

# CONSERVATION VERSUS PRESERVATION

There's Only One  
Logical Choice!

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The words “marvels of nature” don’t come close to describing the wondrous places that exist on Earth! This thought hit like a thunderbolt during a recent visit to the Galapagos Islands as my sister and I gazed in awe at our first sightings of iconic tortoises and iguanas. In some lagoons, hundreds of sea turtles swam under our boat. The government of Ecuador, aiming to minimize disturbance and conserve these beautiful and profoundly historic islands, restricts landing parties to no more than 15 visitors guided by trained naturalists. I listened closely to those naturalists, expecting to catch them on biological inaccuracies or spouting rhetoric about the “preservation” of nature. To my surprise and great satisfaction, not one used the “p-word” in reference to conservation policies and programs for the Galapagos Islands!

You might find the Galapagos an odd choice for introducing my views regarding wildlife management in North America. But the plight of the Galapagos Islands (i.e., crews of sailing ships removing huge numbers of tortoises for food) parallels what happened to many wildlife species, plants, and ecosystems in North America. Both represent remarkable sagas in which conservation, with its emphasis on sustainable use and active management, turned things around and enabled a future for wildlife and other marvels of nature. Yet many people reject those very tenets, supporting instead the hands-off philosophy of preservation.

Let’s review the story of wildlife in North America and consider why it was a conservation movement, not a preservation movement, that resulted in the world-class wildlife resources and wondrous places that we enjoy so much today.

*It is critically important that the continuing evolution of natural resource policies be driven by science rather than the emotional arguments of special-interest groups.*

# POSITION OF THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB

## DEFINING WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

### Situational Overview

Conservation and preservation are two different philosophies. Conservation is the wise and prudent use of natural resources without waste. It includes protection from illegal and unethical use. Preservation is the protection from use or spoilage and may include passive or non-consumptive use.

The diverse and abundant wildlife populations that exist in Canada and America today are primarily the result of conservation and not preservation, as many are now being led to believe. To gain popularity for their beliefs, preservationists are now calling themselves conservationists, and the preservation organizations that have emerged are being referred to in the media as conservation organizations. Further, dictionaries are now defining conservation as “preservation and protection.” Consequently, the successful track record of conservation is being confused with and undermined by preservationist philosophies that pose a threat to effective wildlife conservation.

When the Boone and Crockett Club was founded in 1887 by Theodore Roosevelt and George Bird Grinnell, the word conservation did not appear in the English language. An overall philosophy of sustainability and ethically using only what natural resources were necessary and a concern for over-use did not exist. The conservation philosophy was actually counter to the prevailing belief at the time that natural resources, especially wildlife, were inexhaustible, there for unlimited take, and by any means possible. As a result of widespread market hunting of many species of wildlife and outright extinction of some, a new governing principle was needed for the human-natural resources relationship. Some proposed that non-use or preservation – preserving wildlife and other natural resources without consumptive use by humans – was the answer. The Boone and Crockett Club believed this view was unrealistic, and that attempting to remove humans from the equation would devalue and thereby diminish wildlife resources even further. The Club championed an approach that would balance human needs with those of wildlife, and would create a concept of sustainable use.

George Bird Grinnell originally coined the term conservation and defined it as, “wise and prudent use without waste.” With the support of the Club and through his presidential administration, Theodore Roosevelt nationalized the concept of conservation. Wise and prudent use backed by laws and science became the widely accepted model for the treatment of natural resources, including wildlife, timber, water and soils. The concept of complete preservation, non-use, or non-consumptive use was kept for national parks.

Today, preservationist attitudes have emerged with the belief that our current wildlife and natural resource diversity and abundance happened by accident and not by active management, commonly referred to as “the balance of nature” or letting nature take its course. This belief is based on the notion that if we remove human access, use, and active management from the equation and set aside protected areas; wildlife and natural systems will thrive on their own. This may have been true 10,000 years ago; not so in today’s world full of people, with more on the way. Preservationists further believe that wildlife is not a resource to use, that wildlife should only have an esthetic and not an economic or consumptive value, and that killing wildlife through regulated hunting or any active management is unnecessary. Unfortunately, the “balance of nature” that produces pristine wilderness is a myth that many would like to believe. Science has shown there is no such thing as a balance of nature. The wildlife and natural resource diversity and abundance that now exists in countries that embrace conservation is because of hands-on active management and sustainable use of ever-changing ecosystems, not in spite of it.

