

CAPITOL COMMENTS



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Conservation Leadership Today

Leaders have a tremendous responsibility to their co-workers, their organization, and ultimately their country. With this responsibility comes rewards, risks, accomplishments, failures, and change. President Harry

Truman observed that, "Men make history, and not the other way around. In periods where there is no leadership, society stands still. Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better." Although we often think that conservation leaders include only the likes of Grinnell, Roosevelt, Pinchot, and Leopold, there are conservation leaders alive today who are actively recruiting, teaching, and training tomorrow's conservation leaders.

Recognizing, as did Truman, that progress occurs when leaders "seize the opportunity to change things for the better," two new and innovative efforts stand out as providing effective conservation leadership for tomorrow. The National Conservation Leadership Institute (NCLI) and the Conservation Leaders for Tomorrow (CLT) programs are designed to address leadership at the professional and university wildlife student levels. These two programs are important efforts to address the impending and significant loss of retiring, "baby boomer" wildlife professionals. The loss of these seasoned professionals will leave a serious gap in the institutional knowledge of wildlife conservation and may ultimately lead to a change in the values of state and federal wildlife conservation agencies. As members of the Boone and Crockett Club, we all have a stake in this unprecedented changing of the guard that is occurring this decade.

The NCLI will host its first session this year. Approximately 35 wildlife professionals from state and federal agencies, conservation organizations, and industry will participate in an eight-month intensive training session which includes preparatory

study, a 10-day residency at the National Conservation Training Center in West Virginia, and a six-month leadership project. NCLI will bring together some of the best and brightest conservation professionals at work today. NCLI will immerse participants in a formal training session that includes national experts in leadership training and current wildlife professionals that are holding or have held leadership positions for years. Combining state-of-the-art leadership principles and teaching methods with field-tested experience, NCLI will provide participants with an extraordinary opportunity to learn from real-world examples and to develop leadership skills.

NCLI was conceived and developed through a collaborative effort involving the Association for Fish and Wildlife Agencies, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Conservation Fund, state fish and wildlife agency directors, Wildlife Management Institute, Izaak Walton League of America, International Paper, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the Boone and Crockett Club. These organizations, which have all provided conservation leadership in the past, have once again recognized the need for change and have stepped into a leadership role. Private foundations, conservation organizations, industry, and individuals have funded the Institute in its inaugural year. Future sessions depend on

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continued generosity from these entities and others.

The CLT program is designed to expose and educate university wildlife students about the role of hunting in conservation. A few decades ago, university wildlife students were primarily drawn from rural lifestyles where hunting and fishing was a routine family activity and an impor-

tant part of their personal heritage. Today, approximately 50 percent of in-coming wildlife students have never hunted or been exposed to hunting. In an effort to address this issue, CLT provides an intensive, hands-on experience for students. The CLT program recognizes that students, as future wildlife biologists and administrators, must understand the importance of hunting to wildlife agencies and conservation. The curriculum has two primary objectives. First, students learn the biological, sociological, economic, and personal reasons for hunting. Second, they experience hunters and hunting through field exercises that include shooting, hunting, preparing game for the table, and enjoying a game feast.

Currently CLT involves students from three major universities. This effort was spearheaded by the Wildlife Management Institute and with a generous grant from the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation. It is based on hunter-education projects conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Pennsylvania State University, and Colorado State University. Our collective goal is to expand this program to major universities throughout the country. As our nation continues its march toward urbanization and away from traditional rural activities that include hunting and active land management, it is critical that we train students and professionals in the values and activities associated with wildlife conservation. The CLT program has taken a dramatic first step in helping to prepare tomorrow's conservation leaders. As with NCLI, future financial contributions will decide the pace of this innovative effort as it expands across the country.

Conservation leaders have the vision to see beyond the current situation and chart a course for improvement. Each of the current individuals and organizations involved in the National Conservation Leadership Institute and the Conservation Leaders for Tomorrow programs share this skill and approach. Although only history will record if any of these individuals and organizations ascends to the level of past conservation giants, from my viewpoint, they all deserve our recognition for seizing the opportunity to make history and to change things for the better. ■