

TRADITIONAL USE ... A CONSERVATION ISSUE WORTH SPEAKING OUT ABOUT

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INSET PHOTOS BY AUTHORS



The Boone and Crockett Club recognizes the traditional and sustainable uses of wildlife as important and enduring bonds between people and nature. It is our position to support traditional uses consistent with the long-term health and sustainability of wildlife, their habitats, and the human cultures and communities who depend on wildlife. We recognize that wildlife conservation may in many cases include an element of basic human necessity, and urge that any solutions must include the people whose lives and livelihoods are at stake.

This text is taken from a position statement passed at a recent meeting of the membership of the Boone & Crockett Club. What is meant by "traditional use," and why would the Boone & Crockett Club state a position on this issue? Traditional use refers to the ways that generations of humans have used the wildlife resources around them to meet their various survival, cultural, and economic needs. These uses of wildlife represent relationships and traditions that are deeply rooted in human history and experience. The relationships may be of a subsistence nature, such as the direct use of food, skins, and other products. Traditional use also includes activities that support livelihoods indirectly, by generating income or trade that allows families and communities to enjoy a reasonable level of dignity and economic security. Whether ancient or relatively recent, human uses of wildlife are an integral part of cultural identities, family and community traditions, regional or local histories, and environmental ethics. Still today, issues of human health and community stability can not be separated from the health of animal populations that underlie traditional uses, customs, and values.

Traditional use is more commonly associated with developing nations than with the United States and its North American neighbors. Why, then, is it important for western conservation organizations such as the Boone & Crockett Club to

state a position? In this article, we explore the subject of traditional use in a variety of geographical contexts, making the case that it is a fundamental conservation issue that requires affirmation in both words and actions.

URBAN PERSPECTIVES

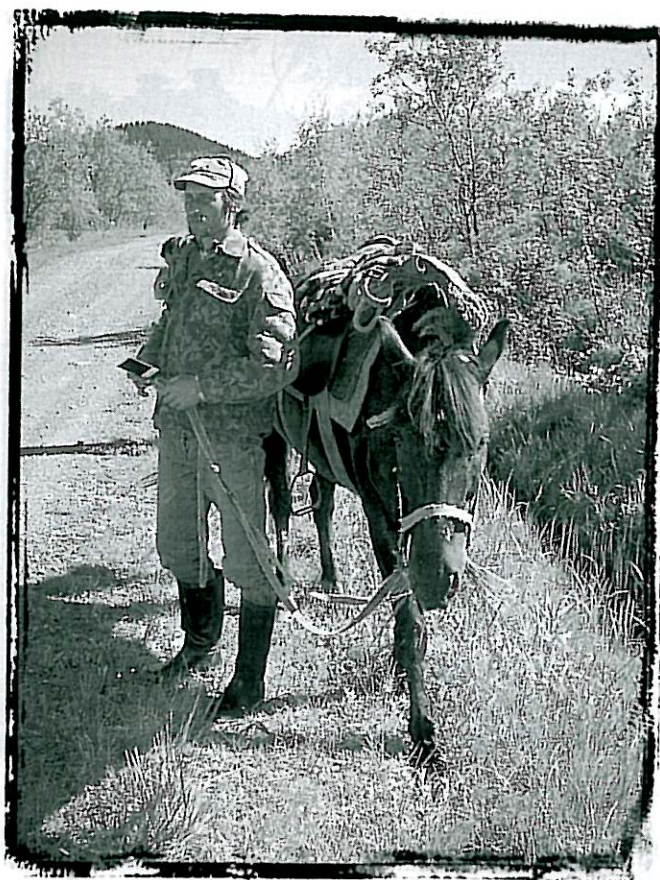
For many people raised in modern urban settings, wildlife is viewed as something apart from everyday human life. Such perspectives are shaped in part by documentary films and coffee-table books that feature the plight of threatened wildlife in far-away places.

