

B&C PROFESSOR'S CORNER



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The Great American Experiment

During a recent written Ph.D. exam, I asked the candidate to provide me with a summary of the North American Wildlife Conservation Model. He was familiar with the general history of wildlife conservation in North America but fumbled with words

to describe a model he had not heard of. Had not heard of it?

The guts of the model have been presented to anyone interested on a CD, Opportunity For All produced by Conservation Visions and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation since 2006, written about in *Bugle*, *Fair Chase*, wildlife journals, and presented at professional conferences and meetings. After the exam I was reading the latest copy of the *Welder Wildlife Newsletter* where Dr. Selma Glasscock (B&C Professional member and Associate Director of the Welder Wildlife Foundation) had written yet another summary of the model. I called and asked what prompted her to repeat what had already been presented. I was again surprised when she said that she had asked graduate students during oral exams to outline the model and they were unable to do so. The newsletter was another attempt to get the word out.

The North American Wildlife Conservation Model is not cast in stone but is a living and functional account of the Great American Experiment, one that restored wildlife to this country and serves as a guideline for future success. The current model's origins lie in bedrock developed by early conservationists, including members of the Boone and Crockett Club. Theodore Roosevelt, John Lacey, W. Cary Sanger, and other Club members led the way. In 1930 Aldo Leopold and others presented the American Wildlife Policy, which laid further groundwork for the model. The model was established on two general principles: fish and wildlife are to be reserved for

the non-commercial use of individual hunters and anglers, and their populations are to be sustainably managed so their populations will be sustained at optimal levels forever.

These two principles have been supported by seven pillars or the "seven sisters" of the North American Conservation Model.

1. Wildlife belongs to the public and as such, other pillars arise (2, 3, and 4).
2. Market and commercial hunting is banned.
3. The allocation of wildlife is by law, not power, wealth, or position.
4. Under the law, every man and woman has an equal opportunity to hunt and fish.
5. Wildlife could be killed for food, fur, self-defense, or property protection. Non-frivolous use is not acceptable.
6. Wildlife is an international resource and should be managed as such.
7. Scientific management is the cornerstone to maintain viable populations

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Is the model perfect? Not at all; it is similar to democracy—not a perfect system but the best system available and one the world tries to emulate. Conservationists led wildlife in the United States and Canada from the brink of extinction to the successful system we have today but changes will be needed to refine the model and keep it moving forward.

If it is to truly be a model of wildlife conservation for North America, Mexico has to be engaged so its practices parallel those in the rest of the continent. And while it was the hunter and angler that society can thank for the wildlife available today, there are others that now play pivotal roles. Other parts of the model need to be refined as well. For example, there is controversy over special hunting tags where some states allow the holders of these tags to hunt year-round. Everyone cannot afford to bid on these special tags and even if they could, few are available. Is this equal opportunity? There are other issues that can be addressed to improve the model and The Wildlife Society has developed a committee to review the model and see where it can be refined further to more accurately reflect its success and future accomplishments.

This cornerstone of the wildlife profession and wildlife conservation is so important it will continue to be addressed in professional and lay publications—as well it should. Biologists are constantly reminded that their actions should be measured in terms of how they influence productivity (animals born per female) and recruitment (adults added to the population) of the wildlife they work with. We also need to be aware of our roots and understand how the profession has evolved. The tenets of the North American Wildlife Conservation Model should be stamped on the hearts and soul of everyone interested in wildlife, especially wildlife professionals. Only then can improvements be made to this historic, well-worn, model. ■

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