

MEMBERSHIP SURVEY OF THE NEVADA CHAPTER OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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1989 TRANSACTIONS OF THE WESTERN SECTION OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY 25:32-37

Abstract: The Nevada Chapter (NC) of The Wildlife Society surveyed its membership in 1985 to determine their characteristics and opinions and provide information for pursuit of long-range goals and activities. Forty-nine of the 77 members (64%) responded. Members indicated their educational and employment backgrounds, likes and dislikes about TWS publications and organizational units, thoughts about fund-raising, preferred means of maintaining professional standards, and the kinds of public involvement they were willing to support. A majority indicated support for existing activities, programs, and policies, including the NC awards program, fund-raising methods, continuing wildlife education, professional certification, university accreditation, and public affairs involvement. However, rates of individual participation in the latter were relatively low. The membership included no retirees. A majority indicated support for changes, including new requirements for maintenance of professional certification, a requirement for professional wildlife biologists to commit in writing to a code of ethics and establishment of a professional conduct review board, and a new program to support professionals whose employers try to require them to violate the code of ethics. There was support for raising NC dues if a need were demonstrated.

The Executive Board of the Nevada Chapter (NC) of The Wildlife Society (TWS) authorized an ad hoc committee to survey NC members by a mailed questionnaire in 1985. The purpose of the survey was to facilitate the democratic process by providing members the opportunity to list data for use in determining long-range goals. Demographic data were also gathered. Topics of inquiry included member age, education, occupational affiliations, professional standards for wildlife biologists, TWS membership eligibility standards, certification, preferences in TWS publications, continuing wildlife education, university accreditation, public involvement, support of professionals, dues, ways and means, and other activities, positions, and standards for the Chapter.

This paper would not have been possible without the decision of the Nevada Chapter TWS Executive Board to conduct the survey. J. D. Yoakum and P. B. Davis were the primary forces who recommended, developed, and conducted the survey. P. Bradley and A. E. Garske compiled the survey results.

METHODS

The Executive Board appointed a committee to develop the questionnaire (J. Yoakum, pers. commun.). The committee solicited membership input and used a consensus method to compose the questionnaire. The Executive Board added questions to the draft submitted by the committee.

The questionnaire was mailed to the 77 Nevada Chapter members. Forty-nine (64%) responses were received and used in this analysis. No follow-up questionnaires were sent to non-respondents. Schmidt (1987) reported a similar level of response to a 1985 survey of The Western Section (WS) members. Survey results are reported as the percent of the total number of members who responded. Corresponding data from surveys of the WS and TWS are presented for comparison.

RESULTS

Characteristics of Members

Seventy-five percent of the respondents were 21-40 years old (Table 1) compared to 69% in the WS (Schmidt 1987). Two respondents were university students and the rest had earned at least a baccalaureate degree similar to WS (Schmidt 1987) and TWS memberships (Hodgdon 1986).

Thirty-eight percent had completed at least one graduate degree, compared to 57% in the WS (Schmidt 1987). Thirteen percent felt that graduate degrees should be considered a professional standard for practicing wildlife biologists.

Table 1. Age, formal education, and occupation of Nevada Chapter members, The Wildlife Society, expressed as a percent of the total number of respondents.

Age (years)	% of members	Occupation	% of members
21-30	28	Wildlife Biologist	34
31-40	47	Resource manager	19
41-50	17	Administrative	17
51-60	8	Researcher	4
		Student	2
		Teacher	2
		Consultant	2
		Other	20
Education			
High school	2		
Baccalaureate	60		
Masters	28		
Ph.D.	10		

Thirty-four percent of respondents were wildlife biologists (Table 1). "Other" occupations included unemployed, a fisheries biologist, fish culturists, a range conservationist, a graduate fellow, and a public health worker. None of the respondents were retired, compared to the WS, where 24% were retired (Schmidt 1987).

Federal and State agencies were the primary employers, more so in the NC than in WS or TWS (Table 2).

Table 2. Employers of Nevada Chapter (NC), Western Section (WS) (Schmidt 1987), and The Wildlife Society (TWS) (Hodgson 1986) members as a percent of survey respondents.

	NC %	WS %	TWS %
Federal Agencies	48	40	26
State Agencies	37	21	26
College/University	13	16	19
Private	2	11	14
Other/Unknown	0	12	15

All respondents were members of TWS. Membership in WS was 94% (Table 3). There has been an increase over the years in the number of members joining the Nevada Chapter. Twenty-three percent had been TWS members for 11-15 years, while 17% had been Chapter members and 13% Section members as long. Half have been Nevada Chapter members for five years or less; 14% have been TWS members for more than 20 years.

