

CAPITOL COMMENTS



Steven Williams, Ph.D.
PROFESSIONAL MEMBER
Boone and Crockett Club
PRESIDENT
Wildlife Management
Institute

Emerging from the Dark

Most of us have spent time in dark woods. We have observed our surroundings slowly transform from pitch black to shades of gray, then brown and tan, and eventually green and yellow. As the dawn's sunlight reveals the colors and shapes of trees, then branches, then twigs, the world slowly comes into focus. This visual awakening is accompanied by an increasing variety of bird calls and whistles as the sun slowly rises. We use this time to release tensions and blend our human form into the natural forest floor or canopy, and become a participant in the cycle of life and death.

Unless you have experienced this transformation, I believe it is difficult to fully comprehend wildlife, hunting, and hunters. Sadly, fewer and fewer people understand, much less participate in, hunting and the hunters' role in wildlife conservation. A particularly insidious problem facing hunters is the rapid urbanizing of North America, especially in the United States. In addition to the geographical sprawl of cities and suburbia, there will be serious encroachment on rural community lifestyles and values. General understanding of natural elements and processes is certain to diminish, as will appreciation for management of wildlife resources. Policy makers, legislators, and the judicial system will best be prepared to address these challenges by working with professional wildlife conservationists, engaged hunters, and an educated public.

Although many fish and wildlife species have national plans to guide management and funding decisions, there has never been a national plan to ensure the sustainability of hunting in North America. No organization or coalition presently exists to ensure that hunting remains an enjoyable and safe recreation, an economic mainstay for many communities, and an essential wildlife management

strategy and tool. However, a recent decision by the Hunting Heritage Steering Committee may remedy this situation.

The Hunting Heritage Steering Committee is comprised of individuals from 17 conservation organizations and state fish and wildlife agencies. At the most recent North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, the committee asked the Wildlife Management Institute to lead and coordinate the development of a comprehensive strategic and implementation plan to reverse the 30-year decline in hunting participation and to ensure that our hunting heritage is sustained throughout this century.

The Hunting Heritage Action Plan will be an unprecedented, comprehensive and coordinated effort involving federal, provincial, state, academic, industry, and conservation organization staff and members. Using the North American Waterfowl Management Plan as a model, this effort will involve the identification and analysis of existing programs and projects aimed at the factors that influence hunting. The plan will target hunting's and the hunters' role

in conservation, education, hunter recruitment and retention, sociology and economy, politics and law, outreach, and funding. This coordinated assessment and strategic-plan development will be carried out in conjunction with the relevant committees of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Boone and Crockett Club members can and should play a significant role in the Hunting Heritage Action Plan development and implementation. Club members can provide advice, information and resources to assist the hunting community in this daunting but critical project. The Hunting Heritage Action Plan proposes to:

- Identify, define, and assess hunting heritage investments and efforts of federal, state and provincial agencies, conservation organizations, academic institutions, and hunting and shooting sports industry;
- Develop and implement a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary, practical strategy to protect, preserve and improve North America's hunting heritage in collaboration with those same entities; and
- Create and sustain greater public recognition of and support for the values of recreational hunting, its role in conservation and conservation funding.

Imagine a time when society understands and respects our hunting traditions and the opportunity to participate in nature. Then make a commitment to our hunting heritage so future generations experience the traditions that we hold dear.



Armed with this comprehensive and collaborative plan to sustain hunting, we will approach foundations and individuals to provide funding for priority projects and programs. These priorities will reflect our collective knowledge of what is really needed to pass on our hunting traditions. For the first time ever, we will take a concerted approach to address those factors that dictate the future of hunting.

The next time you watch the world come alive from a blind, tree stand, or during an early-morning walk, think about how these experiences have transformed your life and connected you with your natural surroundings. Imagine a time when society understands and respects our hunting traditions and the opportunity to participate in nature. Then make a commitment to our hunting heritage so future generations experience the traditions that we hold dear. ■