### Position

The Boone and Crockett Club believes that conservation and conservationist organizations should not be confused with preservation and preservationist organizations and that the two distinctly different concepts and their respective ethics should not be confused either.

The Club supports the definition of conservation as wise and prudent use, without waste. The Club supports the principle, as did our founder, Theodore Roosevelt, “that conservation means development as much as it does protection.”

The Club adopts the view that complete preservation of wildlife and other natural resources from ethical and sustainable consumptive uses by humans breaks the fundamental roles that humans have always played in the ecosystems they inhabit and depend upon for meaning and well being.

The Club further finds that conserving wildlife and other natural resources into the future will require the same advocacy and funding for active management that historical access to regulated, ethical, and sustainable uses of wildlife and other natural resources has proven to provide.

## Back From the Brink

Colonial North Americans viewed wildlife and their habitats as endlessly bountiful. Harvest was not controlled because in part, these animals meant survival. Colonists also viewed wildlife as resources for all people, not just for nobility as practiced throughout Europe at that time. By the early 1900s, the passenger pigeon, heath hen, and Carolina parakeet were extinct because of over-harvest via market hunting and habitat loss through deforestation. Additionally, game species we revere today, including elk, whitetail deer, mule deer, pronghorn, bison, wild turkey, and waterfowl were brought to near-extinction through market hunting for their meat, hides or feathers. By 1900, the situation was indeed grim!

Fortunately, some visionary individuals realized that the uncontrolled market hunting and rampant deforestation had to end. George Bird Grinnell, Gifford Pinchot, Aldo Leopold, John Muir, and Theodore Roosevelt were prominent among those who literally shaped the conservation landscape of North America. Interestingly, it was Grinnell who first used the term conservation, which he defined as “wise and prudent use without waste.” Theodore Roosevelt realized that a strong and highly organized effort needed to be undertaken to conserve America’s resources. In 1887, Roosevelt and Grinnell launched that organized effort by establishing the Boone and Crockett Club, the nation’s first conservation organization.

Job number one was to end market hunting. This was accomplished by Boone and Crockett members and other key conservationists working with the United States Congress to enact the Lacey Act of 1900. A subsequent milestone, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, greatly aided in curbing over-harvest of migratory waterfowl.

These conservation leaders understood the value and importance of natural resources and wanted them to exist in perpetuity. They had a key role in the establishment of national parks: first Yosemite followed by Sequoia National Parks in 1890. The Park Protection Act of 1894 was enacted to specifically protect wildlife in the new national parks. In 1885, the first Canadian national park, Banff, was established. It is often said that our national park system was established to preserve wonders of nature, and I agree that a key objective was to ensure that these sites would remain for future generations to experience.

*In the role of stewards, we must step in to regulate many wildlife populations as a part of sustaining well-functioning systems. Nature just can't take its course because frankly, there is no location on Earth where humankind has not had an impact.*

