

B&C PROFESSORS' CORNER



William Porter
PROFESSIONAL MEMBER
Boone and Crockett Club
Professor
Michigan State
University

What Does It Take to Create a Successful Boone and Crockett Club Professorship?

No conservation organization has taken the remarkable step that the Boone and Crockett Club has. Establishing Boone and Crockett Professorships at major universities fosters a community that will have both immediate and lasting impact. It is a bold and

forward-thinking investment. This program is an important legacy of the Club, so as we move to add new Boone and Crockett Professorships at other universities, it's important to ask, how do we maximize our impact? What does it take to create a successful Boone and Crockett Professorship?

The Club's efforts at Michigan State University (MSU) represent the most recent effort to establish an endowed Boone and Crockett Professor of Wildlife Conservation. From the outset, the approach at MSU has been different from those at the University of Montana and Texas A&M University, and the program at Oregon State University, so it's useful to examine what has been helpful in this newest effort.

Successful academic programs require three ingredients that are always in short supply: space, talent, and money. Acquiring those resources requires a network of colleagues who can make things happen within large organizations like universities, government agencies, and NGOs. In the world of science, building large programs that can attract talented graduate students and ultimately affect policy takes time. Individuals can move everything forward, but the best way to accelerate the process is to put together a team of able partners.

At MSU, the decision was to build a strong partnership first so there would be a group of committed individuals already in place when the Boone and Crockett Professor arrived. The three principal partners were the MSU's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR), the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Boone and Crockett Club.

Universities have many ways to accelerate the process of building a new program. At MSU, the college renovated a lab in a prime location and provided funds to support two post-doctoral research

scientists. CANR's Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, the new home for the Boone and Crockett Professor of Wildlife Conservation, facilitated the admission of three doctoral students and a graduate student. AgBioResearch (formerly, the Agricultural Experiment Station) and MSU Extension set up financial operating accounts. All of this happened before I arrived. With this foundation already in place, we were able to devote more time to moving the research and policy agenda forward.

As a partner, the university's role is more than just helping with the start-up. The Boone and Crockett Club recruits people to its professorships who are good at getting things done in large bureaucracies. They know the secret to achieving results is to understand the subtleties of a university's procedures and build relationships with the people who are particularly effective within the organization. Every university is a little different, and of course, starting at a new institution means most of the subtleties and all of the people are new. Getting started is like drinking from a fire hose. From executing contracts to gaining approval for new courses, there is a lot to learn. It's vital to have mentors, collaborators, and good friends, all of whom I have found at MSU.

The second important partner in Michigan is the Division of Wildlife at the Department of Natural Resources. When I arrived, the division stepped forward immediately to make funding available to support a graduate student and to extend an invitation to attend strategic planning meetings. The division also helped establish a new cooperative research project focused on a particularly difficult issue with white-tailed deer. The division chief made time for frequent conversations, and we are building a strong working relationship.

Within the first 18 months, this partnership allowed me to address several important policy issues. For instance, at the state level, I testified before the Michigan Natural Resource Commission on a controversy related to baiting deer and offered opinion on pending legislation concerning wild turkey management in Michigan. On a national level, I spoke at meetings of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference about our work with chronic wasting disease.

Of course, the keystone partner is the

Boone and Crockett Club. Club members are essential to establishing the endowment that supports the professorship. Equally important, though, are the developing personal relationships. At MSU, we sought to build those personal relationships from the beginning. Early on we established the Michigan Boone and Crockett Partners. This group meets with the graduate students, postdoctoral associates, and me three to four times a year for business and often dinner. Along with Club members, these meetings generally include CANR administrators, the chief of the Division of Wildlife, the past director of the DNR, and a representative of an important philanthropic foundation in Michigan.

Initially, meetings of the Michigan Boone and Crockett Partners were devoted to discussing strategic planning for the Boone and Crockett professorship and affiliated programs at MSU. More recent meetings have focused on the research we are doing and our efforts to affect policy. Everyone recognizes that an important purpose of these meetings is to provide an opportunity for people to get to know one another. The graduate students comment that among the highlights of their experience thus far was an informal gathering we held at the hunting retreat of Club members in southern Michigan.

The growing personal relationships are producing important results. Club members have become active contributors to university programs. Some Club members have provided books and taxidermy mounts to our lab while others have made guest appearances in classes. Club Members have also begun working with individual students, introducing them to wildlife biologists throughout the Midwest. Other members are offering to set up meetings for us in Washington, D.C. with key officials in federal agencies. We all are learning to describe our research and policy initiatives in terms of the broader goals of the Boone and Crockett Club. A tangible result is the recent "Dead Deer Walking" feature article in Fair Chase.

The university programs of the Boone and Crockett Club at the University of Montana, Texas A&M, and Oregon State are making important contributions to wildlife conservation at many levels. We at Michigan State have worked hard to come up to speed. That we have made significant strides in two years can be attributed to partnership. ■