Table 3. Years of membership in the Nevada Chapter (NC), Western Section (WS), and The Wildlife Society (TWS) as a percent of Nevada Chapter respondents.

Years	NC %	WS %	TWS %
0-5	50	63	37
6-10	27	22	22
11-15	17	13	23
16-20	2	0	4
21+	4	2	14

Professional Status and Membership Classes

A debate over professional versus non-professional membership classes has continued since the founding of The Wildlife Society, and has been dealt with by different professional societies (Mosby 1987, Swank 1987). While this issue was not directly addressed in the NC survey, 52% of the respondents favored minimum educational requirements for joining the Society. Of these, 59% favored a bachelor's degree minimum, and 26% a two-year college degree minimum. None of the respondents had two-year degrees.

Regarding occupations, 84% felt natural resource managers and students of natural resource management should be eligible to join. Twenty-two percent thought anyone should be allowed to join. Twenty-seven percent favored membership in TWS for professional wildlife biologists only. All agreed that voting on TWS business and policies should be limited to currently paid members. Fifty-three percent thought TWS should provide professional services such as certification, continuing education, and training to non-TWS members.

Certification

Sixty-nine percent of NC members had participated in the TWS program for certification of professional wildlife biologists by submitting an application for either Certified or Associate Wildlife Biologist, and 94% had been approved. This compared to a 55% application rate among responding WS members (Schmidt 1987). Of those not having applied, 33% felt they lacked the education and experience necessary, and 40% either did not feel it was necessary or did not perceive any benefits. Among those who had applied, 59% cited "better reputation for profession" as a perceived benefit of the program, 29% thought it would increase employability, while 20% saw no benefits. No one reported higher salaries as a benefit of certification. Seventy percent favored periodic updates in education and reevaluation as requirements for maintaining certification, while the rest stated that certification should be permanent.

Continuing Wildlife Education

Eighty-three percent favored participation in a continuing education program as a standard for professional wildlife biologists. Thirty-three percent had started a "Personal Activity Record" which is part of the Continuing Wildlife Education (CWE) program the Chapter approved in July of 1982. Eighty percent replied that they would like the Chapter to conduct a 1-2 hr workshop on the program's objectives and procedures at a forthcoming annual meeting. Fifty-five percent said that the review of individual records by the CWE Committee should be financed entirely by fees submitted by applicants, whereas 41% stated a combination of fees and general funds would be appropriate.

University Accreditation

Most respondents (91%) favored TWS accreditation of colleges granting degrees in wildlife sciences.

Outstanding Professional Award

Every respondent agreed on the need to recognize outstanding professional wildlife contributions as the NC currently does, and most (81%) thought the purpose of the award was clearly understood.

Conduct and Professional Support

Eighty-three percent of respondents favored commitment in writing to a code of ethics as a standard for a professional wildlife biologist, and 77% supported establishing a professional conduct board to review cases regarding practicing professionals' observance of the code.

Ninety-six percent favored the development of a program at either the TWS (39%) or NC (35%) level to support professional wildlife biologists who experience conflicts with employers who may require them to violate the TWS Code of Ethics or Standards of Professional Conduct, a concern addressed by Yoakum (1985). Eighty percent thought the program should be financed by membership dues, and 51% thought voluntary contributions were appropriate. Eighty-two percent indicated they would be willing to contribute \$5.00-\$25.00 to support the program, and 8% would contribute \$50.00 or more. All agreed the support should be extended to current practicing members, 65% opposed support to certified non-members, and 90% opposed support to non-certified non-members.

Chapter Activities

Responding members felt the need for an increased emphasis in 11 major chapter activities (Table 4).

Table 4. Support for increased emphasis in chapter activities by members in Nevada Chapter, The Wildlife Society.

Activity	% of respondents favoring increased emphasis
Conduct workshops or symposia	64
Conduct training sessions	64
Conduct conservation-education programs	53
Annual meeting	42
Summer field trips	42
Write position statements	38
Publish a newsletter	34
Produce audio-visual programs	32
Maintain a financial contributions policy	25
Operations manual	19
Annually give awards	13

In addition, 98% stated that TWS should become more involved in public affairs regarding wildlife management, such as providing expertise to State legislators (94%), participating in conservation organizations and programs (90%), developing position statements (85%), and reviewing environmental documents (85%). Respondents (85%) stated that TWS should take an advocacy role at the NC level.