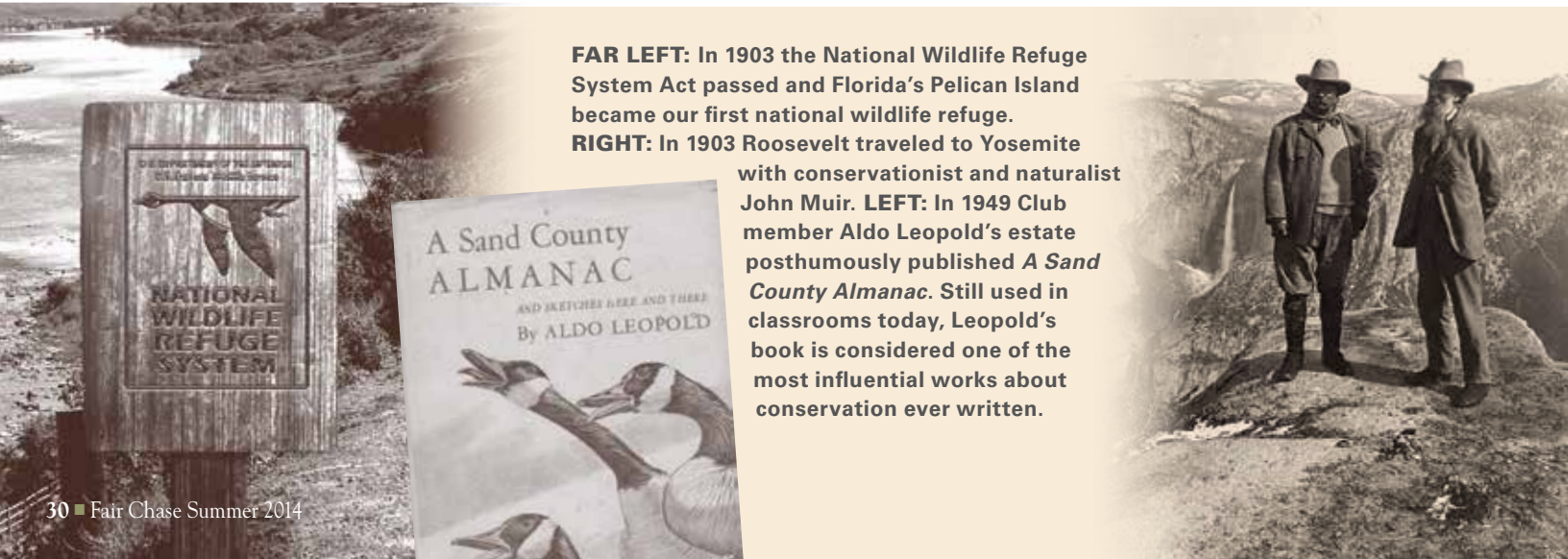
However, facilitating human use and enjoyment of the parks was also a key part of the original vision. That is why roads, trails, and lodges were constructed and concessions established to enhance visitor services. Today national park conservation includes diverse activities from people management (such as restrictions on visitation) to major biological interventions (such as reintroduction of native carnivores).

William Hornaday, a strong wildlife advocate, championed the creation of habitat sanctuaries (wildlife refuges) as a conservation measure. A contemporary of Hornaday’s, Aldo Leopold, supported a system of refuges across North America to provide breeding stock for hunters everywhere. The first

national wildlife refuge, Pelican Island, was established in 1903. The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act (1966) permitted “uses of refuges for any purpose” as long as it was “compatible with individual purposes of the individual refuge.” In essence this created additional sport-hunting opportunities in the refuges while facilitating management of deer, elk, and other ungulates that had become over-abundant in the absence of apex (top of the food chain) carnivores. Predictably, preservationists filed lawsuits to stop hunting in the refuges, but fortunately they met with little success.

Numerous federal laws enacted since the mid-1950s established national policies for management of natural resources: the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, Environmental Protection Act of 1970, Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, and Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. These laws and others all aim to promote sustained and wise use of wildlife, timber, and other natural resources. They were never intended to preserve our natural resources by letting nature take its course. Rather, they provide for sound, science-based management.

Passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964 shows that conservation leaders also recognized the importance of maintaining undisturbed wilderness. In designated wilderness areas, as in national parks, ecosystems continue to be shaped and influenced primarily by large-scale natural processes. But even in these cases, monitoring is required to ensure that global changes (such as climate and wildfires) don’t disrupt the ecosystems beyond their capacity to remain resilient. Key funding to support state management of wildlife populations and habitats comes through the Federal Aid



**FAR LEFT:** In 1903 the National Wildlife Refuge System Act passed and Florida’s Pelican Island became our first national wildlife refuge.

**RIGHT:** In 1903 Roosevelt traveled to Yosemite with conservationist and naturalist John Muir. **LEFT:** In 1949 Club member Aldo Leopold’s estate posthumously published *A Sand County Almanac*. Still used in classrooms today, Leopold’s book is considered one of the most influential works about conservation ever written.

Programs via the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration (Pittman-Robertson) Act of 1937 and the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration (Dingell-Johnson) Act of 1950. An interesting note is that Franklin D. Roosevelt, a fifth cousin of Theodore Roosevelt, signed the Pittman-Robertson Act into law. Thus the onus of restoring wildlife and fish populations fell upon the nation's hunters and anglers through excise taxes levied on their purchases of guns, ammunition, fishing gear, and other equipment. Over \$2 billion has been spent to date to conserve America's fish, wildlife and their habitats. Then and now, consumptive use has been the driver in bringing back bison herds, elk, mule deer, whitetail deer, wild turkey, and many other revered species from the brink of extinction.

