

THE FUTURE OF THE WESTERN SECTION OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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TRANSACTIONS OF THE WESTERN SECTION OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY 40:26-29

Aldo Leopold, the “father” of our discipline, wrote in his “Sand County Almanac” that “there are two types of people in the world, those who can live without wildlife and wild places, and those who can not” (Leopold 1949). I expect most members of the Western Section of The Wildlife Society would agree they were in the latter camp. The Wildlife Society and its Western Section exist because many more people agree with you.

You have heard a series of excellent reviews on the history of the Western Section so I will not dwell on our history. Rather, I am going to start by reminding you what the objectives of The Wildlife Society are. You may recall they were provided by Aldo Leopold and others in 1937.

- 1) To develop and promote sound stewardship of wildlife resources and of the environments upon which wildlife and humans depend;
- 2) To undertake an active role in preventing human-induced environmental degradation;
- 3) To increase awareness and appreciation of wildlife values; and
- 4) To seek the highest standards in all activities of the wildlife profession.

TWS-WS Bylaws ARTICLE II. Section 1. in essence say we will promote the objectives of the parent society in the Western Section area.

LEADERSHIP

I have heard there is a sociological axiom that any random sample of people can be categorized by the 90-9-1 percent rule. Ninety percent of the people will not even know what is going on. Nine percent will be aware of the situation, but only one percent will be motivated to do something about it. The latter are the leaders in any group. You, of course, by the very fact that you are here today, represent the

10 percent that at least keep abreast of what is going on. We have about a thousand members in the Western Section. By formula then, we should have about 100 potential leaders among us. Let’s recognize them, encourage them to serve, and thank them when they do well. I think our history shows the Western Section has done a pretty good job in this regard.

The future of the Western Section will depend largely on who you choose to be your leaders and the extent to which you join with them to energize the Western Section. I invite each of you to consider becoming a leader and to encourage people you believe will make good leaders to participate. I also urge you to help us expand our membership by reaching out to colleagues, educators and students who are concerned about the conservation of our wildlife heritage.

MEGATRENDS

While I cannot predict the future in detail, there are some major trends (mega-trends) that will continue to influence everything we do for some time to come. Let me highlight just three that are central to the success of our efforts.

In November last year Science magazine hosted an excellent series of review papers on “The State of the Planet” (Smith 2003). You might want to check it out at www.sciencemag.org.

The first and foremost review was by the internationally respected demographer, Joel E. Cohen (2003). He noted it took 250,000 years from the first human until 1927 to reach the first 2 billion people on Earth. By 1974 there were 4 billion. By 1999 there were 6 billion. We are the first humans to live through a doubling of the global population in one lifetime. We also have witnessed the most important demographic event in history about 1970 when the global population growth rate reached its all time peak of 2.1% per year.

Cohen (2003) predicted that in the next 50 years the human population will probably be growing more



slowly, but still reach 8-10 billion people. The average density of humans on Earth will then be about 66 people per square kilometer of land. The 77 million individuals now added to the earth each year pose formidable challenges for fresh water, food, housing, education, health and employment. People will be more urban and live longer in the next 50 years than in the last 50 years. Our organization has a substantial stake in the quality and extent of public education about the implications of these population changes

The second megatrend I will highlight involves technology and globalization. Our ability to make use of resources has accelerated dramatically in the last 50 years and is projected to continue for the foreseeable future (Chow et al. 2003). In my lifetime we have moved from slide rules to computers, from radios to DVD's and high definition color televisions. Petroleum has fueled our ability to rapidly move goods around the world just as we can now freely communicate new information worldwide almost instantly. We have witnessed the impact of warfare expanding from local to global actions. Warfare of any kind is detrimental to wildlife conservation.

These trends have allowed a single nation to become the primary force for good or evil. The trend for power and resources to be concentrated in the hands of a few continues unabated. Depending on the attitudes and values of those few, our wildlife heritage may or may not be conserved. Our greatest need may be for strategies to apply our knowledge and technology more wisely. Here again the Western Section has a role to play.

Climate change is certainly a megatrend we cannot avoid. The same series of Science articles pointed out that the Earth's climate is clearly warming. Moreover, it is no longer speculation that human influences on climate have now eclipsed other causes of variation (Karl and Trenberth 2003). The primary activity affecting climate is our burning of fuels, releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, but land use changes are also important. Changes to be expected include greater extremes in temperature and precipitation, decreases in ice packs, increases in sea level, and shifting of weather patterns around the globe. The review concludes that current trends are likely to continue beyond our lifetimes, and that we all are "... venturing into the unknown with climate, and its associated impacts could

be quite disruptive." (Karl and Trenberth 2003).

There are of course many other impediments to progress towards our goals, including greed, consumerism, the territorial imperative, generational amnesia, alienation from nature, balkanization or tribalization, ignorance, and a list of others too long to consider here.

Despite these mega-trends and human tendencies, I submit that anything we as individuals, and as members of the Western Section, can do to enhance societies' capability, and desire, to manage wildlife resources wisely is worth each of our best efforts, no matter how small.