When asked if they would be willing to spend time at these activities, the majority replied affirmatively. Two-thirds or more would be willing to make presentations to conservation organizations, public schools, scout groups, and churches; 65% to develop position statements; 57% to participate in Project WILD; 54% to participate in State legislative activities, and 53% to review environmental documents. Individuals spent widely varying amounts of time on conservation education activities (Table 5). While 32% devoted 20 hrs or more per year to conservation education, 68% spent 20 hrs or less per year. Schmidt (1987) reported comparable rates of involvement and commitment in the WS.

Table 5. Time devoted to conservation education by members of the Nevada Chapter, The Wildlife Society.

Hours per year	% of members
0-5	28
5-10	19
10-20	21
20-40	8
40+	24

Even though 13% were not familiar with Project WILD, all respondents agreed that the NC should strongly support the program, and 87% said that NC should offer Project WILD the names of members willing to help teachers with training. Most respondents had seen the Chapter's slide-tape programs Silver Wildlife (83%), Silver Mammals (68%), Silver Birds (71%), and Silver Amphibians and Reptiles (45%).

Internal Affairs

Dues- Most respondents advised either keeping the present dues (48% of respondents) or raising them according to need (48%). Ten percent thought TWS dues should be increased by either 25% (4% of respondents) or by 100% (6%). Elsewhere in the questionnaire, 51% were willing to increase annual NC dues above \$10.00. Of these about half (54%) would pay \$15.00, 23% would pay \$20.00, and 19% would pay

\$25.00 for dues. Ninety-eight percent favored paying Chapter, Section, and Society dues with a single check.

Asked to indicate willingness to support certain professional activities with Chapter dues, 94% advocated conservation education, 94% the Newsletter, 72% awards, 60% continuing wildlife education, and 40% scholarships.

Fund-raising- All members stated the NC should continue its Ways and Means Committee, and 94% supported the concept of "making money" to support chapter activities. Also, 94% agreed in principle with the types of fund-raising activities the Committee had undertaken to date (Table 6).

Table 6. Ways and Means Committee activities preferred by members in Nevada Chapter, The Wildlife Society.

Scale of Preference (Most to Least) by Committee Activity	
1	(Most) Sales of Chapter products such as Silver Wildlife programs and hats
2	Soliciting major contributions and grants
3	Raising funds for special projects such as the TWS Building Fund
4	Charging more for meeting registration, exhibitor fees, and ads
5	Sale of advertising space in the Chapter Newsletter
6	Raffles at Annual Meeting
7	Special events such as fun runs and turkey shoots
8	Raffle of moderate scale
9	(Least) Raffle of major scale

Meetings- A majority (89%) favored holding annual meetings during January, and 62% advocated holding these meetings in conjunction with other societies.

Chapter Representation

All respondents stated NC officers should be members of the NC, the WS, and TWS as required in the By-Laws. Most (92%) wanted the Chapter to be represented at the Section and parent Society. Eighty-six percent favored paying a portion of the expenses for the Chapter representative to attend the meetings of those organizations.

Newsletter- Seventy-five percent of the respondents did not think the content of the Newsletter should be changed, and 96% felt the frequency of publication should be kept the same. Although 60% did not think it should be distributed to all wildlife biologists regardless of membership in the Chapter, 74% favored sending it to agencies involved in political issues affecting wildlife resources. Sixty percent stated NC should not publish a newsletter for the

general public.

Publications

Members were asked what they liked least and most about the NC, the WS, TWS, the Journal of Wildlife Management (JWM), the Wildlife Society Bulletin (WSB), and the Cal-Neva Wildlife Transactions (now titled Transactions of the Western Section of The Wildlife Society).

Respondents liked the meetings and Transactions most about the Western Section. Of the parent Society, the most liked features were the JWM and other publications, as well as political positions statements on issues. The overall quality of the JWM, its topical material, and its highly technical level were the most praised attributes. Ironically, the most disliked feature of JWM was the orientation of content toward technical and research matters rather than practical management.

The most often repeated praise of the WSB was the practical management orientation, usefulness, relevance, and timeliness of its articles. Criticism of the WSB were minor.

