

ADVANCING CONSERVATION POLICY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

FROM THE
PRESIDENT



Timothy C. Brady
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In my last column, I discussed the many challenges that wildlife and natural resources face and the need for stronger, unified leadership; improved communications that reach a broader audience; and conservation policy based on sound science. It is hard to read, watch, or listen to the news without witnessing the many pressures threatening to further separate an already diverse group of people.

In North America, political power rests with the people. This power derives from a long history of pursuing independence and opposing tyranny ever since our forefathers settled this land. There are many lessons to be learned from this history. For instance, the original English game acts restricted hunting and the possession of firearms to the king and higher nobility. The relationship between personal freedoms, gun ownership, and hunting greatly strengthened the drive for American independence from England, as well as development of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

When reviewing accounts written by the early settlers of North America, there are numerous references to the abundance of wildlife—bison blanketing the Great Plains and ducks and geese so plentiful they would darken the sky. In fact, the stories sent back to England detailing the freedom to hunt without restraint became symbolic of liberty. Before 1850, wildlife was a free commodity. Those willing to hunt and take were rewarded with

enough food to sustain themselves and enough income to maintain their livelihoods. However, those less able or unwilling to endure the harsh living conditions often associated with life in the wild paid handsomely for the hunter's bounty. The market more than supported a dynamic trade in furs and skins and other wildlife products. Eventually, some states attempted to protect specific species during the breeding season by outlawing hunting during that time; however, these laws were rarely enforced.

During the second half of the 19th century, however, more influential members of North American society began to express their concerns over the reduced numbers and distribution of wild animals. Sportsmen, humanitarians, and naturalists alike came together to make the case that although wildlife supplied meat and skins, the ability for anyone, at any time, to hunt and take of their own free will would eventually deplete the resource. If hunting—whether for food or sport—was to be pursued and enjoyed by more than the current generation, things would need to change. Many of these realizations about the future and the evolution of our hunting practices and wildlife resources resulted in the birth of the Boone and Crockett Club. As our founder, Theodore Roosevelt, said, "Conservation of natural resources is the fundamental problem. Unless we solve that problem, it will avail us little to solve all others."

The influential founding members of B&C, many of

whom were concerned hunters themselves, decided that in order to slow the decline in wildlife populations, the status quo of virtually unlimited take would have to be evaluated. This meant changing the structure of property rights and writing and enforcing rules and regulations to deter harmful hunting behavior in order to sustain wildlife and natural resources for the future.

While this plan of action sounds simple to understand, it has become a very complicated matter as more and more factions of society have voiced their opinions. From animal rights activists to environmentalists, preservationists to conservationists, and sportspersons to private property rights advocates, priorities differ, resulting in significant disagreement on how to manage wildlife and natural resources.

This division is hurting conservation and is most noticeable when discussing issues such as modernizing the Endangered Species Act. We should be working together to make the Act more effective

in benefiting species and not using it as a tool to prohibit important and necessary efforts such as science-based forest management and fire prevention or renewable energy development. The continuous discord often results in policy gridlock. Inaction affects other species due to deteriorating habitat; it affects humans in the form of lost economic opportunities. Conservation should be a bipartisan, unifying effort and support changes that result in healthier populations of at-risk species and a better quality of life for all Americans.

Challenges to wildlife and natural resources are constantly evolving. Land management and hunting are being distorted by urbanization, demographic changes, and economic and political demands. Nonetheless, although some people may not be cognizant of the importance of these resources, they

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are vital to all citizens, and each person should have a vested interest in conservation, whether it is for clean water to drink, clean air to breathe, or just knowing that wild things and wild places exist for all of us to enjoy. Individuals, professionals, and groups—throughout the political spectrum—are all stakeholders. However, even among those who are fully aware of their stake, opinions and motivations about the best course of action for a given issue are as diverse as the citizenry itself and are impacted by a virtually limitless pool of variables. We face a moving target and must continually re-evaluate both fact and perception and adjust plans and expectations.

As we advance wildlife and natural resources policy for the next generation, we must find ways for all stakeholders—as diverse agencies, organizations, and individuals who do not always agree—to work together as coalitions, centered on a vision and mission, to address both challenges to, and opportunities for, advancing conservation. We must work across political party lines, get to know our elected officials and their record on natural resource issues, and help them

understand why supporting these issues are politically, socially, economically, and ecologically important. This will enable our community—those who wish to preserve our hunting and natural heritages—to remain politically relevant.

As a Club, we must better organize ourselves to influence conservation policy. We all have relationships with people that can influence policies to advance hunting and conservation for not only ourselves, but the next generation. For example, I have a relationship with Senator Lisa Murkowski and have worked with her to advance the Natural Resources Management Act—a very bipartisan piece of legislation that was recently signed into law. You can read more about the Act in the Conservation Policy column on the next page. Most recently, I invited her to be our Club's keynote speaker at the last Annual Meeting in Nashville, Tennessee. Historically, utilizing our personal and professional networks is how the Club functioned and effectively influenced conservation policy, and it is also how we should continue to function and influence policy today. In the grand scheme of conservation organizations, we are

a small Club, but we have a large influence. Our Club retains this influence because of members like you, and we need to better utilize this influence. I encourage you to participate in our conservation policy efforts and help us advance our mission. Theodore Roosevelt once said, "We have fallen heirs to the most glorious heritage a people ever received, and each one must do his part if we wish to show that the nation is worthy of its good fortune." As a Regular or Professional Member, or an Associate, it is your charge to do this. We do not just want you, we NEED you.

As concerned citizens and natural resource professionals, we all enjoy being in the field. However, if we are to have a future in which wildlife and natural resources remain an essential component of life in North America, and one that future generations will enjoy, we must possess and seek expertise in policy and communications, political and people skills, leadership and management tools, adaptive and crisis management strategies, organizational and team-building proficiencies, and much more. ■



Senator Lisa Murkowski spoke at the Club's Annual meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, in December 2018. LEFT TO RIGHT: Verne Martell, Senator Lisa Murkowski, Betty Brady, and B&C President Tim Brady.



THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB ASKS THAT YOU PLEASE THANK OUR TRAILBLAZERS WITH YOUR PATRONAGE.