

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY ADVOCACY AND BIOPOLITICS

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The Wildlife Society has been an advocate for several decades, but such actions were infrequent and limited in subject matter -- a budget support here, concern for a water project there, support for wilderness preservation and a Public Land Law Review here, concern for wildlife management in National Parks, and so on. Old-timers will agree that your Wildlife Society is very conservative in this area. Some individual wildlifers, and a few Society chapters moved towards environmental involvement and advocacy in the mid-1960's. Our inactivity on environmental affairs probably lost many members, and we practically lost the Montana Chapter they were so discouraged. Finally, amendments were added to our Bylaws to provide for handling of Resolutions and Public Statements by the Society and by Society Sections and Chapters. It has been my experience that these Bylaws procedures have been much too cumbersome and time-consuming to meet emergencies as they arise.

You may be interested to know that Society Sections and Chapters may speak out on environmental issues provided their content falls within established policy of The Wildlife Society, and is not in conflict with it. Subjects not yet treated by the parent Society may be treated by Sections and Chapters provided they do so in a professional manner.

But, back to the history of environmental advocacy within the Society -- during the late 1960's Society members joined with the ground swell which reflected the general public's increasing awareness and concern for the environment. This sense of urgency spread from the Society members through the Regional representatives to the Council. Any of you following the reports on Society activities within The Wildlife Society News must be aware of the tremendous increase in the level of Society involvement in the environmental action arena within the last two years.

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We have expressed our views and made recommendations within the past year or two on a wide variety of Federal legislation and U.S. Government administrative efforts including such subjects as: the Everglades and Big Cypress Swamp, the Alaska Pipeline, the Water Bank Act, a Big Thicket National Park and a C&O Canal Historic Park, the Miami Jetport, wilderness areas, endangered species from condors to whales, the management of wild horses and ocean mammals, animal damage control and grazing fees of public lands.

We have supported professional career status for U.S. Civil Service positions, States rights in the management of wildlife, the Crusade for Clean Water, the proposed National Hunting and Fishing Day, and increased budget support for wildlife endeavors within the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service.

We have participated in planning and in an advisory role in numerous ways, and we have urged concern for timberland preservation and effects of stream channelization, and have had special concern for the growing preservation-protection sentiment in the laity.

Even with a multitude of activities like those just cited, some members will say TWS is not doing enough, while others will say we are too involved already. I agree with the former, for today's challenges on environmental problems know no bounds! Our Society committee and staff structure is such that what little TWS has done has been fitted into an already too-tight schedule of many other things only remotely related to environmental concerns.

Please let me assert that TWS must proceed with great caution in its move towards more involvement in environmental affairs. Here are some considerations: (1) The Society membership is a diverse one, including managers, educators, biologists and other scientists such as chemists and electronics experts, administrators, and enforcement specialists. Consequently, it is extremely difficult to develop a statement on any particular issue that will reflect consensus among the membership. The tendency, therefore, is towards statements or expressions of a generalistic nature, often not as strong and direct as they otherwise could be. (2) As a professional association, any expression of the Society must be well based on facts. Guesses will only embarrass the profession. (3) Emotional tirades should have no place in our expressions or presentations. Leave that to the non-professionals in a multitude of other groups. A professional association without integrity will be lost among those multitudes. (4) The way in which positions on environmental issues are handled is crucial to the legal status of associations such as ours. Outright lobbying is frowned upon. It is better to make an expression in response to a request for it from the person or groups considering the issue. Appear as a friendly witness, or in an advisory role rather than in an adversary position.

At this point let me conclude by discussing an important related aspect of biopolitics. It is worthy of your most serious thoughts. I refer to the internecine developments becoming so prevalent among many of those interested in environmental affairs. This internecine warfare was first brought into public discussion by the National Wildlife Federation's Thomas L. Kimball at meetings of the International Association of Game, Fish and Conservation Commissioners in Toronto in 1967. Some "conservation" groups (and I use that term somewhat with my fingers crossed) have become so outspoken and active against business and industry that a strong backlash is growing that makes it increasingly difficult for even a modicum of reason and communication to prevail toward solutions to some of our environmental problems. Industry is rebelling strongly in many quarters. This is, of course, a more or less natural conflict.

The previously-mentioned preservation-protection trend among the laity is even more discouraging. I always thought wildlifers were numbered among the good guys with the white hats, but, believe it or not, this preservation-protection philosophy has gone so far in some quarters that the old-line conservation agencies rooted in the financial support of hunters and anglers are now wearing black hats in the eyes of much of the public!

Now let me lead you further down the proverbial, but jaundiced, primrose path. One wonders today who is who among conservationists and conservation groups. Self-styled ecologists, conservationists and environmentalists are coming out of the woodwork everywhere. A big headline on the front page of the January 7, 1972 Washington Post read: "Conservationists Ask Court to Split AEC." A reading of the article to see which of my sister organizations

were involved revealed none of them. All those involved were local or regional groups from portions of a few eastern states such as Long Island's Lloyd Harbor Study Group. The article revealed the plaintiffs had not even analyzed the steps to be taken if their suit for divising the AEC were successful. Much of this type of action may not be so much an expression of concern for the environment as it may be an expedient and productive endeavor for today's crop of young attorneys.

The divergence between the newcomer groups and established conservation groups continues on many fronts. Perhaps of most concern is the current divergence in philosophy and public action between long-established organizations. Those of you belonging to a number of such groups know to what I refer. This trend to divergence appears to be growing in several quarters -- not only at public hearings, in the public press, and in association publications, but also within the smoke-filled meeting rooms among personalities with presumably mutual objectives.

The unfortunate part about all these expensive and time-consuming internecine activities is that it is wildlife and other natural resources that will suffer -- not the personalities or associations involved. Egocentric conservationists fiddle while the resources face increasing jeopardy. It is hoped that each of you will take these thoughts to heart and that you will use your personal influence to help bring all interested groups with which you may affiliate back onto the same track -- namely toward a goal of wise conservation of our natural resources. Good luck to you in your endeavors in the crucial area of biopolitics.