Typically, the focus is on the behavior of individual animals or family groups, with little or no information about the humans who must use the same land and natural resources to meet their own needs. Lacking information to the contrary, urbanites assume either that no humans are involved or that, like themselves, the resident humans have choices available in such matters as what to eat and where to live.

Typically set in parks or preserves, these films and books provide a distorted view; in the real world, the majority of habitats must be shared by people and wildlife. The distortion feeds the popular notion that the key to wildlife conservation is strict protection, preferably in special, human-free areas established just for this purpose. Strict protectionism is a logical extension of the view of people apart from nature. However, such notions exhibit little understanding or regard for conditions in other parts of the world, where the lives and livelihoods of people are interdependent with the wildlife around them.

BACK TO BASICS: MONGOLIA AND THE ALTAI

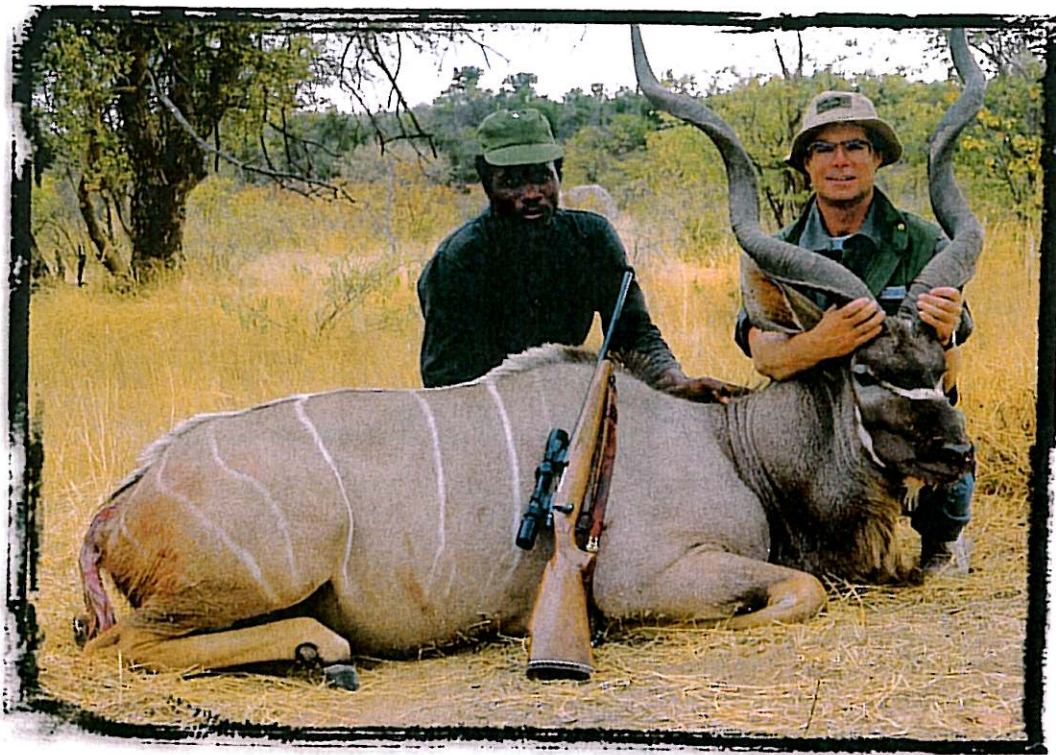
Local peoples often have a wealth of knowledge about wildlife, and deep respect, developed through a long history of co-exist-



ing with and using these resources. These bonds may be overlooked by conservation interests whose perspective reflects a foreign set of values, assumptions, and experiences regarding human/wildlife relationships. Where wildlife is in trouble, the usual, reflexive reaction is to judge wildlife use as a destructive practice that must cease. As a result, ideas for designing conservation approaches that "fit" the ecological, cultural, and economic realities of a place often may never make it to the table.

