

# EDUCATING AND INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF CONSERVATION LEADERS

FROM THE  
PRESIDENT



Morrison Stevens, Sr.  
PRESIDENT

**I thank Dr. Christine Thomas and Dr. Steven Leath for their informative articles on this very important subject. They did an excellent job of recapping the predicament that we are facing with substantial retirements in the next several years of experienced wildlife researchers, forestry experts, and senior managers at the state and federal level, as well as in our non-governmental organizations (NGOs). “The big question remains: Who is going to replace them?”**

Drs. Thomas and Leath also discussed the change in demographics of the collegiate students who currently study natural resources and conservation. These “new” students, many of who come from suburban or more urban environments, appear to have a strong interest in wildlife and passion for wildlife conservation. However, they often lack hunting and fishing experience, exposure to rural environments, and a general appreciation of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. Once traditional curriculum will need to be revised to broaden the education of these new students, especially to include an investment in field research.

In June of 2014, I attended a meeting in Washington, D.C. with 28 undergraduate students in the Demmer Scholars Program, an internship program sponsored by Michigan State

University and instructed by B&C Professional Member, Mark Rey. The purpose of the program is to place advanced students interested in natural resources conservation into internship positions at the federal government or NGO level. At this meeting I had eight students at my table. Four of them grew up in a rural environment and the other four grew up in an urban environment. Four of them did not hunt. Think of the amount of field experience and training the new student will require! While these new students may be better at math, science, and communication than those of the previous generation, they may very likely lack the practical field experience that is crucial for a successful, respectable career in the natural resources arena.

To address this, your Club has been investing heavily over the past several years to assist in the inspiration, education, and professional development of future natural resource and conservation leaders. In 1987, the Club initiated a program of endowed professorship positions at major land-grant universities, each well respected in the wildlife, fisheries, and forestry fields. We began this series at the University of Montana, followed by Texas A&M University, Michigan State University, Oregon State University, Texas A&M at Kingsville, University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point, and

most recently SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in collaboration with the Maxwell School of Public Policy. The Club will raise approximately \$11.5 million in funding these programs. The purpose of these university programs are to take science-based students and refine their political and social skills so that they are able to become future leaders and advocates for our hunting heritage. Many of the graduates from these programs have found meaningful employment in federal wildlife agencies, relevant NGOs, state fish and game departments, legislature, forestry, and wildlife committees.

Another leadership initiative of your Club was the formation of the National Conservation Leadership Institute (NCLI) approximately 10 years ago. NCLI is now funded by many organizations and also receives financial support from the Club. The NCLI selects and trains 36 individuals each year for an intensive

eight-month experience at the National Conservation Training Center. Over 280 professionals have already graduated from this program and are working their way up the leadership ladder in the conservation community.

Our Club membership as well as the rest of the conservation community is very conscious of the big changes that are forthcoming, and we know what we need to do to succeed in developing future leadership. Be assured that the Boone and Crockett Club will continue to invest in university programs and expanded field experiences for this new generation, so they can mature into the type of wildlife experts we need to maintain a healthy North American Model, and provide the very critical education that is necessary for the development of future leaders. Many of the other NGOs are doing their share as well. Broadening these initiatives to attract the best minds possible will be our ultimate avenue to success. ■

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# UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS

## CHRISTINE L. THOMAS

B&C PROFESSIONAL MEMBER

Dean, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point,  
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**Historically, the Boone and Crockett Club and the conservation movement have benefitted from the expertise of professional members. Many of them have come from natural resource management agencies or university wildlife management programs. These professionals provided the science that club members needed to make wise investments in the policy side of the conservation equation. Where will these leaders come from in the future? The changing face of the population of North America is a major challenge the Club must face to remain relevant in the future.**

There is a perfect storm upon us right now. We (the Baby Boomers) should have seen it coming in 1960. We know that Millennials and Gen X'ers are weary of hearing about us. However, the fact is the largest demographic to dominate the American landscape, the one that marched across the political scene in the 1960s, is about to march one more time. We are marching out the door to retirement. In fact, some state and federal agencies believe that half of their work force is eligible to retire right now. Think of the ramifications of losing half of the people in any organization in a short time period. The potential impact on conservation leadership is staggering.

While the specter of mass retirements is upon us, the nature of young people who

are interested in careers in natural resource management is radically different than it was in 1970. Historically, natural resource management agencies have had many employees who cycled out of the military after a war, went to school on the GI Bill and moved into the agency on veteran's preference points. The last cycle like that was post-Vietnam. They came from rural backgrounds. They had woods skills, could operate farm or other heavy equipment, had practical knowledge and a sense of direction, hunted, fished, and could find the truck at the end of the day. They understood the meaning of and need for "management."

Today's crop of future natural resource managers and conservation leaders is a very different demographic. They are more likely to be suburban or even urban. While they may know their way around all the latest electronics (important skills to be sure), they generally lack the practical woods and waters skills that their predecessors gained from the farm and forest environments that they grew up in. They may also have a much different view of what wildlife management means. That view may be largely based on cable television. They have not likely heard of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, let alone subscribe to it. This creates educational challenges that did not exist 40 years ago.

