

# CAPITOL COMMENTS

## Who Are the Real Conservationists?



Rollin D. Sparrowe

President

Wildlife Management Institute

Professional Member

Boone and Crockett Club

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC AND decision makers must be confused by the polarized image of wildlife and natural resources. For example, environmental groups allege that logging on the Bitterroot National Forest is a scheme to enter roadless areas inappropriately and would damage fish and wildlife. Land managers and fish and wildlife professionals believe the same project is environmentally sound and will restore fish and wildlife habitats. The press focuses on allegations of wrongdoing, and ignores opposing views. Jack Ward Thomas calls this the “conflict industry” in which facts and tradeoffs necessary between those with differing values are obscured by dogmatic positions.

They are viewed as leftovers from the last administration; and are not more easily solved now than before. Perhaps also because the issues we hunter/conservationists care about — like balancing energy production and wildlife, clean air and water, and reversing habitat loss are equally difficult to solve.

They are correct, our issues aren't easy! What we want from any sitting administration is active involvement in developing solutions from start to finish. We can't be of much help, and will not “rubber stamp” our approval of policies or decisions automatically. During the past administration certain environmental groups had a constant seat at the table, and were constantly working with that administration and its agencies to affect policy without our input. It won't work any better if the current Administration ignores wildlife needs while they make plans for accelerated energy development, and then come looking for help.

In seeking higher visibility and a “seat at the table” on issues ranging from the needs for fish and wildlife in energy development to national policies for management of wetlands, we must take active part in the dialogue. The Wildlife Conservation Partners (WCP), for example, need a suitable mix of organizations regularly interacting with agency and administration officials on legislation, and rule makings within the agencies. We will have little impact on the outcome if we wait to respond to issues as they arise. We can affect change “the old-fashioned way”—with hard work and knowledge and expertise brought to bear with reasonable thinking.

Neither the conservation legacy of our Club, nor the power of the organizations under WCP can do much more to influence policy than get us in the door. Once that door is open, we need to be involved from start to finish, working with decision makers to find solutions. Perhaps for the

Club, the answer is more action by professional members who work daily with the issues. WCP is working out action plans to pursue its agenda “Wildlife for the 21st Century.” There will be a lot of work to do on issues that aren't easy.

Access to the Administration and top-level agency administrators like U.S.F.S. Chief Bosworth is improving. The Wildlife Partners Network (WPN) has suggested wildlife provisions for the National Fire Plan and weighed in on the status of fish and wildlife biologists in the work force, road management on the national forests, the proliferation of off-road vehicle use, and the visibility of wildlife in forest plans. The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Alliance has engaged hunters and anglers in expressing their needs for forest plans in the Southeast, Midwest, and Northern Rockies.

On the energy front, WPN discussions with White House staff, the White House Energy Task Force, Deputy Secretary of Interior and working level people in the Bureau of Land Management have focused on energy and wildlife. A simple message from the wildlife and fisheries communities to the Administration and Congress on the energy question: Any responsible national energy policy must include direct provision for fish and wildlife and its management. On this issue we must demand action from those who would serve our interests and ask our help on other issues.

A historical opportunity is emerging re: management on wildlife refuges. I've reported previously on the work of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) and its assessment of needs for the operation and maintenance of the Refuge Program. The growth of maintenance problems has leveled off, and we are finally reducing the backlog. Next in focus is funding for staff and management actions to improve refuges. A Centennial Commission on the Na-

**In advancing the visibility of the hunter/conservationist, we have been advised that the new Administration initially can't distinguish a conservationist from an environmentalist. Perhaps this is because lingering issues like roadless areas and endangered species are viewed as leftovers from the last administration; and are not more easily solved now than before.**

In advancing the visibility of the hunter/conservationist, we have been advised that the new Administration initially can't distinguish a conservationist from an environmentalist. Perhaps this is because lingering issues like roadless areas and endangered spe-

---

tional Wildlife Refuge System, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the first refuge established by President Roosevelt in 1903, has been appointed by Interior Secretary Norton. Contacts by the CARE group and partner groups in the WCP have shown the Administration that the refuge issue can be a unifying one. Secretary Norton has requested \$57 million of new money for refuges for FY 2003, the largest increase ever. The Club is proud to have Dan Pedrotti as a member of the Commission, and we look forward to working with Dan to capitalize on this opportunity for the future of the refuge system.

So how do we hunter/conservationists differentiate ourselves from others who advocate help for wildlife and the environment? We can't rest only on our record. Though hunters and anglers have led and paid for most of the efforts

to set aside public lands and conserve fish and wildlife, such credentials are lost on people with no background in that history, and there are many more well organized voices with different objectives than ours. But we can build on that legacy. Our approach to conservation differs from that of many environmental activists in its recognition of the needs of people, those on the land and citizens at large. It differs from that of regulatory-minded groups in seeking fish and wildlife policy and programs that will last and be widely supported. We still believe that careful management based on science is the best way to deal effectively with a landscape widely changed by the hand of man. We recognize that no management may work in certain circumstances, but in most, professional intervention is necessary.

Some good news in the turmoil of Washington amidst the de-

bate about campaign finance reform and the hoopla surrounding Enron: Steve Williams was finally confirmed in the second week of February as the 14th director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He and his family endured a long and frustrating wait. His first statement to agency employees embraced partnerships, endorsing conservation as protection of the resource while providing public access to it and accommodating other appropriate uses as well. One of the main things he hopes to accomplish as Director is to strengthen partnerships and restore those that have been strained. In his confirmation testimony last fall, he focused on the need to mend fences with the hunting and angling community and all the others who enjoy the great outdoors. We look forward to working with him, and know he will need our help for this difficult job. He is our kind of conservationist. ▲▲▲