Our thinking on these issues has been influenced by our participation in conservation planning in other parts of the world. In recent years, we have worked in autonomous regions that, until recently, were part of the Eastern Block. During the Soviet era, land-use decisions in such places as Mongolia and the Altai Republic (of south central Siberia) consisted largely of top-down production quotas that had little regard for local preferences or traditions of resource use. Following economic collapse, peoples of the autonomous regions have had to address such basic is-

AN ALTAI FOREST WARDEN ON PATROL FOR POACHERS.



SUCCESSFUL WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT IN ZIMBABWE ALLOWS LOCAL PEOPLE TO SHARE THE BENEFITS.

issues as: Who should own land and natural resources? What uses do we wish to allow of those lands and resources, and how do we allocate those uses in an equitable, economically viable, and ecologically sustainable manner?

Working with a non-profit organization, Ecologically Sustainable Development, Inc. (ESD), we assisted Mongolia and the Altai Republic in the development of comprehensive plans for the sustainable use of lands and natural resources. The purpose of these plans is to improve the lives of local people through economic initiatives that conserve biological diversity, promote environmental health, and that respect the traditions and values of the people who live there. Through this work, we came to appreciate that this region has long and varied traditions of wildlife use. In Mongolia, for example, the opening of marmot season is an important yearly event for herding families, who supplement their income by participating in this traditional fur industry. Other Mongolians realize income through guiding and outfitting services offered to a specialized "brand" of foreign hunter. Maral farming in the Altai—a relatively new tradition of about 100 years—

is one of few agricultural pursuits that has remained profitable during these difficult times. Maral is the same species as our elk (*Cervus elaphus*); its medicinal values are highly valued by the Altai people, and the sale of antlers-in-velvet commands high prices in Korean and Chinese markets.

Based on these findings, we concluded that a spectrum of wildlife uses—from subsistence use to managed trophy hunting—should be a cornerstone of strategies aimed at achieving both wildlife conservation and economic objectives. Such logic is hardly universal among conservation interests, however. This region, having been closed to westerners until very recently, has attracted the keen interest of a variety of non-government organizations, including those (e.g. the World Wildlife Fund) whose mandate is protection rather than sustainable use. The approach of these organizations was strikingly different from that of ESD. Focusing on selected species and protected areas, their approach gave scant consideration of the cultural, social, and economic context in which those wildlife populations must exist. Undoubtedly such efforts produce results in the form of protected area

designations and increased international awareness of species at risk. However, we believe that more and better prospects for wildlife conservation may be found in the more comprehensive planning visions that encompass a sustainable future for both human communities and wildlife.

A CRITICAL LOOK AT AFRICA

Our experiences in Africa, primarily sport hunting in Zimbabwe, have affirmed our belief that strategies for conserving wildlife will be most effective when the needs, values, and traditions of local people are taken into account. We avoid the huge parks of east Africa; the experiences available there are too artificial for our tastes, reflecting foreign influences more than African realities.

The subject of westerners imposing their own values and solutions on African people and wildlife is thoroughly addressed in Raymond Bonner's 1993 book, *The Hand of Man: Peril and Hope for Africa's Wildlife*. Bonner begins the book with the observation that:

Western attitudes toward wildlife are fixed by National Geographic and David Attenborough documentaries. They depict the wonder and magnificence of the animals. But they provide little if any understanding of the people of Africa... The more Africans I met and talked with, particularly outside the capitals and cities, the more I realized that the way I, a Westerner, looked at wildlife wasn't necessarily the way Africans did.

Bonner explains that whereas westerners view African wildlife as a precious global heritage or something to marvel at, the African view may be quite different. Many Africans see wildlife as a critical food source in a land of chronic hunger; or, they may view wildlife as a threat to their life and property. The outcome of many Western conservation schemes is that visitors and other non-Africans receive all the benefits, whereas local people bear all the



MARAL FARMING REMAINS A PROFITABLE PURSUIT IN THE ALTAI REPUBLIC.

costs. These gross inequities explain why such conservation schemes are often fraught with poaching and other problems.