### The Animal Rights Movement

Hunting regulated through numerous state and federal laws is a cornerstone to sound management of wildlife populations and habitats—not just game species, but also nuisance animals. Prominent examples are invasive and/or exotic wildlife species controlled through hunting to reduce harm to native wildlife and habitats, livestock, pets, and human health.

All societies include differing viewpoints on any issue, and hunting and active wildlife management certainly have their share of critics.

In 1947, Defenders of Fur Bearers, now called Defenders of Wildlife (Defenders), was established with the purpose to “**preserve** (my emphasis) wild animals.” PETA, which stands for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, was established in 1980 with the motto, “Animals are **not** (their emphasis) ours to eat, wear, experiment on, use for entertainment, or abuse in any other way.” These and related groups fundamentally believe that active management of wildlife and their habitats is wrong, and that humankind should let nature take its course. In other words, natural processes such as competition, predation, and disease should regulate wildlife populations and their habitats without interference from humans. According to this view, letting nature do its thing in national parks and designated wilderness is not enough; other public and private lands throughout North America should also remain free of active management. We will consider that premise in a minute, but first, let's briefly consider the history of animal rights.

Notions of animals having rights probably did not exist during the first attempts at wildlife harvest regulation by the Mongolian Emperor Kublai Khan, as

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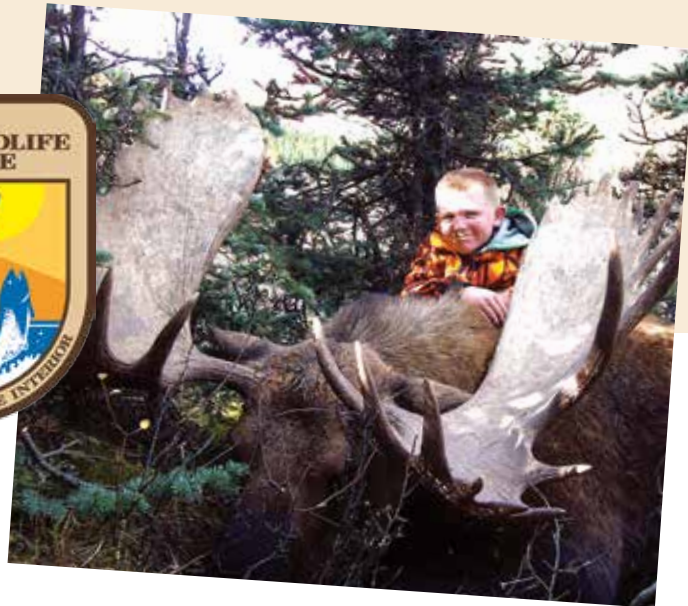
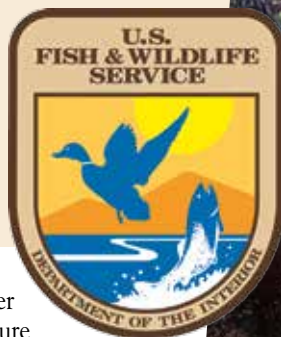
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described in Marco Polo's journals. But by the 1600s English and Colonial legislators did recognize legal standing of animals, holding them responsible for their actions in special courts that sought to balance rights of men versus animals. For example in 1662, a court in Connecticut tried one cow, two heifers, three sheep, and two sows for their crimes against man. Thus, concern with human-animal relationships and the ethics of hunting (and fishing) has been around for quite some time. What has changed is that just as the Boone and Crockett Club organized to promote the sustainable management of wildlife and habitats, Defenders of Wildlife and PETA organized to advocate the rights, welfare, and preservation of wildlife.

Do we share any common ground with such organizations, and do they serve a useful purpose? Before you shout “He## no!” please hear me out. For one thing PETA and others, in promoting passage of the Animal Welfare Act of 1966, have helped achieve substantial improvements in the use and treatment of laboratory animals and wildlife used in research.

But getting back to hunting, let's consider fair chase, a foundational tenet of the Boone and Crockett Club that has been around for a long time. In the traditions of European and other cultures, harvested animals are laid upon the ground and thanked for providing their meat and the sport of the hunt. Such rituals demonstrate the utmost respect for the harvested game.

