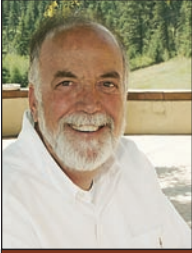


B&C PROFESSOR'S CORNER



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The Elephant in the Room

I was recently asked to list 10 of the most important issues related to wildlife management (including conservation) that wildlifers (and society) need to address. I prepared my list considering the four general ways

populations are managed: by making the population increase, by making the population decrease, harvesting the population for a continuing yield, or simply monitoring the population without any active management. Pretty straightforward. Creating the list of issues was a bit more challenging but was likely not much different from lists that other wildlifers would develop. I included the following topics (in alphabetical order):

Administration and regulations.

Both are extremely important as they provide the framework from which wildlifers operate and provide the mechanism for professional management.

Communication. This has to be on the list as nothing will be accomplished without effective communication among agencies, with hunters, and the general public is vital to creating an effective management plan.

Energy development. Energy development could easily be placed in other categories but it is, has, and will continue to be a hot topic in the management of wildlife.

Exotics and invasive species. As these plants and animals spread, the influence on landscapes and native flora and fauna is influenced, usually in a detrimental manner.

Global climate change. As temperatures change worldwide, the influence on

wildlife and wildlife habitats cannot be ignored.

Habitat fragmentation. For many species, fragmentation is like putting them behind a fence or isolating them from other populations, which chips away at their ability to maintain viable populations.

Habitat loss. Unfortunately, habitat loss occurs on a regular—even daily—basis that most have seen in their lifetimes. Even more unfortunate, it continues at an alarming rate.

Overabundant populations. With wildlife, more is not always better. When various wildlife species expand to the

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point that they influence society in a negative manner, they are considered problems.

Sustainable use of wildlife. Hunting has always been an important part of human society, but as societal values change, sustainable use of wildlife is not receiving as much attention.

Understanding life history characteristics of wildlife. How many management plans, studies, or reports end with the statement that more information is needed about the animal in question for a true understanding of the issue? We know a lot but there is still a lot to be learned.

One could quibble with the list and make modifications here and there, but for the most part, issues that wildlifers deal with

can be placed in one of these 10 categories. But making a list of issues is not helpful in dealing with wildlife problems without some kind of action taking place for effective management, even if it is the straightforward model that Leopold proposed. His model was to visualize the situation as it is, compare the situation to how things should be, determine the limiting factor(s), and then test the solution on a small scale before applying it on a landscape level or abandoning the plan (and starting over). In applying this approach to the issues listed, I looked for commonalities among the topics. It was obvious that the overriding cause of all these “problems” was an increasing human population, reminding me of the cartoon character, Pogo, who often said, “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

How prepared are wildlifers to deal with an expanding human population that influences habitat fragmentation, habitat loss, global climate change, exotics, invasive species, and all the other concerns they pose for wildlife and their habitats? Occasionally, a lecture that addresses the human population issue will be presented to a class of wildlife students, and some college programs may even devote a lab period to the issue of increasing human popula-

tions on wildlife, but the issue is not really addressed as other wildlife concerns are. Look at the recent efforts that are going into understanding how wildlife and habitat are being influenced by energy development. How about the millions of dollars being spent to understand how translocated wildlife or exotics will alter landscapes for wildlife? The point is that when wildlife is challenged, wildlifers (and society) are at the forefront of the charge to find solutions to minimize impacts. So, what do we do about the increasing human population that is the cause of the problems wildlife faces? It is a question that deserves attention, and something we all should be thinking about. ■

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