Bonner makes a compelling case that many Western efforts to save African wildlife are in reality an extension of old colonial views in the guise of wildlife preservation. Any hope for saving wildlife, he believes, will be found in programs of "sustainable utilization" whereby local people share in the benefit of wildlife and thus value them and work to protect them.

SUCCESS STORIES FROM HERE AND THERE

How can traditional use be integrated into strategies for wildlife conservation and management? A necessary first step is to recognize and respect the important connections that exist between people and wildlife. For many of the world's peoples, wildlife are a matter of daily survival. The linkages may be of a direct, subsistence nature: when food is scarce, people must kill to eat. Indirectly, wildlife can

threaten survival by destroying crops or killing livestock on which people depend. Can people's perceptions of wildlife as essential food, or as threats to daily survival, be turned around? Yes, but only if the relationships between wildlife and people are changed in ways that provide for the survival of both. Once these relationships are recognized, actions are needed to secure the survival of wildlife by making sure that people's basic needs are met. The good news is that plenty of examples exist to demonstrate that such approaches work.

In 1993, we had the opportunity to feature success stories in a session that we chaired at the First International Wildlife Congress, held by The Wildlife Society in San Jose, Costa Rica. The session was designed to explore the following question: Is it possible to achieve national and international goals for wildlife conservation in a manner that provides for the basic needs and values of local and indigenous peoples? People from diverse ecological, cultural, and economic settings around the world were invited to share their experiences. We sought examples that would represent different levels of implementation, from grass-roots to national, and that spanned a spectrum of wildlife management options including fee hunting, animal damage control, commercial uses of wildlife products, ecotourism, and more. The response was overwhelming.

Of over 50 submissions received, around 20 were selected for presentation and publication in the conference proceedings (Bissonette and Krausman 1995). The stories of human and wildlife survival ranged from the tropics to the arctic, from nomadic pastoral settings to modern towns and villages. At Ostional, Costa Rica, the future of the Olive Ridley sea turtle is being secured by an egg management program that provides food and income for—and depends upon—the local residents. In southwestern Rajasthan, India, the Ranthambhore Foundation is

achieving conservation objectives for tigers and other wildlife through projects that include cottage industries, medical services, education, reforestation, art programs, resources co-management, and other activities to remove people from "the edge," thus improving prospects for co-existence of wildlife and people. The International Hunting Program in Dulan, Qinghai, People's Republic of China, brings income and other benefits to the nomadic communities of the area, who in turn enhance the conservation success of the program through their anti-poaching activities and other forms of participation. Similarly, conflicts in Zimbabwe between wildlife and villagers have been turned around through the Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE), a program that promotes conservation of wildlife resources through utilization and that allows communal landholders to receive direct payment of income generated from local natural resources.

These examples illustrate that, even where people, land, and wildlife are under severe stress, it is possible to implement effective conservation programs. However, these efforts must provide means for rural families and communities to secure a reasonable level of dignity and economic security. To do otherwise is to ignore the basic realities of wildlife conservation and management today. The problem is not one of managing wildlife populations themselves, but rather in creating an environment in which humans and wildlife can survive together. The real challenge is to restore the balance of wildlife resources and human need so that long and successful traditions of co-existence may continue.

NORTH AMERICA: BRINGING THE LESSONS HOME

The examples provided, concerning people and wildlife in Asia, Africa, and Latin America,

may have readers wondering about the relevance of traditional use to North America. Despite the many differences, the principles of traditional use are equally valid. Here, too, people's uses of wildlife are integral to their sense of community, of self, and of place. A key difference is that, in North America, most of us do not require wildlife to meet our daily survival needs. Nonetheless, many individuals and families choose lifestyles and livelihoods that include traditional uses of wildlife resources.

