

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE WESTERN SECTION OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY, 1970-1990

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TRANSACTIONS OF THE WESTERN SECTION OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY 40:9-12

I appreciate the opportunity to be part of this special 50th anniversary celebration of the Western Section. I think it is useful for people to review their history periodically because it helps them evaluate options for the future. But perhaps more important, looking back sometimes help us see how far we have come. I think the Western Section of The Wildlife Society, and the wildlife profession made exceptional progress during the past 50 years. I'd like to use my time this morning to describe the significant advances of the 1970s and 1980s. I'll suggest that this was perhaps the most important period in our history because it was the time when the Executive Board took on the difficult task of defining the standards for ethical conduct, performance and continuing education for our emerging profession. I'll also describe the significant legacy that remains from this important work.

Like most of you, I wasn't a member of the Western Section or The Wildlife Society in the 1970s. I joined in 1980. So I called on some old friends who were important section leaders to help me shape this talk for you today. I would especially like to thank Jim Yoakum, Judie Tartaglia, Brad Valentine, Ken Mayer, Chuck Evans, Jon Hooper, Bill Laudenslayer, Rick Williams, Kent Smith and the other members of this panel for their help with my remarks. In addition, my comments on the Section's accomplishments during the 1970s and 1980s were largely drawn from a paper by Jim Yoakum on the same subject at the 1989 annual conference (Yoakum 1989).

If I were asked to summarize the 1970s and 1980s in bullet form, I would say that the 1970s and 1980s were a time when:

- * strong public interest in environmental protection was emerging
- * from that, biologists gained new prominence in conservation and land-use planning
- * we greatly expanded and diversified as a profession
- * your Executive Board helped develop most of the structure and process that exist in the Western Section and TWS today.

I'd like to highlight this transitional period by first listing 3 important milestones between 1970 and 1990. I'll then add some context by describing some important trends in society and the wildlife profession that influenced the thinking of our Executive Board. And I'll finish by describing some of the key deliberations and accomplishments that occurred along the way.

MAJOR MILESTONES

Here are some important milestones that should be mentioned for the Western Section during the 1970s and 1980s.

1) In 1970, the California Section of TWS became the Western Section. Hawaii and Guam were added to the Cal-Neva Chapter membership, which formed in 1964, and 10 local chapters were organized to represent subdivisions of the 3 states.

2) In 1984, the Section elected Judie Tartaglia to the office of President. Judie went on to become the Section's representative to the TWS Council and she was the first woman to hold these offices in The Wildlife Society.

3) The Section decided to abandon its twenty-year relationship with the Cal-Neva Chapter of the American Fisheries Society in 1985. The joint annual meetings were discontinued that year and Cal-Neva Wildlife was replaced by the Transactions of the Western Section in 1986.

TRENDS THAT INFLUENCE THE WESTERN SECTION

Before I review the work and accomplishments of the Western Section during the 1970s and 1980s, let's first quickly highlight some important trends in society and the wildlife profession that influenced our work. I remember the 1970s and 1980s as the time when wildlife biologists assumed a prominent



role in land-use and conservation planning. I also remember that we did not achieve this new status by ourselves. In my view, our status was strongly influenced by several social factors that emerged during the 1960's and early 1970s. The key factors from this period were:

1) Environmental awareness was becoming firmly embedded in the American public. Publications such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* were widely read by 1970 and the public was increasingly aware of environmental pollution and other impacts from expanding human populations.

2) The public was also developing an intense desire for open expression and involvement in government actions. This movement emerged during the Civil Rights Movement, expanded during the Viet Nam War, and helped advance environmental protection in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

3) There were rapid advancements in communication and analytical technology. Fax machines and the first desktop computers surfaced during the 1970s and 1980s. Advancements in these technologies helped society more completely understand the need for environmental protection and communicate that need more widely and quickly.

4) A broad-scale mandate for environmental protection was delivered through a variety of new state and federal laws. Without question, the biggest factor that changed the status of wildlife biologists was the adoption of new environmental protection and disclosure laws in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Those that were particularly significant to us were the federal and state Endangered Species Acts as well as National Environmental Policy Act and California Environmental Quality Act. Together, these new laws called for greater environmental protection, disclosure of environmental impacts, and greatly increased public involvement in the process.

Together, these important trends in our society helped bring wildlife to the forefront of environmental planning by the mid 1970s. As a result, the wildlife profession changed quickly.

Even those who were not yet professional biologists in the 1970s probably know that after the Federal Endangered Species Act was adopted in 1973, individual fish and wildlife species quickly became central issues in planning for water developments, urban planning, forest management, and ag-

riculture. As a result, agencies with species or habitat responsibilities were soon scrambling to find new wildlife professionals to help with these issues. The development community was also beginning to hire staff biologists and "wildlifers" were increasingly being hired by a growing environmental consulting sector. Still others were moving into the not-for-profit arena and academic institutions were broadening their programs to meet the increasing demand for qualified wildlife professionals.

THE WESTERN SECTION EXAMINES NEW GOALS AND PROGRAMS

So it was public interest in environmental protection that stimulated new state and federal mandates for species and habitat conservation. This, in turn, provided wildlife biologists with a prominent role in natural resource management by the mid 1970s. These new trends produced a professional workforce that diversified quickly to include many nontraditional fields such as non-game species ecology, population biology, habitat relationships modeling, impact analysis, and law enforcement. And our rapidly changing membership presented some important new challenges for the Western Section Executive Board. Let me now give you a very short overview of some of the issues that were at the center this transitional period for the Executive Board and The Wildlife Society.