HAPPINESS

We all would like to be happy. A survey of 38,000 people world wide (The Pew Research Center For The People & The Press 2002) recently found that North Americans were the happiest people on Earth. Furthermore, happy people tended to be more hopeful. Hopeful people tended to be more optimistic, and optimistic people tended to be more successful in reaching their goals. From personal experience I can tell you that helping to educate others can help make you happy.

A "gee-aint-it-bad" person is less likely to be successful. Recall Henry Ford's admonition that "Whether you think you can or can't, you're right." So the future will, by and large, be what we make it via our elected leaders and our collective efforts to support them.

SUGGESTIONS

I will now turn to a number of suggestions for those of you who will be the leaders of the Western Section in future years. They were gleaned primarily from the newsletters of other organizations and are in no particular order.

I suggest we expand our efforts at membership development by undertaking a market analysis combined with a resurvey of our current membership's interests and attitudes. We need to know who in our region consider themselves wildlife biologists and work to encourage all these individuals to become members similar to the efforts of the Nevada and Southern California Chapters some years ago and the survey project by the Western Section two decades ago.

I suggest we consider establishing or strength-

ening ties to other scientific and professional groups with overlapping interests. I am a member of several other such organizations and have noticed that there is much redundancy as well as opportunity for synergistic activities. Maybe having formal “ambassadors” or “liaisons” to other groups would be a way to start. Occasional joint meetings have been tried in the past, but should be expanded in my opinion.

I suggest we improve and broaden our public image. Based on my sampling of college students, I believe we have an image problem with the younger generation. Many see wildlife management and The Wildlife Society as all about killing animals. I think this is unfortunate, and in fact, inaccurate.

How many of you consider yourself hunters (consumptive users of wildlife)? I am a hunter and consumptive user of wildlife, yet I see myself aligned on a more fundamental level with others concerned with stewardship of natural resources and promotion of a land ethic. The Wildlife Society has strength in our traditional understanding of game management, but in fact, it is concerned with much more, including what many today would categorize as conservation biology, ecosystem management and environmental science. Our history reveals this deeper connection.

Did you know that the first time the term “conservation biology” was used in print was by Durward Allen in a 1954 article? He was a professor at Purdue whose text book was standard reading for wildlife biology classes in my college days. Terms like “ecosystem management” were also first expressed long ago by wildlife biologists including Ray Dasmann. I think we could market ourselves to younger generations more accurately than is being done by others. We may even wish to actively counter misinformation.

I suggest that the biggest wildlife conservation issue at the state level is the funding mechanism for state wildlife agencies. I would like to see the Western Section become more involved in this issue than it has been. No agency can be effective if available funds arrive in a boom and bust fashion. No program can survive unless the interested public believes it is being taxed fairly and recognizes the value of services provided. We have much work to do in this regard in nearly all states. The Western Section could provide an outlet for information that may be

difficult for the agencies involved to produce.

I suggest we provide avenues and forums for debating the merits of new approaches to wildlife management, such as directives by the current federal administration to privatize as many as a million federal jobs, including wildlife biologist positions. The US Forest Service is expected to have privatized a quarter of its 44,000 person work force by 2007. I have seen little discussion of this directive despite its implications for our profession and the wildlife resource. This is of course related to that of determining professional competence.

I suggest the Western Section sponsor and facilitate overview studies, assessments or evaluations of how wildlife management is or is not working. This could be done in “bioblitz” fashion with short field trips to relevant locations. I think there is a need for independent review of a wide variety of wildlife management programs. The purpose would not be to embarrass the current landowner or manager, but by invitation, to independently highlight opportunities for improvement and critical needs, much as “outside reviews” are done for university departments.

I suggest we sponsor a web site that makes photographs freely available to the world. The material could be provided by interested members. For example, I have completed scanning some 30,000 slides taken throughout my career. I expect at least a few of them would be of interest to others. I am sure many of you have better photographs than I. An example web site is The Warren and Genevieve Garst Photographic Collection hosted at Colorado State University [<http://manta.colostate.edu/wildlife/>]. This site is supported by an endowment to the university. I believe the Western Section has the capacity to serve as a host for such an endeavor.

Along these lines, I suggest we complete our efforts to make our past Transactions freely available on a web site. This will be a very cost effective means of both advertising our existence, and of furthering our objective of providing free scientifically based information on wildlife and its conservation in our region.

You no doubt have more and better suggestions. I urge you to share them and become involved in seeing them to fruition. Personally, I think it is more fun to work with others than to “go it alone.”

RISK

I will conclude with a comment about risk. Robert Model, President of the Boone and Crockett Club, recently noted that "Risk is an inevitable part of existence-for organizations, as well as individuals..." "If we stand aside or 'play it safe' there are risks to our very reason for existence." The early movers and shakers of the 116-year-old Boone and Crockett Club such as Theodore Roosevelt, George Bird Grinnell, Gifford Pinchot and Aldo Leopold certainly took many risks, moreover, they "...understood that, by and large, the only real chance of success for wildlife conservation rested in combining both utilitarian and preservationist approaches in a coherent whole, based on the 'best science' of the time" (Model 2003). The world of wildlife management is not black and white. It is up to us to help the public see all the shades of gray in each wildlife issue.

Finally, a wish for those of you in the younger generation: May you never have to be resigned to a future without wildlife and wild places. Make sure you take the time to regularly experience these wonderful things first hand.

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