

CAPITOL COMMENTS



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It is often said that “the only thing constant is change,” and so it is for this column. I now have the honor of writing this and future “Capital Comments.” Boone and Crockett Professional Member Rollie Sparrowe, who authored

the column for years, recently retired as president of the Wildlife Management Institute (WMI). Although Rollie claims to be retired, he has and will continue to be a major contributor to the wildlife profession. Rollie and his wife Bettina have adapted well to life in Daniel, Wyoming, but I understand that the area’s fish and game are on a high-alert status.

I have been asked to write this column as the new president of WMI. Prior to serving in this role, I was the past direc-

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tor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, secretary of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, and worked in state fish and wildlife agencies in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. My task is to keep you apprised of the goings-on (and there are always plenty) here in Washington, D.C., and to report its relevance to the national conservation scene.

During the past three years, I experienced the inner workings of wildlife conservation governance at the federal level. I was constantly impressed with the volume, intensity, and complexity of issues that crossed my desk. Equally impressive was the professional staff of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, state fish and wildlife agencies, and conservation organizations that rolled up their sleeves to tackle these issues. Individually, organizations have had significant input and impact. However, I also witnessed the growth and maturation of the collective American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP), which is directly responsible for the increased access that hunters and anglers enjoy with the Bush Administration. The Boone and Crockett Club has played a prominent leadership role in building a level of trust among AWCP organizations and the administration. Conservation has been advanced because of these coordinated efforts.

Maintaining this momentum will be a considerably difficult, ongoing, collaborative endeavor. As our nation confronts challenges on foreign soil and challenges to domestic security, grapples with rebuilding efforts on the Gulf Coast, deals with serious partisan divisions in Congress, tackles large budget deficits, and awaits the next crisis that is sure to rock Washington, D.C., and the nation, the conservation movement must continue the struggle to gain the attention of the public, the Administration, and Congress. The foundation that has been laid during the past few years by AWCP is sound, but future conservation efforts must not rest solely on that foundation.

Conservation efforts are fueled in large part by federal funding. Due to current events, FY 2006 budget reconciliation and FY 2007 budget development will test the conservation resolve of Congress and the public. We already know that the Departments of Interior and Agriculture are contemplating major fund rescissions to

help finance foreign and domestic programs. These rescissions threaten to set back Farm Bill Conservation Title funding, state wildlife grants, waterfowl habitat conservation, and private land conservation efforts, to name but a few programs that have previously enjoyed funding increases. In times of fiscal difficulty, conservation normally takes a back seat to matters of defense, homeland security, energy, and health and human services.

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In August, many of us attended the White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation in St. Louis, Missouri. This conference brought together administration officials and hundreds of individuals and organizations to celebrate how we can accomplish more working together than as individuals. Local, regional, and national groups presented examples of conservation success based on mutual trust and respect among sometimes seemingly disparate groups. These successes were based on collaboration and leadership that provided coordinated efforts.

On almost any conservation issue, the current collection of conservation groups has different strategies and messages. Individually these strategies have honorable intent; however, it is only on those issues where we form a common plan and voice that truly great conservation success is achieved with Congress and the Administration. Notable examples are the recent healthy forest initiative, wetland enhancement goals, and Farm Bill coalition efforts.

With the difficult issues that face this nation, the conservation community needs to identify leadership and better coordinate action to achieve our goals. Individual organizations are uniquely positioned to assume some of this responsibility, but together, all conservation organizations must commit their time and resources to advance our nation’s conservation legacy. ■