Game versus Non-Game Emphasis

My reading of the Transactions suggests that the predominant issue for the Executive Board in the early 1970s was the degree to which the Section should divide its attention between game and non-game species. You probably know that the California and Nevada Chapters had a strong focus on game species during the 1950s and 1960s (see Howard 1989). So leaders of the Western Section struggled with what Starker Leopold in 1974 called a "powerful new force of protectionists in our ranks who have come to view hunters and fishermen as adversaries" (Leopold 1974). The "new force" was, of course, the many new biologists who were interested in a much broader set biological issues and considerations. So in this presentation, Dr. Leopold stressed the importance of bridging the differences between hunters and anti-hunters, and focusing the efforts of both on what he called "The real enemies

- the exploiters, dam builders, polluters, sub-dividers”.

So the desire to expand beyond a game management emphasis had started by 1974. In my view, the expansion occurred over several decades without much fanfare because there was little resistance to broadening the focus of wildlife professionals beyond game species. In fact, papers presented at the annual meetings during this time indicated that the transition away from a game emphasis had already begun by the early 1970s. Only 30% of the papers published in *Cal-Neva Wildlife* focused on game animals during the 1970s. The proportion dropped by about half to 17% in the 1980's, and was only 6% in the 1990s.

A New Mission and Focus

A second major emphasis for the Western Section in the 1970s and 1980s was identifying a new mission and focus for the organization. When TWS formed the Western Section in 1970, the growing interest in broader conservation and professionalism issues was presenting some new options for work and attention by the Executive Board.

One example of this was the discussions about professional conduct and ethics. When the California State Board of Forestry began considering state licensing for anyone practicing wildlife impact assessments in the early 1970s, the Executive Board could see that ethics and professional conduct would become an important issue for the membership. The Board had many heated debates about ways to address these issues. Looking back, we now know that this was an exceptionally difficult time for the Wildlife Society and Western Section. It was a difficult time because our organization was taking on the difficult challenge of determining the first standards for professional conduct and continuing education in our profession. Yet, after all the wounds healed from this struggle, what remained were the Certification, Code of Ethics, and Continuing Wildlife Education programs that are still with us today.

Let me now make a few quick remarks about each of these efforts.

1) Certification. As they began to consider how they might address emerging ethics and profession conduct issues, the Executive Board was fortunate that members from the Nevada Chapter were al-

ready working on this subject. Jim Yoakum, Rick Brigham, Don Armentrout, and others from the “Silver State” quickly assumed a leadership role. Soon your Executive Board was working with The Wildlife Society Council to draft our Certification Program that was adopted by the full membership of The Wildlife Society in 1977. Many members soon signed on.

This new program established standards for professional and ethical conduct as well as minimum education and experience qualifications for certification. I'm told that no one has yet assembled summary statistics for participation in the Certification Program. So I cannot report that information to you today. Yet, most of you know that Certification is a very valuable national program that was heavily influenced by Western Section in the 1970s.

2) Continuing Wildlife Education. The Nevada Chapter also helped The Wildlife Society with the development of our Continuing Wildlife Education Program. The Nevada Chapter developed its “CWE” program in the early 1980s. A similar program was adopted by the Western Section in 1988 and The Wildlife Society signed on in 1989. This program is now called the Professional Development Program. It is administered by The Wildlife Society who issues Professional Development Certificates to members and non-members who have completed at least 150 hours of training over 5 years or less. I was unable to obtain any summary statistics for this program. Still, Professional Development is clearly another valuable national program that had its roots in the Nevada Chapter and Western Section.

3) Natural Resources Communications Workshop. Jim Yoakum from Nevada also stimulated the Western Section to begin our Natural Resources Communication Workshop in 1970. The first session was held in Reno and it was taught by Eugene Decker from Colorado State University. The program was moved to the University of California, Davis in 1971 where it was coordinated by Lew Nelson for a short while. But for most of it's history, the workshop has been coordinated by Jon Hooper at California State University, Chico.

Over the past 34 years, 43 communications workshops have been completed (2 sessions were offered in some years). The original purpose for the workshop was to help wildlife professionals communicate more effectively. However, the target audience now includes all natural resource professionals. Since 1970, over 600 professionals from more than 40 agencies and organizations have attended the session. A profit has been returned to the Western Section every year.

4) Wildlife Training Workshops and Symposia. Still another significant contribution from your Executive Board in the 1980s was the use of wildlife training workshops and symposia to offer continuing education to our members while providing a valuable source of income for the Section. While some training was offered earlier, serious work on this began late in the 1980s. When I first joined the Executive Board in 1985, our working capital was less than \$2,000 and the Board seemed to constantly worry about staying solvent. But in 1986, we organized a workshop on deer management in Oakhurst. We charged a small fee to the 50 or so participants. From this we learned that the Section might be able use additional workshops to increase revenue while offering important training opportunities for our members. Soon, several other workshops were completed and the Western Section began to see financial security. However, after several volunteers quickly burned out on the workload involved with organizing the sessions, the Section hired our first Executive Secretary, Bill Hull, early in the 1990s to oversee this work.

SOME CLOSING OBSERVATIONS

In my view, the 1970s and 1980s was an exceptional period for the Western Section of The Wildlife Society. During these 2 decades, "wildlifera" gained new and special status, our numbers rapidly increased, and we matured and diversified as a profession. In response, the Western Section expanded on the traditional focus on game management to include a much broader set of wildlife considerations. Between 1970 and 1990, our membership grew from 145 paid members to over 300. And many important programs were developed in the WS and TWS that are still place today. We broke ranks with the American Fisheries Society in 1985 and, fueled by funds from our annual meetings and educational workshops, the Western Section became a fully functioning business by 1990. Our net worth grew from less than \$1,000 in 1970 to over \$40,000 in 1989 and well over \$100K in the 1990s.

So I believe the Executive Board provided a significant legacy for the Western section between 1970 and 1990. And we should be proud of the accomplishments they made on our behalf.

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