

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY: PUBLIC INTEREST, NATURAL DIVERSITY, AND POLITICAL ACTION

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The western states are undergoing tremendous and rapid social, economic and demographic changes. These changes are especially dramatic in California. Consider the following. California has the largest population of any state (about one-tenth of the nation's total) and the largest Congressional delegation. It is ranked as the world's seventh largest economic power. Tourism and agriculture compete for the state's largest economic force. California's population grew by 11.4 percent alone between 1980 and 1985, and a new Californian is now added to the population every 65 seconds!

At the same time, California already has over 240 species listed as endangered, threatened, rare, or fully protected under state law. There are reportedly more federally listed endangered and threatened species in California than any other state except Hawaii. There is a long list of candidate species awaiting both federal and state listing consideration. According to California Resources Secretary Van Vleck, "Recent information indicates that over \$100 million might be necessary over the next several years to provide adequate protection for those species or areas that are of highest priority." There are different estimates on how many thousands of acres of habitat are lost each year, but most Californians have stories about favorite fields and forests being transformed into condos and shopping malls.

The reality is that, in California and elsewhere, human population growth and expanding development are the single greatest threat to wildlife habitat, and this is a threat of staggering proportions. The question, therefore, for purposes of this panel discussion becomes: What role will wildlife managers play in reconciling growing human population and development with dwindling habitats?

I believe that wildlife managers, like any other profession, must readily adapt to changing conditions, and must be held accountable for their work. As the title of this presentation indicates, I submit that wildlife managers should be judged by at least three basic standards: representing the public interest, encouraging natural diversity, and working for necessary political reforms.

First, let me explain that I define public interest in both substantive and procedural terms. Substantively, this means that all wildlife and plant species, whether legally characterized as game, nongame, or endangered, would receive equitable amounts of concern and action. Procedurally, this means that all wildlife constituencies, from trophy hunters to birdwatchers, would receive fair

shares of representation and consideration.

Historically, when wildlife agencies and the wildlife management profession began, the basic problems related to depletion of game species. Comprehensive federal and state programs were developed to solve these problems, and funding was generally tied to appropriative users. From a national perspective, this bond generally continues. Appropriative users pay for and get the lion's share of wildlife management attention. However, from another perspective, this means that about 90 percent of the 3,700 wild vertebrate species listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) are nongame and they now receive only 10 percent of available funding.

Many nongame species and programs are seriously jeopardized. In 1982, 28 nongame migratory bird species were identified by the USFWS as in trouble, with populations declining regionally or nationally. Nothing has been done since to conduct follow-up studies on these 28 species, much less implement any corrective action. In 1983, a nongame migratory bird management plan for the United States was drafted by USFWS. To date, it has not been finalized, adopted, or implemented. The federal Nongame Act has not been funded, and the Reagan Administration recommended against its reauthorization.

At the same time, recent surveys and polls demonstrate a rapid increase in public uses and concern for wildlife, from a non-appropriative standpoint. According to a 1980 Interior Department national survey, 83.2 million Americans 16 years of age and older participated in at least one activity devoted primarily to some form of non-appropriative wildlife use, especially observing, photographing, or feeding wildlife. Although not yet released, a similar 1985 survey will reportedly document a further increase in non-appropriative uses. This data reflects an enormous jump in popularity from the 49 million Americans who enjoyed non-appropriative uses ten years ago. For a comparison, 42.1 million Americans fished and 17.4 million hunted in 1980.

A recent survey on outdoor recreation conducted by the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors (PCAO) indicated that 81 percent of the respondents "strongly agree(d) that the Government should preserve natural areas for use by future generations...." The survey noted that 75 percent of the American population now lives in an "urbanized" environment where development tends to outpace and overcome efforts to retain open space. California voters demonstrated their concern by approving Proposition 19, the \$86,000,000 wildlife bond on the June 1984 ballot, by an overwhelming 64 percent

vote - highest approval for any measure on that ballot!

In light of these facts and trends, the challenge for wildlife managers is to work with conservation groups to achieve adequate funding for nongame programs by effectively translating the public's widespread support into tangible reforms. In large part, wildlife managers may be measured on how well they serve the public interest by their actions and achievements in meeting this challenge.

At this juncture, the standards of natural diversity and political action become relevant. To have credibility and public support, wildlife managers must recognize that Americans want balanced programs which foster the natural diversity and abundance of indigenous species. This should not be viewed in a negative or defensive fashion. Rather, wildlife managers should welcome the new and broader wildlife constituencies as a means to expand their funding and build upon the traditional base of appropriative users.

Finally, wildlife managers must become more

politically active. I realize that politics is a dirty word to many biologists. The only time many biologists seem to care about politics is when, usually belatedly, they learn that their program or funding is under attack. Then I often get confidential calls from biologists who wouldn't be caught dead near me in public, asking if Defenders will help them. I respond to many of these requests, but my overall impression is that the wildlife management profession is woefully under-represented from a political lobbying standpoint. Other professions, such as lawyers, doctors, and even nurserymen have consistent and visible legislative representation. The increasing competition in budget allocations alone should underscore the need for adequate representation. I urge the Wildlife Society to become much more actively involved in legislative matters. As two examples, your help is needed to put another \$85,000,000 wildlife bond on the June 1988 California ballot, and to stop the proposed repeal of California's voluntary endangered species tax check-off. I look forward to working with more of you in the future.