

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WESTERN SECTION OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY**

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### *TRANSACTIONS OF THE WESTERN SECTION OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY 40:1-2*

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On December 21, 1953, 38 wildlife biologists, most of them working for the California Department of Fish and Game, signed a petition signifying their intent to create the California Section of The Wildlife Society. Their goal was simple - establish a local group for wildlife biologists that would hold annual gatherings to exchange information and maintain contacts for this relatively new profession. The initiator of this effort was Dr. Walter (Howdy) E. Howard, a wildlife professor from the University of California, Davis. With the creation of the California Section when The Wildlife Society accepted the petition in 1954, Dr. Starker Leopold from U.C. Berkeley was the first President. There were 66 members in the 1954 charter year. Howdy was the Chair of the Section's first annual meeting held in February 1954 on the U.C. Davis campus where 200 wildlifers attended and discussed issues focused mostly on game management. From that humble beginning, the California Section has grown into the preeminent professional organization for wildlife biologists in California, Nevada, Hawaii, and Guam and is now called the Western Section of The Wildlife Society.

We gathered in Rohnert Park in February 2004 to celebrate the Section's first 50 years with a panel discussion that documented the Section's long record of excellence and commitment to the wildlife profession and to conserving the region's wildlife resources. Other festivities to celebrate the Section's 50-year history included group portraits of the Section's charter members and officers and a banquet honoring the Section's charter members.

Over its 50-year history, the Western Section has undergone many changes that are too numerous to list in this introduction. Papers by Howard (1989) and Yoakum (1989) provide more complete information on the Section's genesis and accomplish-

ments but a few changes bear discussion here. There have also been profound and irreversible changes in human populations and the landscape in the Section's boundaries over this same period, and some of these changes are discussed in some of the papers given in this panel discussion. A pertinent example is the tremendous increase in human populations during this period. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, California's human population stood at 12.5 million people in 1954, the Western Section's charter year. By 2002, California's human population grew 182% to 35.3 million people. Similar population increases occurred in Nevada and Hawaii during the same period. These incredible increases have caused irreversible losses, modifications, and degradations of wildlife habitat.

In 1964, Nevada joined with the California Section to form the California-Nevada Chapter. In 1970, the Chapter was reorganized by The Wildlife Society and renamed the Western Section when Hawaii and Guam were added. There were 66 members in 1954, annual dues were \$0.50, and there was \$122 in the bank. In 2004, there are more than 1100 members, dues are \$20, and we have assets that hover around 5 figures. The increased membership and increased commitments to provide professional development opportunities for wildlifers led the Section to hire a part-time Executive Secretary in 1993 to handle its business because the volunteer abilities of the Section's leadership was taxed to the limit. The Executive Secretary's position was changed to a full-time Executive Director with by-law changes in 2003 because the Section wanted to become a



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more professional organization with greater responsibility assumed by Executive Director.

The 4 papers published from this panel discussion accomplish 3 goals. First, these papers identify the significant wildlife issues that the Section faced or may face in the future. Second, the authors discuss significant accomplishments of the Western Section during these same periods. Lastly, these papers continue to capture the Section's history and serve as part of the Section's historical record. Dr. Walter (Howdy) Howard's paper covers the 1950's and 1960's when the Section was a fledgling professional organization focused primarily on providing opportunities for professional interactions and education. Mike Chapel's paper addresses the 1970's and 1980's when the Section began to evolve and change into a larger professional organization that added environmental advocacy and more formalized professional development programs to its activities. My paper summarizes the period from 1990 to 2003 when the Section completed its transition into a full-fledged professional organization with staff that allowed the Section to become more fully engaged to resource conservation and professional development. Dr. Reginald Barrett prognosticates about the future and what the Section and its membership can expect and offers some recommendations about what the Section might do to best meet these predicted future needs.

These papers are not intended to wax poetically about the "good old days of wildlife management" which I still feel like I missed, but more to recount the Section's history and future by the 4 authors so that those of us who engage in this noble profession essentially created by Starker's father, Aldo Leopold, will remember the history and pedigree for all Western Section members that resulted from the vision, hard work, and dedication of the Section's officers and members over the last 50 years. These 4 papers and the papers cited therein plus past issues of the "*Transactions of the Western Section of The Wildlife Society*," the Section's newsletters, and the

abstracts and proceedings from the Section's Annual Conferences provide a rich record of the Section's history, and I urge anyone interested in more detailed review of this history to read these documents. One of the reasons the Section has been so effective and successful is that there has been continuity to its activities as well as ample written records that document its history. Papers from the panel discussion continue this tradition.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Program Chair for 2004 Annual Conference, J. Harris, deserves considerable appreciation for allowing me to organize the panel discussion on the Section's 50th anniversary. The panel resulted from the hard work of several individuals including the other speakers, R. Barrett, M. Chapel, and H. Howard. The Section's Executive Director, B. Rocco, also deserves special appreciation and was an immense help in organizing the panel discussion and coordinating the festivities for the 50th anniversary. The Section's long-time Historian J. Yoakum, the Section's previous Executive Secretary B. Hull, and B. Rocco deserve special thanks for maintaining files with the Section's archives. Finally, I extend my sincere appreciation and utmost gratitude to H. Howard, S. Leopold, and all the charter and early members and officers of the Western Section who created this fine organization and provided the foundation for future generations of wildlifers to become more effective professionals.

#### LITERATURE CITED

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