For us personally, traditional wildlife use can be a matter of spiritual survival. When our careers took us to Washington, DC, hunting was an essential escape from the pressures of urban life. Life is more than mere survival; you have to want to live, to get up and greet the day. There was nothing in the press of people, the stink of stale city air, and the noise of daily life to make us want to greet the day. Without access to unconfined wildlife, and without the ability to participate in nature as hunters, our spiritual survival was in question.

Joining a local hunting club provided access to private land that, combined with escapes to other states and countries, made urban life tolerable for a few years until we were able to re-locate to a more suitable "habitat." But even here, in British Columbia, we detect a growing need to affirm the principles and values of traditional use.

Examples of the important and enduring relationships between people and wildlife are abundant where we live, in northern British Columbia. Most obvious are the First Nations (aboriginal) communities, where use of wildlife and fish for food, clothing, and ceremonial purposes reflects thousands of years of history and tradition. Wildlife and fish are prominently featured in the art, stories, and the social life of these peoples. Today's conflicts surrounding native land claims may be attributed, in large measure, to the inability or unwill-

ingness of non-Native people to understand that much more than economic issues are at stake.

Receiving even less recognition and appreciation are the families who choose to live in rural or "bush" situations where they can make a living as trappers, guides, and outfitters. Our neighbors, the McKays, are such a family. They are special because of the closeness and respect they feel for the land and for one another. Recently, Bernie McKay decided to share his family's experiences in a book, *Wild Trails, Wild Tales* (McKay 1996). In Bernie's words,

It seems there is always something to do in the bush. I have always enjoyed my work because it never seemed like work...It has been gratifying to see my children, especially my three sons, grow up with an appreciation of the wild country. My hope is that you, the reader, not only enjoy my stories but also gain in your love of our beautiful wild country.

Unfortunately, the more urbanized people become, the more difficult it is for them to understand and appreciate the families like the McKays. Even here in British Columbia, we are beginning to see threats to these traditional values, uses, and lifestyles. Last year a group called Bear Watch launched an initiative to stop the hunting of bears throughout British Columbia. Their stated reason—that bear populations are threatened, was unsupported by the data maintained by provincial authorities. Moreover, it was a ludicrous assertion for those of us who live in the bush and are accustomed to an abundance of bears around us. The other justification offered by Bear Watch concerned a problem of poaching (whether actual or potential remains unclear) to support illegal trade in bear parts. The solution, they argued, was to outlaw all legal hunting. Aside from penalizing the law-abiding citizens who hunt bears, there was a major flaw in this proposed solution. When the woods were free of law-

abiding hunters, who would there be to report or otherwise discourage the illegal market hunters?

The Bear Watch initiative was illogical because it was spawned by urbanites who do not understand rural realities, as they pertain to both wildlife and people. This lack of understanding proved to be the downfall of the initiative. In order to secure the referendum they desired, Bear Watch members were required to obtain a certain number of signatures from all ridings (voting districts) in the province. Starting their effort in the lower mainland, where the majority of people live in or around Vancouver and Victoria, the Bear Watch volunteers had little difficulty getting the signatures they needed for the southern ridings. With great confidence for success, they headed north to obtain the required signatures from northern residents.

To the great surprise of Bear Watch (but not to the rural folks), the drive for northern signatures failed. Unlike the urban perspective, the view in the uncrowded north is not one of wildlife and people existing apart. Rather, wildlife are understood to have direct and important connections to the livelihoods, spiritual well-being, and quality of life of rural people. Thus the people of the north, understanding that bear populations are not at risk, refused to support the Bear Watch petition. We suspect that for many, their action affirmed a belief that the traditional values and uses associated with wildlife resources are well worth conserving.

Although every human society is affected by the richness and health of its wildlife resources, there are some communities, not necessarily far away, where the traditions of wildlife use mean a great deal more. That is why conservation organizations like the Boone and Crockett Club need to speak out on behalf of a sustainable future for people, for wildlife, and for the diverse and enduring relationships that connect them.▲▲▲

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