

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



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## Anatomy of Risk

What does the word “risk” mean to you? I have pondered what it means to me and how I view risk. We frequently hear the word “risk” many times in the

course of a week, consider risk in the course of work, and hear it discussed in the print and television media. We hear about risk as it relates to military and security matters, political issues, and in personal affairs. Webster’s dictionary says that risk is a “peril, danger, or hazard.” There are various kinds of risk including calculated risk, measured risk, and reckless risk to name a few. We make risk assessment, individual and collective, on a daily basis. The challenge is in deciding how much to risk and why.

I think often of the risks taken by early Members of the Boone and Crockett Club – including such men as Theodore Roosevelt, George Bird Grinnell, Gifford Pinchot, and Aldo Leopold – as they met the conservation challenges of their times

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head on. They quickly recognized that as the population exploded in the American West, market hunting, land abuse in the form of unregulated mining, grazing, timbering, and farming were causing irreparable damage to the land and wildlife. They understood that, by and large, the only real chance of success rested in combining both utilitarian and preservationist approaches in a coherent whole, based on the “best science” of the time. It is nothing short of amazing that their diligent work resulted in the founding of the forest reserves, the national parks, and the wildlife refuge system.

Earlier this year, Club Member Dale Bosworth (who is also the current Chief of the U.S. Forest Service) spoke at a meeting in California, and highlighted current and evolving natural resource management challenges for which he elicited help. These issues included habitat fragmentation, invasive plant species, forest health, and inappropriate use of all-terrain vehicles. In looking at these and other issues, Club Members came face to face with a question – do we want to assume a leadership role in addressing these and other such problems? There is risk of course. But, where does the greater risk lie – in doing nothing or in taking a stand?

Some might say, “Why bother?” In seeking an answer, I pondered 116 years of the Club’s history and sought answers in the Club’s reaction to challenges and risks of the past. Had our predecessors looked away from the challenges – maybe they were opportunities – of their day would we have our national parks, national forests, and wildlife refuges that exist today? Would market hunting have driven species to extinction? Would we be hunting today under the standards of fair chase?

As risk is an inevitable part of existence – for organizations, as well as individuals – it is essential that the Club take risks in taking on issues that will determine if the next generation of Americans will retain the right to hunt and have places to hunt. Such are legacies from our predecessors and hold in trust for our successors. We can choose to enter the fray or stand aside. There are risks in both courses of action. If we stand aside or “play it safe” there are risks to our very reason for existence. If we wait until decisions are reached and then protest we are no

longer leaders. Or, should we be leaders and accept the slings and arrows that, at this moment in American history are hurled at those who engage in the great conservation debate on the side of what one of the early members referred to as “wise use?” Do we stand up for fair chase hunting when it is under attack? There is risk no matter what the course of action. But, I think a look backward to those who came before points out the way we must go.

Fifteen years ago, the Club decided to concentrate on those issues that lie at the heart of our being – ethical hunting, record keeping, conservation, and education. Now, we are coming to realize that we are faced with other challenges as we debate new issues that relate to our core values. Stepping beyond our “home range” will entail risks – the largest of which could be division in our membership as we debate those issues. Our bonds may be tested by these risks, but I don’t believe we can shy away from our destiny so proudly displayed in our history of accepted risk and marked achievement. I believe that we can heed that old adage evoked when risks of division are high, “Come, let us reason together.” The stakes are too high to do otherwise.

To begin our journey, we must understand the relative risks of action versus inaction. We can look for guidance in the past but this is our time upon our stage with a chance to make a difference for conservation and for fair chase hunting. Our Members of today are no less dedicated, no less competent, with no less potential than those who came before us. For 116 years, Club Members have accepted risks, worked through more contentious issues than those we face today. And, over and over, on issue after issue, the Club made a difference. Conservation in this country is, and always will be, a work in progress. Now is our time in the sun. It is up to us to make a difference. In order to make a difference we must put aside the little things and keep our eye on the prize – the continuation of fair chase hunting in the context of good conservation practices.

Yes, there are risks in action. But, inaction and complacency produce even greater risks of losing all that we have inherited and sustained for our 116-year history. Do we even have a choice? Not really. ■