At the same time university wildlife management programs are facing major challenges. Just when we have a population of students who, while they may be intelligent and willing, likely do not

possess field skills, many university programs have phased out the field studies side of their curricula in the face of budget challenges. The current trend is to "environmental science" types of programs rather than more expensive field approaches. The facilities and faculty that it takes to sponsor a rigorous field program carry a steep price tag. Finding field-based faculty is itself a major challenge. These days you cannot assume that applicants for academic positions know how to trailer and launch boats, run chainsaws, or use any field tools common to the profession. Many come from the theoretical side of things only.

Fortunately, young people are still interested in the natural world. They are still idealistic and hoping to make the world a better place. Enrollment in the remaining field-based university programs is growing. Working with these young people every day is an honor and a privilege, and cause for optimism. At a time when we will need to replace more managers and leaders in a shorter time frame than we have ever had to, this is the "good news."

The challenge for the conservation community is to support programs and experiences that contribute to the growth and development of well-rounded, practical scientists and managers who can step up in this time of transition to a new generation. The need is great and the price tag significant. However, the price of not shaping the future leaders of the conservation cause is too high to contemplate. I believe the Boone and Crockett Club is up for the challenge. ■



Texas A&M University



MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY

Michigan State University



Oregon State University



Texas A&M at Kingsville



University of Wisconsin  
at Stevens Point



SUNY College of Environmental  
Science and Forestry

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**STEVEN LEATH**  
B&C REGULAR MEMBER  
President, Iowa State University

**The future of conservation policy and management is facing a crucial predicament: The need to train the next generation of conservation leaders and craft innovative conservation policy is more important than ever due to growing global challenges; but an increasingly urban population coupled with a lack of scientific literacy is resulting in a public that has limited knowledge to weigh complex natural resource issues. In addition, enrollments in many natural resource management fields have either remained constant over the past three decades or experienced declines. Consequently, maintaining and strengthening natural resources education has been identified by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities as one of six grand challenges for the future of natural resources.**

This begs the critical question: What steps can and must be taken to meet this grand challenge? To remain relevant, natural resource management programs must consider the skills and knowledge that will empower students to develop into effective leaders. While it is essential to continue rigorous scientific and technical training, programs also need more emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches to solve problems.

But even more important, future leaders must be able to effectively communicate problems, solutions, and policies in ways that the general public can easily comprehend and support. Otherwise, we relegate our natural resource policies to emotion and misperception. Furthermore, to successfully take on the global issues affecting our environment, the workforce must represent the global populace. Programs must do a better job of engaging women and minorities as recent U.S. Census Bureau data shows the field of agriculture and natural resources has the second lowest percentage of women in the workforce and it ranks at the bottom in percentage of minorities compared to 14 other major disciplines.

The year 2015 is expected to mark a major turning point in the employment outlook for natural resource and wildlife professionals. A 2004 survey of state fish and wildlife agencies reported that almost half of their employees and three-quarters of those in leadership positions plan to retire by 2015, resulting in the greatest employment demand in the field in the past 30 years, a situation referred to as “the graying of the green.” However, certain disciplines are seeing greater needs than others. Currently there is a surplus of students in environmental studies and conservation biology; but according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are lagging numbers of students in areas such as

human dimensions of natural resources decision-making, quantitative modeling of natural resources, and natural resource managers.

A sufficient number of well-trained conservation leaders from diverse backgrounds is vital in order to successfully address the five remaining grand challenges identified by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities: sustainability; impact of climate change; agriculture; identifying new and alternative renewable energy resources; and restoring and protecting water quality. Given the urgency and complexity of these challenges, we need to accelerate the development of the next generation of leaders; but we must also act now. Both the state of Iowa and Iowa State University are making significant contributions to confront these matters. The state of Iowa is investing more than \$270 million this year in infrastructure, waterway and watershed restoration and protection, and upgrades to drinking and waste water systems to support proper water quality. Iowa State University is moving forward on several natural resource initiatives to stimulate this and related fields:

- I have allocated presidential discretionary funds to launch nine research projects to advance fisheries and wildlife research on topics, including chronic wasting disease; trophy deer

management, habitat, and dispersal; the impact of wind farms on ring-necked pheasants; and the influence of environmental and human factors on large-mouth bass populations.

- Iowa State is establishing a research and teaching center named after Iowan and Boone and Crockett member, Jay N. “Ding” Darling, to provide opportunities for interdisciplinary cooperation across several departments, including natural resources and ecology, agriculture, art and design, journalism, and political science. These disciplines represent Darling’s legacy of achievement and will form a basis for effective development of conservation policies.

- The university is also developing a residential field laboratory in Montana that will offer hands-on, experiential training to the next generation of forestry, wildlife, fisheries, biology, and ecology professionals.

Undoubtedly, the development of effective conservation leaders to create and carry out innovative conservation policy is necessary to ensure a sustainable future; but ultimately, everyone must take ownership, meaning we all have an obligation to protect the environment we cherish. As local stewards of our natural resources and wildlife, responsible conservation can and must start with us. ■