Trade Offs

Energy Development and Fish and Wildlife Resources

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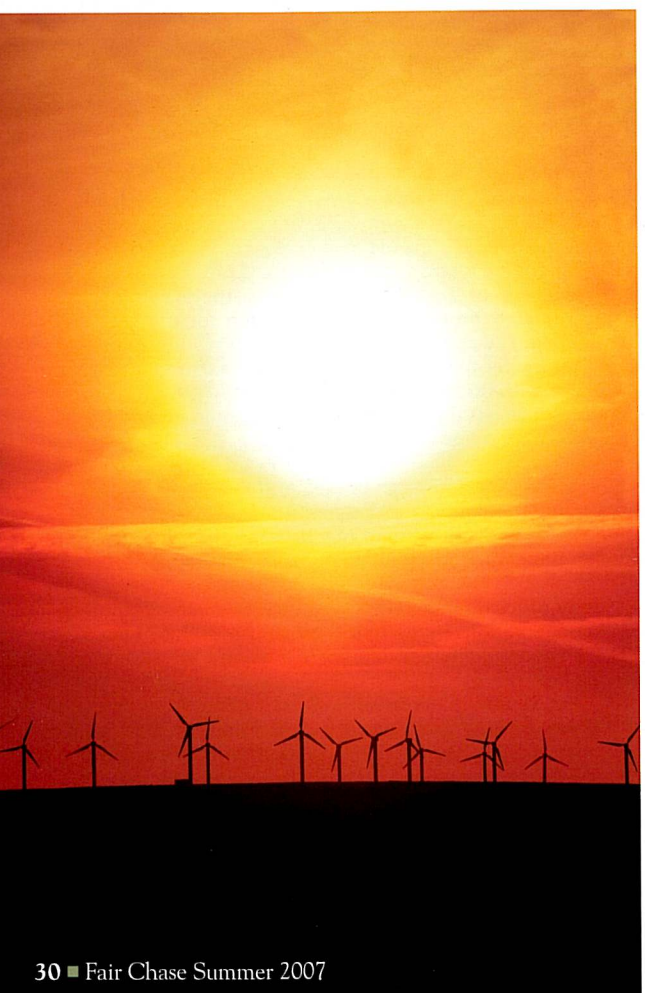
EDITOR'S NOTE: This material is excerpted from John Baughman's presentation during the 72nd North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference. The presentation was titled, *Energy Development and Fish and Wildlife Trade Off.*

Given my background on the evolution of trade-offs between energy development and fish and wildlife resources, I would like to offer a few observations on why we don't do better in balancing these trade-offs and how we might do better in the future.

There are trade-offs in wildlife and wildlife habitat whenever there is any type of energy development. On a site-specific scale, wildlife habitat is lost and wildlife is displaced from the land directly disturbed for well pads, roads, storage tanks, and other facilities. Wildlife populations can be disturbed over a far greater area depending on timing, duration, and intensity of development; noise; human presence; and compounding problems from other land uses, weather, and other factors.

Avoiding these losses during energy development depends far less on our technical ability to drill better wells, erect more bird-friendly wind turbines, or develop better science about energy development's impacts on wildlife. Instead, conserving habitat and wildlife hinges on our ability to work together.



A Common Goal

Nearly all of us in the energy/wildlife game share a common goal: cheap, reliable energy and a healthy environment — including abundant wildlife. If we want to achieve both of these outcomes, the players must work together.

Unfortunately, organizational or personal values and agendas seem to get in the way. There are a few hopeful signs that these agendas aren't as intractable as in the past, but there is still room for improvement. If we want to better balance energy development versus wildlife habitat trade-offs, we need to learn to work together — and we better do it soon.

Why don't we work well together? I believe three problems cause most difficulties in addressing energy and wildlife trade-offs. Those problems are poor communication between groups; lack of common objectives; and an unwillingness to compromise.

Poor Communication

In the energy development/wildlife arena, we don't have traditional channels of communication and long-established personal and working relationships between the energy industry, the environmental and conservation community, and government.

In many situations we don't even have adequate communications and relationships between conservation and environmental groups or between state and federal agencies. We have lots of issues to address — things that are complex, like leasing, planning, permitting, reclamation, on-site and off-site mitigation and so on, but they aren't rocket science.

All of these can be improved, and any one entity could probably tell us

how, but between the major players we don't know whom to talk to, or where, when, and how to communicate.

So we fail to build the necessary relationships, we fail to clearly define the real issues, and we fail to make the needed improvements in each of these processes.