Respondents felt that the Transactions was a good outlet for students to get publication experience and for smaller scale research not necessarily applicable for the JWM or WSB. They liked that it emphasized relevant local and regional research and management topics. The greatest criticisms of the Transactions were the delay in publishing and that not all papers presented at the WS conference were published. (The Transactions is usually published and distributed at the following annual meeting, and some of the papers presented are preliminary in nature or are to be published elsewhere.)

DISCUSSION

There was strong majority opinion supporting the TWS programs, including professional certification, university accreditation, the NC awards program, administration of a code of ethics and support of professionals adhering to it, conservation education, and public/political involvement in wildlife issues. Ways and Means Committee fund-raising activities were also widely supported. There was high approval of holding annual meetings in January, of having a Chapter representative involved in WS and TWS affairs, and of the content, frequency, and quality of the Newsletter. Conducting workshops, symposia, and training sessions were chapter activities most supported by members.

Although some members were critical, no mandate was expressed for making specific or general

changes in the JWM, WSB, or Transactions.

Most supported the unified method of paying TWS, WS, and NC dues. A small minority supported raising NC dues if a need could be demonstrated.

Nevada Chapter members overwhelmingly supported involvement in a variety of public affairs regarding wildlife, and a majority indicated willingness to spend time at such activities. However, a gap appears between this spoken willingness and the extent to which members actually spend time in public affairs. There is potential and need for a greater amount of individual participation in conservation education and other public affairs. The NC might explore ways of encouraging increased commitment to these kinds of work. Franklin (1985) offered practical advice on how individuals may increase professional commitments.

Interestingly, the NC had no retired members at the time of the survey. Assuming that the NC geographic area includes former members who are retired, the NC should investigate ways to encourage their renewed membership. Such individuals could contribute a wealth of experience, judgment, and time that would benefit the profession at the Chapter level. Most respondents thought that all natural resource managers and students should be eligible to join TWS, but only 22% favored the present policy of admitting members without minimum qualifications. A majority favored new requirements of additional education and periodic review for maintaining professional certification rather than the present practice of one-time permanent certification. Although most (83%) favored the Continuing Wildlife Education program, only one member has earned a certificate of continuing education through NC since the program was established (D. Withers, pers. commun.). This may indicate a large gap between interest and participation, or that participants in CWE sessions were simply not applying for the awards certificate. Eighty percent stated they would like a short workshop on the CWE program's objectives and procedures at a forthcoming annual meeting. Other means of disseminating information could make the program more available or relevant to members. The WS is in the process of discontinuing its own CWE program now that TWS has initiated the Professional Development Program (J. Yoakum, pers. commun.).

A majority (83%) supported written commitment to a code of ethics for all professional wildlife biologists, which is presently not required. Most members advocated the establishment of a professional conduct board to review cases of alleged infractions of the code. Most also support a program developed to support practicing wildlife biologists whose employers try to require them to violate TWS Code of Ethics or Standards of Professional Conduct.

This analysis of the 1985 Nevada Chapter TWS membership survey is intended for use as a tool in a democratic organization, providing direct individual input from members for consideration by the Executive Board as well as by the membership as a whole. The next step for NC leadership is to implement the findings on a priority scale and thereby advance the interests of members.

A key value of the survey is the baseline it provides. It should not be difficult to revise the questionnaire to reflect current issues and administer it again at an interval of perhaps five years. The Society periodically publishes updated reports on membership data (Hodgdon 1988). The surveys conducted in the WS and NC could set an example noteworthy for all the other sections and chapters. The results of these surveys may serve as documentation of members' support for, or opposition to, changes in TWS activities and policies.

As the membership changes and new issues arise, so will the characteristics and preferences of individuals. The 64% response rate to the lengthy questionnaire indicates at least a moderate degree of support for the concept that the NC should examine its membership characteristics, consider members' preferences and wishes, use this information as a basis for setting its policies and conducting its activities, and assess the organization's progress toward meeting long-range goals.

Although the number of respondents might be considered mediocre among members of a professional society, the questionnaire requested 150 responses on 14 pages. One way to make the questionnaire shorter would be to use instruments other than a questionnaire to gather some of the data. Existing records on certification, subscriptions to publications, etc. could be consulted directly. The questionnaire could also be shortened by eliminating duplicate questions, a few of which yielded conflicting data.

A thorough critique of future questionnaires before administration should screen out any ambiguities in the questions. Accuracy of data is reduced, and analysis is more difficult, if one respondent interprets a question differently than does another or when a respondent has to guess the meaning of a question.

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