

B&C PROFESSORS' CORNER



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21 Years of University Programs

The Club has now entered its 21st year of formal, long-term affiliations with universities (short-term affiliations through research grants have occurred for decades). We have expanded from the initial

program at the University of Montana in 1992, to Texas A&M—College Station (2005), Michigan State (2009), Oregon State (2010), and next to University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point and Texas A&M—Kingsville (2013). We remain open to additional affiliations that help us fulfill our mission.

As we consider the major future challenges facing humanity and nature, and how Club-affiliated university programs might contribute, we cannot avoid confronting the “9 billion challenge.” Let me frame how I see this challenge translating to wildlife, wild places and the hunting heritage we cherish and champion.

- Within 40 years there will be 30 percent more people on the planet (9 billion) to be provisioned while keeping wild places and wildlife as wild, diverse, productive, resilient and *connected* as possible. Connected is emphasized because it will not suffice to just have nodes of good habitat here and there if large mammals cannot get from one node to another.

- With climate change accelerating, driving extreme droughts, storms, and wildfires, both we and wildlife must be adaptable and given opportunities to alter where or how we live. For wildlife, that will require resilient and connected landscapes.

- With growing energy demands, we must discover ways to produce energy as sustainably and renewably as possible, and we must learn how to do it with minimal impacts on wild places and wildlife.

- With growing urbanization of humans, we must create more effective ways to engage people with nature so they will appreciate and support keeping wild places and wildlife wild.

- With both growing human population and rising levels of affluence, more people will want to live higher on the food chain. This will require increases in agricultural production, more effective transport and storage, and more equitable distribution. Achieving these with minimal impacts on wild places, wildlife and water are huge challenges in which we hunter-conservationists have a large stake.

- Absent top mammalian predators from much of the American landscape, keeping wild places diverse and resilient depends on hunting as the only viable management tool available. For social acceptability, hunting depends on the fair chase ethic. For ecological health, the land depends on hunting effectiveness in keeping herbivore populations at reasonable levels. The latter yields new meaning to the role of hunters as stewards of ecosystem health; it extends fair chase as a hunting ethic to a role for hunting in Aldo Leopold's *Land Ethic*.

As we nurture and grow our Boone and Crockett University Programs, these are among the grand challenges we must keep in our sights. They are not silos of challenges; all are connected. If we let up on any one,

others will be made more difficult. Our founders knew the challenges of their time were connected and that was when the human population and technology were only fractions of what we have today. And what we have today are but fractions of what the future holds. How well Club-affiliated research and graduates meet them could and should impact the future for our natural and hunting heritage.

Each university affiliation includes an agreement on program focus and an endowment to support faculty and/or graduate students conducting research and learning how to be a scientist in the process. These vary from modest endowments for student-only support to large ones for faculty, students and outreach programs. Montana, Michigan and Texas A&M have Boone and Crockett Professors of Wildlife Conservation. Oregon State, Wisconsin—Stevens Point and Texas A&M—Kingsville have endowments for student support only. Collectively, since 1992, these programs have graduated 11 doctorate scholars and 16 master's students, with eight more doctorate and five master's students currently in the pipeline. One post-doctoral student has completed and one is currently in a Club-affiliated university program. Michigan State University's Boone and Crockett Program also hosts the only endowed Wildlife Education Extension Specialist in the nation and is the hub for a three-university policy internship program that has placed several dozen students in varied Washington, D.C., experiences.

Graduates of B&C University Programs now hold a wide variety of positions, ranging from industry to agency and academia to policy. Investments in university programs are bearing fruit through the impacts of these “emeritus fellows.”

As the Club opens its third decade of university programs it is a good time to remind ourselves why we started this

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partnership in the first place, and consider where it might be going. The “why” is simply to ensure a talent pool of skilled scientists and leaders who are committed to the Boone and Crockett vision and mission, and keep large mammal research in the nation’s graduate-level university portfolio. Recent moves towards molecular and genetic lab biology have lessened emphasis on whole animal and field ecology and management studies. A major concern was also the lack of policy-relevant big game research. Club-affiliated university programs now have and are addressing wildlife biology and ecology, human dimension of conservation, wildlife policies, wildlife and conservation education, and internships with organizations shaping conservation policies. These foci all remain vital to the future of B&C University Programs.

Among the promising signs that people are recognizing the need for some new approaches are both public and private initiatives. In the public sector they include conservation strategies in every state, the “all lands” policy of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives of the U.S. Department of the Interior. In the private sector, conservation-minded landowners have formed regional conservation alliances centered on forests and rangelands. The recently formed Western Landowners Alliance champions policies and practices that provide incentives for landowners in the West to feature wildlife and habitat conservation, landscape connectivity, hunting and angling as integral parts of their commercial enterprises. From northern Mexico to southern Canada, through the Rockies (the “spine of the continent”) and spreading outwards, their goal is to integrate conservation with economic development for sustainable mixed-use of working

landscapes. Several Boone and Crockett members and emeritus B&C Fellows are actively engaged in leading these endeavors.

The potential contribution to our wildlife and hunting heritage is enormous. There are tens of millions of acres of private working lands just in the Rockies. These private working lands are often fall, winter, and spring ranges for big game. Historically they have been thought of as critical winter range and the connectors for the public land habitats upon which large mammals depend in summer. Through these landowner alliances for conservation, private lands are becoming not merely the winter range and connectors but the core habitats for wildlife diversity and productivity, with public lands serving as the connectors and summer ranges. Our western wildlife future depends on both public and private lands remaining resilient, productive, diverse, connected and economically viable open spaces. Mixed-use, private working lands may even become the “new” models for future public lands management.

Some organizations focus their efforts to stop economic development or hinder human progress. That will not help people meet the 9 billion challenge; shaping and funneling development and progress so it yields higher human and natural well-being than would otherwise be the case will help. That is our grand opportunity and one worthy of the descendants of Roosevelt, Grinnell, Pinchot, Darling, Leopold, and countless others who gave us such strong shoulders to stand on. I hope the Boone and Crockett Club University Programs will continue to produce the knowledge, scientists, and practitioners who rise to the challenge. ■




A herd of mule deer overlook the Denver Colorado skyline.

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