

CAPITOL COMMENTS



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Developing Conservation Leaders

The Boone and Crockett Club is no stranger to conservation leadership. Through the years, renowned Club members became some of the most celebrated conservation leaders in the world. They faced tremendous

obstacles to conservation, but they overcame those obstacles as individuals and as part of an organization.

Who will be tomorrow's leaders? The current obstacles that face wildlife conservation grow each day as the human population and its inherent impacts increase across diverse landscapes. The retirement rate of current wildlife professionals exacerbates the leadership vacuum.

Conservation leaders are needed now and into the future to address these impacts and ensure that wildlife and those that appreciate wildlife endure.

The National Conservation Leadership Institute (NCLI) was specifically designed to develop a network of professional wildlife conservationists who have and will assume important leadership positions at federal, state, and tribal agencies and at private organizations and corporations. Last November, 35 of the nation's best and brightest fish and wildlife professionals attended a 10-day residency program at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's extraordinary National Conservation Training Center. These NCLI Fellows were trained by instructors from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and selected luminaries from the conservation field.

The Boone and Crockett Club and its members assumed a significant position in the establishment of and instruction at the NCLI. John Baughman played an integral role in shepherding this project from an idea to a reality. John, Lowell Baier, Bob Model, Max Peterson, Matt Hogan, and I have served on the NCLI Board. Jack Ward Thomas, Max and I had the privilege of addressing the NCLI Fellows during their stay at the training center.

The Fish and Wildlife Service, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Management Assistance Team, and conservation organizations were instrumental in executing different aspects of the program. Distinguished state fish and wildlife agency directors and other invited speakers discussed their personal stories of conservation leadership and its relevance to their careers and the nation's conservation efforts. Those of us who had the opportunity to spend some time at the training center were impressed with both the quality of presentations and more importantly, the quality of NCLI Fellows.

The residency curriculum involved instruction and discussions on adaptive leadership concepts, team organization,

months back at their real jobs, Fellows and NCLI staff gathered at Big Cedar Lodge in Missouri to share experiences and secure their professional peer network that will support them throughout their entire fish-and-wildlife careers.

The real proof of training and instruction effectiveness is the feedback from the Fellows themselves. Here are some comments from the Fellows report:

"A fantastic lineup of leaders and educators with an excellent focus on leadership."

"A topnotch training opportunity. Five stars! This has truly been life- and career-altering training."

"Overall the experience was tremendous... I believe [it] increased my value in the conservation environment."

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planning, self-assessment, conservation history, challenges, conflict resolution, and media relations. Each of these instruction areas were tied to real conservation case histories presented by active and retired conservation professionals. NCLI Fellows also traveled to Washington, where they met with conservation organization leaders, business groups, administration, agency and congressional staff. This level of instruction and exposure to leadership principles and leaders themselves is unprecedented in the conservation field.

The work of the NCLI Fellows did not stop with the 10-day residency experience. The total NCLI experience included a five-month period where Fellows, working through peer consulting groups, tackled professional leadership challenges, shared advice, and provided support to one another. They also developed new attitudes, tools, and skills to address the tough problems they experienced at work. After five

These were some of the rave reviews from the 2006 inaugural session of this leadership development program. The 2007 NCLI Class and beyond promise to be even better as NCLI staff receive feedback and adapt the curricula and instructors to meet the needs of future participants.

Interest in the NCLI program from federal, state and tribal agencies, conservation organizations, and conservation-related business and industry personnel is tremendous. Demand truly exceeds supply. The NCLI Board is looking at opportunities to expand the leadership development program while maintaining the quality of the experience.

Boone and Crockett Club Members should be proud of their involvement in this innovative and important effort. Some have given their personal time and financial donation. Also, the Club has recognized the importance of future leaders for wildlife conservation and hunting opportunities by donating funds to the effort.

I would challenge all Club members to consider the necessity of effective leadership in facing the challenging times ahead for wildlife conservation. Then, consider what your contribution to wildlife conservation leadership will be. ■