

RESULTS OF A MEMBERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE WESTERN SECTION OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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1987 TRANSACTIONS WESTERN SECTION THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY 23:91-96

Abstract: This paper summarizes the results of a questionnaire sent to all members of the Western Section of The Wildlife Society (TWS) in 1985. One hundred and seventy four (64%) of the members returned their questionnaire forms for analysis. Members indicated a concern for increased Section involvement in conservation activities and conservation education. Demographics, education, employment status, concerns about professionalism, certification, and continuing wildlife education are included in the analysis.

In 1985, a membership questionnaire was mailed to all members of the Western Section ($n=282$) of The Wildlife Society (TWS). One hundred and seventy four (64%) of the questionnaires were returned and are included in this summary.

The questionnaire was designed to gather information from members about three organizational structures which are of interest to professional wildlife biologists in California, Nevada, Hawaii, and Guam. These are The Wildlife Society itself (an international organization), the Western Section of The Wildlife Society, and local Chapters within the Western Section.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MEMBERS

The Section had a relatively young age distribution, with 69% of the questionnaire respondents being between 21 and 40 years of age (Fig. 1). Although women make up 45% of the work force nationwide (Briggs 1987), they are underrepresented in many professions, especially in the natural resources fields. This was also the case in the Western Section (Fig. 2). Women made up 14.7% of the membership of The Wildlife Society in 1985 (Hodgdon 1986). In 1986, women made up 16.2% ($n=112$) of TWS members within the geographic boundaries of the Western Section ($n=691$), but only 12.3% ($n=39$) of the members in the Western Section ($n=317$).

Ninety-eight percent of the Section's membership had at least a 4 year college degree (Fig. 3), and 57% had completed at least one graduate program. This is slightly higher than the TWS membership at large (Hodgdon 1986).

Forty-seven percent of respondents had 10 years or less of paid experience. Twenty-eight percent had 11-20 years paid experience, and 14 percent had more than 21 years paid experience. Eleven percent indicated no paid experience. Section members were employed by a variety of agencies (Fig. 4). Forty percent were employed by 1 of a number of Federal agencies (e.g., BLM, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service); nationwide, only 26% of TWS members were employed by Federal agencies (Hodgdon

1986). Wildlife biologists, resource managers, and researchers made up 50% of the position descriptions (Fig. 5). Surprisingly, 30% of the respondents replied "other"; of these, 80% were retired and 20% were public planners and veterinarians.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

It was instructive to analyze the desire and commitment of members for getting involved in natural resource conservation issues. All of us have heard the complaint that "The Wildlife Society" (at some organizational level) needed to become more involved with these issues. Questionnaire respondents overwhelmingly indicated that it was appropriate for the Society to become actively involved in political issues that affect natural resources, with the parent society being the most appropriate level of organization (Fig. 6). However, all levels of organization received a positive response.

Respondents also indicated a desire that the Western Section become more involved in public debate involving wildlife biology and management. Ninety-six percent indicated that the Western Section should be more involved in activities regarding wildlife management; 88% indicated greater activity in developing position statements; 81% indicated a desire for involvement in reviewing environmental impact statements; 82% indicated a desire for attending and participating in meetings of conservation organizations; and 96% indicated that the Western Section should be involved in providing expertise to State Legislators regarding wildlife management issues.

Additionally, members indicated that the Western Section should be involved in public education activities aimed at increasing public awareness and appreciation of wildlife values (99%), and that the Section should increase conservation education activities (77%).

Personal involvement and commitment in these issues appeared to be very low, however, in contrast to the perception that such activities were needed (Fig. 7). Forty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that they

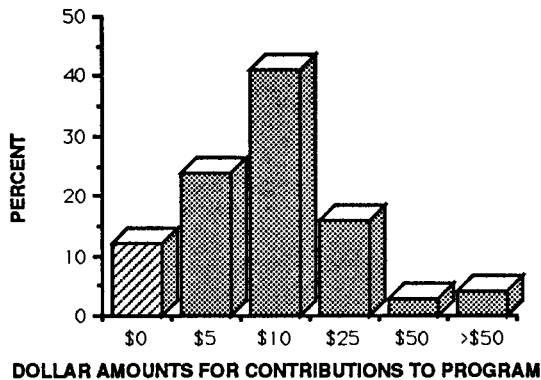


Fig. 11. Amount of financial support Western Section members were willing to put into a professional support program.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Annual Meetings

Respondents favored continuing annual meetings in January (89%). They indicated that meetings should be held in conjunction with other societies (85%), including the American Fisheries Society (36%), the Society for Range Management (31%), the Society of American Foresters (15%), and others (18%).