Meanwhile, domestic energy development rolls forward with a fair amount of waste for everyone, way too much animosity, and too much time and money put into paperwork and litigation rather than on-the-ground resources.

Lack of Common Objectives

All of us have been through planning exercises in which the facilitator asked us to come up with a common vision of success before we designed a plan to get there.

In this case, we can probably agree on the common vision of cheap, reliable energy and a healthy environment. But as we step down to actual development for a specific location, then mix in organizational goals (including money), our common objectives get fuzzy.

To those in the energy industry, success might be a vision of abundant, healthy wildlife but with cheaper, more certain permitting and regulations. To a state wildlife agency, the vision might include cheap, reliable energy but with current wildlife populations and habitat intact. To a federal permitting agency, like the BLM, success might look like a budget that adequately provides for the legal obligations of planning, NEPA, leasing, permitting, and monitoring.

Without a tangible, common vision of success all of us in the energy/wildlife arena are working at cross purposes.

Inability to Compromise

Many of the key players at the agency, organization, or corporation level don't have the ability or the willingness to negotiate in good faith.

To give students or young wildlife professionals an idea of how to recognize this fact, I recommend they read Aldo Leopold's classic, ***A Sand County Almanac***. As important, however, I suggest they read ***Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In***, by Roger Fisher and William Ury with the Harvard Negotiation Project.

The overriding theme of ***Getting to Yes*** is to objectively analyze the many small components of an issue, then negotiate on specific interests to reach a mutually beneficial solution agreeable to all parties, rather than bargaining on positions.

Too often, the key players in the energy/wildlife arena start and finish negotiations with "we absolutely have to conduct this activity at this location," or "you will conduct that activity at that location over my dead body."

If a company, agency, or organization thrives on positional bargaining rather than interest bargaining (we have all seen the emotional, sky-is-falling campaigns to raise money, lobby Congress, or influence voters or candidates) then they are usually contributing more to the problem than to the solution.

How Do We Do Better?

This past November, 35 of our colleagues from government, NGOs, and natural resource-based industries were selected as fellows to attend the inaugural session of the National Conservation Leadership Institute.

The institute was created to help address the impending loss of leadership in National Resource Conservation as baby boomers retire. The institute presented fellows with case-history lectures from some of the country's most recognized conservation leaders, past and present. Leadership experts from Harvard's Kennedy Business School wove the whole program into a cohesive package based on the concept of "adaptive leadership."

Adaptive leadership has two main

components: Solving technical problems by systematically applying existing knowledge and skills (this is what good managers do); and crafting new solutions for new problems (this is what good leaders do).

We have had energy development in the past, and we have good techniques to drill a better, less intrusive well; issue a permit; lease land; write a federal land use plan; or do a habitat improvement project. But we have never had energy development on such a broad, varied, and intensive basis. We are addressing the current situation by trying to do the same things we have always done only we try to do them faster and often with less money and manpower, i.e.: we have been trying to apply a technical solution to an adaptive problem. Einstein said it best, "We can't expect to solve today's problems with the same level of thinking that created them."

Leadership is defined as the ability to get people to willingly do something that you think must be done. In the energy/wildlife arena, there is plenty of opportunity for leadership at all levels (starting with the drillers, biologists, and local citizens on the ground), but if we really want to be successful at a state and regional level it will require the sustained commitment of those who have the authority and are willing to exercise the leadership to implement change.

As I mentioned earlier, there are some positive signs. The Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative is one of these, where Secretary Kempthorne and Governor Freudenthal working with Kathleen Clarke, Jim Hughes, and Bob Bennett of BLM and Terry Cleveland and John Emmerich of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department put together a major initiative to capitalize on the assets of regional energy development and hopefully an appropriation for the "Healthy Lands Initiative" to actually enhance wildlife habitat — potentially over millions of acres.

The long-term success of this initiative and at least four other efforts included in the Healthy Lands Initiative will depend on the continued commitment of those who can make things happen, the dedicated engagement of the right people in the energy industry and the conservation and environmental communities, the establishment of lasting and productive working relationships, and ultimately measurable results on-the-ground.

While I am not ready to proclaim victory, I am willing to proclaim that efforts like these are a big step in the right direction. ■

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John Baughman was a biologist and administrator with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department during several oil and gas booms, a coal boom, uranium boom, wind-energy development, and other powerplants and hydropower projects. He also worked for four years with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies in Washington, D.C.