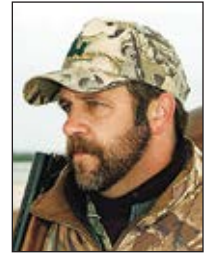


83 YEARS AND COUNTING

CAPITOL COMMENTS



Steven Williams, Ph.D.
B&C PROFESSIONAL MEMBER
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The more than 1,060 attendees of the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference heard powerful presentations about the need for agencies and organizations to become more relevant to the American public and to expand collaborative efforts to manage our natural resources. The conference, in its 83rd year, has provided a forum to discuss the current and emerging issues facing fish and wildlife conservation. In addition, the Boone and Crockett Club held its spring meeting and annual reception and dinner at the conference.

Following a well-attended plenary session, which included Keith Creagh, director of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and Steve Smits, president of Zebco Brands-North America, attendees could choose from four concurrent special sessions. Each session focused on resource management issues and solutions facing natural resource managers. Two sessions addressed the challenge of broadening the support for and relevance of conservation efforts by expanding the outreach to resource stakeholders. Another session described the success of collaborative conservation efforts in the southeast—the Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy. During the conference, there was an impromptu meeting that was intended to lead to the expansion of this effort across the nation. The fourth session focused on the impact of poaching, trafficking, and illegal trade in fish and wildlife.

This session complemented the Club's own report on this issue. While I obviously could not attend each session in its entirety, I did spend a few minutes in each. Without exception, the audience was standing room only, and audience participation was strong.

Aside from the plenary and special sessions, the conference provided a venue for conservation leaders from state and federal agencies, military professionals, national conservation organizations, professional organizations, academicians, and outdoor exhibitors to interact and conduct the business of conservation. More than 75 separate council, committee, and work-group meetings, business meetings, workshops, receptions, and sessions were conducted during the five-day conference. The Wildlife Management Institute (WMI)—largely through the diligent work of WMI Projects Manager Matt Dunfee—worked with Delaney Meeting and Event Management staff to administer the conference. These individuals and their staff have succeeded in hosting a seamless and professional conference setting for many years.

A consistent theme throughout this year's conference, derived from the foundation set during the last six years of conferences, was an expanded approach to conservation that broadens collaboration among partners and seeks to engage the public in recognizing the importance of conservation to all citizens. It was apparent to all participants that, although the history of conservation

success has been predominately financed by sportsmen's and sportswomen's funds, as a profession, we need to establish additional funding mechanisms to meet the public's expectations and the resources' needs. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA), recently introduced in Congress, would do just that. The America's Alliance for Fish and Wildlife campaign leaders held a coordinating meeting at the conference to discuss strategy to pass RAWA, which would redirect existing federal revenue from offshore energy and onshore mineral royalties to statewide conservation efforts. These efforts would be directed primarily to species in need of conservation so that federal protection would not be needed. This would provide business and industry with assurances that regulatory approaches to manage these species would be unnecessary or at least provide the regulatory certainty necessary to make timely business decisions.

The Boone and Crockett Club presented WMI with an award that certainly was the highlight of the conference for all WMI staff, past and present. B&C presented WMI the 2017 Conservation and Stewardship Award at the B&C dinner. The award recognized that WMI shares the same core values of the Boone and Crockett Club and its founder Theodore Roosevelt. The award states, "The Boone

and Crockett Club honors the past, present, and future of the Wildlife Management Institute and its unique role in representing the highest standard of excellence in facilitating strategies, actions, decisions, and programs to benefit wildlife and habitat, professional wildlife and conservation management and our hunting heritage." I had the privilege of accepting this award on behalf of the current WMI staff and the many dedicated WMI employees who have worked tirelessly for professional wildlife conservation since our inception in 1911. Once again, I would like to thank B&C President Ben Hollingsworth, Jr., and all the B&C members and staff for making the 83rd Conference such an incredible experience for all of us here at WMI. WMI is proud of this achievement, and we pledge our continued commitment to live up to its high standards as we continue our path forward into the future. ■

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Williams".

Read more about the Boone and Crockett Club's Conservation and Stewardship Award on page 56.