague us.

We can look forward to demands for more artificial and costly programs of providing fishing, hunting, bird watching and other activities related to our fish and wildlife resources. Meeting the demands of the future millions of people for wildlife-oriented recreation will challenge the imaginations and the check-books of us all.

The public continues to demand more services, and it's the responsibility of government to serve the people. Public demand increases steadily the cost of maintaining fish and wildlife, and the habitat upon which they depend. Already our traditional source of wildlife conservation funds, the hunter and fisherman, are being required to carry too much of the load for all the people.

Our work is clearly cut out for use. Let's talk now about how we may approach the job to best get it done.

Members of the Wildlife Society and the American Fisheries Society often seemed to be out of the mainstream--oddballs, voices in the wilderness shouting about pollution, pleading to maintain wildlife habitat, concerned about saving a rare, giant vulture that few people ever see anyway, and other problems that seemed remote to city people who were not affected by these things directly.

Many of us--in our roles as citizens and sportsmen as well as professionals--have worked on these problems for years. The Department of Fish and Game and Governor Reagan's administration, from its very outset, have placed emphasis on improving the environment. In this regard, I believe the Governor's "state of the state" message provides a clear statement of the status of the battle for our environment on the political-legislative front in Sacramento, outlining the significant gains of the past and pointing the way toward finishing the job.

Now we who have been concerned or active in the conservation crusade are seeing our ranks swollen by eager recruits, Jessie-come-latelys, as environmental issues become the most critical--and thus the most popular--we face today. This grounds-well of concern and demands for action, or that portion of it that is sincere and not political puffery, is welcome. It must, however, be properly directed if it is to be effective and if all the energy being expended is not to be dissipated in endless bickering among rival factions demanding the impossible.

Here is where your two professional organizations have an unparalleled opportunity to make your voices heard and to render an invaluable public service--not by becoming loud advocates, but by providing the hard foundation of knowledge and facts upon which sound environmental decisions can be formulated.

The Wildlife Society took an important step during the past year when it established a coordinating committee to present professional seminars on resource

problems for the California Wildlife Federation. But I believe it would be a mistake for the Wildlife Society to abandon its role of a professional scientific organization to join the ranks of the advocates, taking political positions on each and every environmental controversy. To play both roles at the same time is simply not in the best interest of the Society.

The initial step toward a greater role in public affairs is a good one. I understand that early presentations made your broad, professional competence available to the California Wildlife Federation on such subjects as pesticides, pointing out problems and possible solutions and detailing the available scientific knowledge and interpretations, but not telling the Federation what position it should take. In other words, you gave these sportsmen and conservation leaders the facts and the varying scientific interpretations of the facts and let them decide as to what course of political action their organization should take. This is good, but I submit that a further step into outright advocacy would not be good. We all know that biological decisions cannot be made by majority vote. Often it is the lone maverick scientist who has the answer, not the scientific establishment.

Moving the problem from the philosophical to the practical level, I also see potential problems--and possible great confusion for our supporters among such organizations as the CWF, National Wildlife Federation, Audubon Society and others--if one of your members were to testify, in his role as a member of the Wildlife Society, in opposition to the established position of the agency or department he serves in his other role as a state or federal employee.

Putting it more bluntly, should a professional employee of the Department of Fish and Game, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management or any other public agency, assume the position as public critic of the policies of that organization? I think not. I believe he should present his facts and conclusions as forcefully as possible within his agency and seek to modify, within his agency, policies with which he does not agree. He does himself, his agency, the public and his professional organization a disservice when he takes his advocacy to the public. Nor can I subscribe to the theory that because an employee is expected to abide by the policies of his agency in a controversial matter, he has been "muzzled" or "silenced".

Often in the past, both as members of official conservation agencies and outside conservation organizations, we seem to have placed more emphasis on fighting the good fight in a losing battle than in carefully seeking to win over the "other side" and the general public in less dramatic fashion. In my short time as director of the Department of Fish and Game, I have emphasized the approach of discussion, negotiations and--where possible--compromise, and I will continue to do so.

We have been assigned the role of factfinders and resource managers by the people and their elected representatives. Our job is to develop the facts that are needed to conserve and manage the fish and wildlife resources and to present these facts as effectively as possible to the other agencies concerned, to the

people of the state and to the elected political leaders.

I've noted with interest the initial moves to bring about a closer working relationship between the Wildlife Society and the American Association for Conservation Information. I share the belief of the Wildlife Society's Information-Education Committee that information and education professionals have much to offer biological and managerial professionals in fish and wildlife, and vice versa.

I believe, too, that through information and education lies the way to becoming winners for the whole cause of wildlife conservation. Information, education, discussion, negotiation and sometimes compromise seem to me to be the tools we must all use more often and more effectively.

This does not mean that we must never oppose a water development project, anymore than it means we must never oppose a biologically unsound proposal of the sportsmen, the commercial fishing industry or any other segment of the public we serve.

It does mean we must develop our facts as carefully as possible, present them as thoroughly as possible, negotiate and discuss, keeping all lines of communication open, before we move from lines of communication to lines of battle.

A number of the resource problems we face in California today come back to the basic "people problem" and the need for more effective communication. Look for a minute at the sea otter-abalone controversy, the tule elk problem, the California condor, Lake Tahoe, the Delta and the Peripheral Canal and North Coast water development.

In many public discussions, news media presentations, and written accounts of these subjects there are plenty of inflammatory statements of advocacy, but few calm statements of facts or of the conclusions of the professionals.

We know the challenges our resources face in the coming decade and beyond. Therefore, the challenge we face as resource biologists and managers is to continue, in a professional manner, to develop the facts on which the people and their political leaders can base their decisions, and to present our facts and conclusions to the public and their representatives more effectively so that eventually we can agree on acceptable solutions.

The challenge of communication is complicated by our growing population, for there are many diverse voices and media, but it certainly is one of the most serious challenges we face.

Our fish and wildlife resources share the same potential fate as our other resources and in many cases will be the first barometer of man's success or failure to live within the confines of a limited environment.

In this sense, your meeting here during these two days takes on added importance, as do your business sessions which will help to determine the future course of your organizations. My best wishes for a successful and productive future.