We must continue to maintain federal agencies such as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to manage natural resources in a prudent manner, as well as educate our youth on the importance of accurate wildlife conservation. At 11-years-old, Austin A. Reed took this Canada moose, scoring 203 points, while hunting near Colt Lake, British Columbia, in 2012.



Whether they intend it or not, Defenders and PETA and like organizations keep us ever mindful that how we behave in our hunting activities is of great importance. Regrettably, not every hunter shows the appropriate respect for his or her game, or even hunts in accordance with fair chase principles. It is these individuals (I won't call them hunters) that Defenders and PETA love to document and use in their propaganda.

Here's an example of how PETA keeps us on our toes. Many years ago I was in a McDonald's restaurant when a truck pulled into the parking lot. A large buck in the bed of the truck was clear evidence of a successful hunt. The tailgate was down and the buck lay there, uncovered, with his tongue hanging out and blood dripping from his mouth. I spoke with the hunter and instead of hitting me, he thanked me and promptly raised the tailgate. He never thought about the poor image of hunting he was displaying by having that animal sprawled out in the back of a pickup truck in a public parking lot. These are the scenes PETA dreams of capturing on film to use against the tens of thousands of ethical hunters.

Enough for my positive comments about animal rights organizations such as Defenders and PETA. Let's now consider the other side of the coin.

### The Pitfalls of Protectionism

As a wildlife biologist, a real problem I see is that animal rights and other protectionist organizations base their opinions about wildlife management on emotion to the exclusion of well-founded science and theory. The federal laws I described earlier are not arbitrary! They passed through the gauntlets of scientific scrutiny, extensive debate, and modification before Congress voted them into law. Embedded within many of these statutes are mechanisms to conduct reviews of the science before actions can be taken, such as in the Endangered Species Act (1973).

In addition to helping enact key legislation, the Boone and Crockett Club and other early conservationists worked to create federal agencies (e.g., U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service) to oversee and manage natural resources in a

prudent manner that ensures future sustainability. It is critically important that the continuing evolution of natural resource policies be driven by science rather than the emotional arguments of special-interest groups. Some of these groups reject both the legislative system and the science. Instead of working within the system, they protest policies they disagree with by disrupting hunting activities, spiking trees, pushing referendums to ban hunting and/or trapping, and destroying private property. Such actions violate the rights of hunters, trappers, landowners, and others as guaranteed by Congress or state legislatures.

Organizations and individuals that promote preservation of wildlife and habitats believe in the premise that Mother Nature does best when humankind stays out of the picture. This philosophy is rooted in a love of animals, fundamental disgust of taking life, and the centuries-old belief that animals have rights. There are serious flaws in this reasoning. Humans have been hunting wildlife and manipulating their habitats for hundreds of thousands of years. Recent evidence suggests that primitive peoples contributed to the extinction of woolly mammoths, not by over-hunting, but by overkilling (i.e., running entire herds over cliffs). Early American settlers, fearing large carnivores, rendered the cougar and wolf extinct in the eastern United States and extremely rare in many other states. This absence of large apex carnivores means that Mother Nature is lacking a critical item in her toolbox. In the role of stewards, we must step in to regulate many wildlife populations as a part of sustaining well-functioning systems. Nature just can't take its course because frankly, there is no location on Earth where humankind has not had an impact. From radioactive materials and dust in polar ice, to ever-expanding distributions of invasive species, the evidence is clear that disruption of natural processes is a global phenomenon. Humans are and have always been a significant component of natural ecosystems (contributing the good and the bad) and the notion of suddenly removing

their influence is both illogical and impossible. Natural ecosystems are just too altered to be left alone.

### The Path Ahead

Regrettably, there is no easy way to halt the preservationist steamroller driven by emotions and perceptions rather than science and rational thought. Part of the solution lies in providing our citizenry with factual information on how policies and management choices affect wildlife resources, using all forms of media to share what we know.

I firmly believe that another key part of the solution is sitting in our elementary, middle and high schools. We must be ever vigilant that our K-12 educational system presents an accurate picture of wildlife conservation, highlighting the importance of management practices such as controlled burning, hunting, forest harvesting, and habitat manipulation.

Sustainable wildlife populations cannot be achieved through a preservationist attitude of letting nature take its course. Whether in the Galapagos or here at home, humans must take responsibility for the state of the world's ecosystems. It is not enough to acknowledge our impacts; we must apply the wealth of knowledge gained through science and experience in a sustained effort to set things right. ■

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