Dues

Respondents indicated that The Wildlife Society dues should either be raised according to need (54%) or stay the same as in effect (29%). They favored paying dues with 1 check for all 3 units of organization (92%). Activities supported by Section dues should include the newsletter (95%), conservation education (86%), continuing wildlife education (67%), public involvement (61%), awards (49%), and scholarships (33%). To accomplish these activities, 91% of respondents noted that they would be willing to pay Section dues of \$10.00 (Fig. 12).

Fifty-nine percent of respondents felt that the Section should not hire a professional to coordinate and expand the Section's programs, while 69% felt that the Section should consider affiliating with other conservation groups to help achieve the goals and objectives of the Section.

Chapter, Section, and TWS comments

Respondents, when asked what they like most about the Chapters, listed the opportunity to be better informed about local issues (49%), information exchange with colleagues (22%), and the opportunity to interact with other wildlife biologists (19%) as major factors. They liked least the lack of commitment and participation

(40%), the notion that Chapters involved too big an area with too few participating (29%), and a perception of the Chapter as a social club (19%).

For the Western Section, respondents liked the well-run annual meetings and training sessions (30%), the organization for regional wildlife concerns (30%), and the information exchange with colleagues (23%) the most. They liked least the lack of effectiveness in conservation and the lack of action on positions (28%), the Section's concern about prestige and not about wildlife (24%), and the fact that it is too large (20%).

For TWS, the *JWM* (31%), certification direction (30%), representation of the wildlife profession (25%), and the concern for solid management based on sound research were liked the most. They liked the least the fact that it accomplished little regarding conservation issues (61%), that it was too game oriented (13%), and that it exhibited parochialism (11%).

CONCLUSIONS

This report is not a recommendation for action by the Executive Board of the Western Section. It is a summary of the results of the membership questionnaire, prepared in anticipation that it will be useful as a document in preparing recommendations for the Western Section's Executive Board. Several patterns appear very apparent. These include the desire of the membership for the Section to become more involved in conservation activities and conservation education. However, Section members did not indicate a great desire to do this work themselves; rather, they would like to see the Section take on this task of educating the masses. Strategies for integrating these 2 seemingly diametric views need to be implemented.

Overall, it would appear that the Western Section's membership who responded to this questionnaire generally were satisfied with how it is organized and how

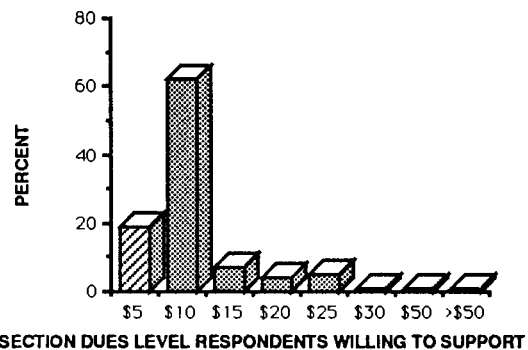


Fig. 12. Section dues level Western Section members were willing to support.

its priorities are developed, aside from the educational concerns expressed above. There are some real differences in the composition and interests of Western Section members as compared with TWS membership nationwide (Hodgdon 1986). The next task of the Western Section's leadership, now and in the future, will be to decide how to implement the members' concerns with the Section's activities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This questionnaire resulted from a campfire discussion at the Western Section's 1984 summer Executive Board meeting. The Executive Board

approved and funded this survey in 1985. J. D. Yoakum and P. B. Davis were instrumental in the formation of the questionnaire itself. P. Bradley tabulated the results. These contributions were essential for the production of this analysis.

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