

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Wildlife Conservation Partners Summit



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The Boone and Crockett Club was founded in 1887 by Theodore Roosevelt and a number of like-minded associates. Their aim was to somehow turn the tide of abuse of wildlife and land that had thus far marked the 19th century. By word and deed they simply and adamantly stated, "stop the abuse," and made it stick. They were there at the beginning of the conservation movement as key players and historians recognize their contributions.

Much of that success was achieved by working quietly, but most effectively, behind the scenes to stimulate action, coordinate activities with other groups and individuals of like-mind. It is a proud history. And, there are

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Theodore Roosevelt
in a hunting costume.
Circa 1884.

lessons to be learned from that history pertinent to hunter-conservationists of today.

The continued conservation successes of the 20th century have indeed been remarkable. The struggle and challenges facing hunter-conservationists still loom large as we enter the 21st century. I believe that the period between 1990 and 2010 will prove as critical for wildlife in North America as the period of 1890 to 1910. And, the Boone and Crockett Club must have a significant role in assuring the welfare of wildlife – and of hunting – as did our founders and early members in their time.

During the very early years of the conservation movement, the Boone and Crockett Club and a few other organizations, stood alone with few members and resources. But, together, they were able to exert influence and power far beyond what cold-blooded analysis would have deemed possible. With cooperation came increased numbers, increased resources, and increased power to influence events. In keeping with the adage that "it is amazing what one can achieve when there is lack of concern over who gets the credit," the Boone and Crockett Club exerted influence, coordinated efforts, provided political leadership, and came forward with bold ideas tinged with idealism. Then, they made things happen.

Now, we stand at the beginning of a new millennium in a period that can easily be compared with the same period a hundred years in the past. Now, there are hundreds of "conservation" organizations with specific agendas that range from traditional hunter-conservationists to extreme preservationists. The halls of government at federal, state, and local levels abound with lobbyists proclaiming the interests and viewpoint of each group. Some observers have gone so far as to declare that there now exists a "conflict industry" that

thrives on the conflicts that surround the management of natural resources in this country. There is much smoke that arises from the ongoing conflict but little light.

Clearly, it is time for hunter-conservationists to seek and proclaim a vision for the future of wildlife and hunting for the next 100 years. I believe that timing is critical and the time is now. Clearly, hunters now compose about six percent of adult Americans. Equally clearly, hunters have provided most of the resources that have gone into wildlife management over the last century. Sooner or later, there will be some national effort to bring together those Americans who care deeply about wildlife – for whatever reason and whatever purposes – to "reason together." But, before that occurs, it would be well for hunter-conservationists to have cemented relationships and developed a shared vision for the future of wildlife and its use. Fortunately, there is a mechanism available to continue the journey begun by the Boone and Crockett Club at the turn of the last century — the Wildlife Partners Network.

This network was founded four years ago by the Boone and Crockett Club, National Wild Turkey Federation, North American Outdoor Group, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Ruffed Grouse Society, Wildlife Forever, and the Wildlife Management Institute. Members added later include The Wildlife Society, Izaak Walton League of America, and the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep. The network provides the partners current information on the hundreds of legislative, regulatory, and policy issues that could influence wildlife. Representatives meet several times a year to discuss shared interests and alternatives to benefit wildlife and its habitats. Each partner, individu-

ally, chooses how to respond to various issues.

The Partners also convene forums to bring wildlife conservationists together to solve problems or develop alternatives to pressing wildlife issues. It is this function and potential of the Partners that I want to discuss.

I have approached members of the Partners Network and asked if they would serve as foundation and catalyst for a "Wildlife Conservation Partners Summit" to formulate a joint vision for hunter-conservationists on several key issues facing wildlife as we enter the new millennium. I cannot help but believe that such an effort is not only prudent but essential at this critical juncture.

I have suggested a steering committee made up of representatives of Ducks Unlimited, Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Izaak Walton League of America, National Shooting Sports Foundation, National Wildlife Turkey Federation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Safari Club International, The Conservation Fund, Wildlife Management Institute,

and the Boone and Crockett Club.

I can visualize that the final plans for the Summit could involve 25-35 organizations with a collective membership of about four million members.

Several similar attempts in the past have failed. But, the need for such an effort is so strong and growing that, to my mind, it is simply time to try again. I have offered the Boone and Crockett Club as host of the proposed Summit.

I propose that the goal of the summit is to strengthen the partnership of hunter-conservationist organizations to protect wildlife and hunting well into the 21st century. The objective is, during the year 2000, to assemble together a partnership of 25-35 wildlife conservation-hunting organizations to identify and prioritize common issues and opportunities, and develop response options.

Our national policies are rapidly evolving through the mechanism of simultaneously applied and sometimes conflicting or overlapping wildlife and environmental laws as interpreted by myriad federal and state judges. It seems to me that our vision of

what we want for the wildlife of our country resembles the changing view through a constantly moving telescope.

It is ancient wisdom "that without vision the people perish." What is our vision for wildlife and its use for the 21st century? Should that vision continue to evolve as interpreted by bureaucracies and the courts no matter where that leads. Or, is it time for those who care much about such matters to set the course? It is the people's wildlife and I think the people should decide.

Obviously, the approach I suggest leans heavily on individuals and organizations of the hunter-conservationist persuasion. But, they have led before and can lead again as we strive to assure the future of wildlife and hunting in the United States in the 21st century.

If we can help make that Summit happen, if we can work with others to formulate a vision, and if we foster circumstances that help wildlife and protect our heritage and responsibilities as hunters into the next millennium we will have fulfilled our destiny. We will be able to look back at our founders and say to them "we kept the faith." ▲▲▲



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