

# THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

## Preserving Our Wildlife Cultural Heritage for the Next 100 Years

**Some years ago, when** desert bighorn sheep were being reintroduced into the mountains of west Texas, I commented on how wonderful it would be if in ten years we would have a population large enough to allow legal sheep hunting. My good friend, Pat Latham, felt my outlook was far too short. "What you need to think about," he said, "is not the next ten years but the next one hundred." As in so many other cases, Pat's profound insight took a while to sink in. But it finally did, and I now think differently about the future of big game hunting. I know that what counts is not what happens in 2010, but what we leave for generations hunting in the year 2100.

A hundred years seems like a very long time. I was recently musing about this while sitting in a deer blind in south Texas with my grandson. It suddenly dawned on me that tomorrow's hunters are not as far removed from us as we might think. In 1940, when I was ten years old, I was hunting and fishing with my dad. Sixty years later, I am hunting with my ten year-old grandson. Assuming that advances in medicine and better understanding of the aging process continue, my grandson could still be hunting in 2070. My great-grandson or great-granddaughter may be able to enjoy this sport through the next millennium. So it is quite possible that during my lifetime, I will know the men and women who will be hunting one hundred years from now.

In order to provide future generations with a hunting legacy of which we can be proud, we must think about wildlife hunting and what it should look like in the year 2100. We need to consider what is possible, and what we will accept. Scientists have to tell us what we can achieve. And finally, we ought to decide what we, as the inheritors of the greatest hunting era, can do about the future. It appears that most people would be

happy with 50 percent of what we have today. I understand why it is so easy to become pessimistic about the future of hunting. We are rapidly losing habitat for game animals, our population is growing, anti-hunting sentiment is on the rise, and the list goes on.

Fortunately, there are also some positive indicators. John Jackson of the Conservation Force is in the process of updating a pamphlet titled *The Un-endangered Species*. He concludes that almost without exception, the hunted species of North America, from wild turkeys to grizzly bears, are increasing in numbers. Based on information contained in our Club's recent publication, *Return of Royalty*, by Dr. Dale Towell and Dr. Valerius Geist, wild sheep numbers have increased over 44 percent in the last 25 years. Statistics also show that big game hunting is on the rise, and big game hunters are spending more money on the sport and more time in the field than in the past.

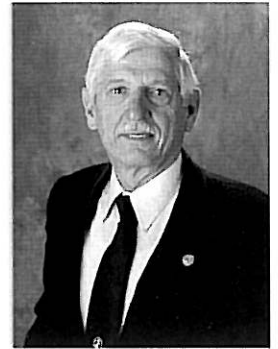
Another reason for optimism, that few people appreciate, is that the earth may indeed be in a warming trend. I am a geologist, and do not think that man's use of hydrocarbon fuels or other actions by civilization caused this situation. I think it is a natural phenomenon.

A graph of the temperature of the Sargasso Sea taken from a 1996 issue of *Science* indicates a pronounced cooling trend, from an average of 77 degrees in 1000 BC to about 71.5 degrees in 1700 AD. Since 1700, however, the temperature has been on the rise, even though today it remains below the mean of 73.4 degrees for the past 3,000 years (see graph). In addition, some studies indicate that North American forests are growing at a faster pace than in the past, and are storing all the human-released carbon. Because animals eat plants, they are multiplying as well. Despite reduced habitat, a warmer planet with milder weather could mean more wildlife.<sup>1</sup>

Another positive factor is the contribution of wildlife science and technology. Advancements in medicine and treatment of disease in humans will become available to our wildlife management departments for application to game animals. We are very close to developing a cure for pasteurella in wild sheep, and preventing the causes of this problem. Conservation and hunting organizations are beginning to invest more of their resources in disease research that will address problems specific to other species as well.

The impending crisis in wildlife management funding may also be close to resolution, at least for the near term. There is a very good chance that The Conservation and Reinvestment Act legislation (Senate Bill 25 and House Bill 701) will become a reality this year, thus providing millions of dollars for wildlife management and habitat protection at the state level. This will free up funds for our wildlife departments to again concentrate on research and wildlife biology.

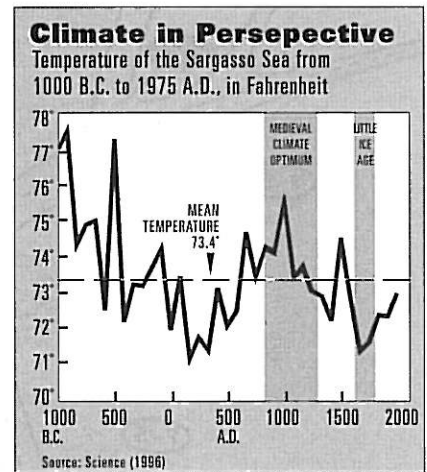
These factors bolster my confidence and increase my determination to reach consensus on a common vision for wildlife conservation for the next century—and beyond. I believe that if we set short-term strategies that can be reviewed and updated on a timely basis, we can begin implementing our common vision and lay the groundwork for effective long-term policies. The missing element is unification of all our resources to support a single vision, ideal, and method. The upcoming Wildlife Partners Summit will focus on this problem, and hopefully, advance a solution. ▲▲▲



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President

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<sup>1</sup> "Global Warming is 300 Year-Old News," *The Wall Street Journal*, 18 Jan. 2000.