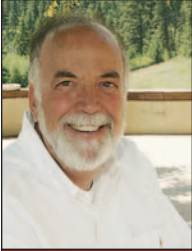


# B&C PROFESSOR'S CORNER

## Is the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation a Fad?



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Years ago, I was asked if science was a fad. It caught me off guard as the scientific process follows a strict process with little deviation. The scientific process begins with an observation from which a generalization is formulated and tested as a hypothesis.

The test either supports or rejects the hypothesis, and the process continues in the search to better understand the natural world.

A fad is “a custom, amusement, or the like, followed for a time with exaggerated zeal; a craze...” according to *Webster's International Dictionary*. While there are similarities (i.e., the scientific process is a long standing custom in science), they are not cut from the same cloth.

However, within science there are topics that are investigated with “exaggerated zeal,” which is positive, but that does not make science a fad. This is an important distinction; within conservation and wildlife management organizations such as the Boone and Crockett Club and The Wildlife Society, there are issues that could be considered fads when contemporary issues are addressed with exaggerated zeal. For example, there are numerous discussions related to policy, management, and the influence of anthropogenic activities on wildlife (e.g., large predator restoration) that wax and wane. However, both organizations promote science from which to make decisions about policy and management of wildlife resources. And both support the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

There has been a considerable amount of discussion of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. Articles have been written about it in this and other sections in *Fair Chase*, technical reviews of the North American Model are being conducted by The Wildlife Society, books and special issues of journals are being written about it, and videos describe the history and future of the North American Model. As such, I have heard some say the model is a fad and others have been critical of it for its shortcomings. The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation is certainly not a

fad. It is a series of longstanding principles that assist with the conservation and management of all wildlife and their habitats across North America. However, as articulated in the Fall 2010 issue of *The Wildlife Professional*, there are challenges to the model. These challenges deserve to be repeated as they represent ways the North American Model can be strengthened. One of the biggest criticisms I've heard of the North American Model is that it does not include Mexico as much as the U.S. and Canada. Fair enough, but that pales in comparison with the other challenges outlined by Shane Mahoney and David Cobb, which

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include global population increase, climate change, global economics, urbanization, novel ecosystems, abundance and superabundance, the human-nature divide, wildlife as vermin, changes in public perceptions, commercialization and privatization, funding for conservation, and lack of education.

Global population increase, climate change, and global economics are serious issues that influence wildlife. The competition for land will increase with rising human populations and habitat alterations due to climate change, and the pressures on conservation will expand. Furthermore, a global economy leaves less room for national, regional, state, or provincial governments to effectively budget for wildlife management. Urbanization and novel ecosystems also lead to land changes altering habitat for wildlife. Many of the efforts of wildlife management are centered on restoration of habitats.

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation grew from the demise of large mammals over 100 years ago. Now some of those same species such as whitetail deer have become so abundant that the public now views them in some areas as detrimental to society and landscapes. In some places, the North American Model is a victim of its own success. Likewise, humans are moving away from nature and are becoming more and more urbanized. Their attitudes and approach to wildlife will be different

than those that developed the North American Model. Some consider wildlife to cause disease and present a public health risk. The combination of predator attacks on people, livestock, and crops, vehicle-accident collisions and other issues create attitudes of some wanting wildlife controlled or eliminated instead of managed.

The North American Model was forged by hunters and fishermen. However, there are many others who are concerned with wildlife, and it is important that they be included in the discussions of how this model will be relevant to society. Hunting and fishing are strong aspects of it, but the

benefits need to be expanded to others interested in maintaining viable, free-ranging populations. The maintenance of “wild” in wildlife is being threatened with game farms, genetic engineering, canned hunts and various commercial markets. All of this threatens the essence of the North American Model. Likewise,

locking up private land and altering habitats is a serious problem that needs to be addressed.

In the past, those that hunt and fish have carried the burden of supporting the North American Model. With their support, they also support conservation of all wildlife. As funds from hunters and fishermen decline, alternate sources of revenue will be needed for effective management and conservation.

Education is the key to obtaining an informed public. However, the public is ignorant of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. Wildlifers need to do a much better job of informing the public about one of the greatest experiments ever conducted: the conservation of our natural capital.

Although these challenges can appear daunting, they must be overcome. The North American Model has faced challenges before and wildlifers will need to step up to meet these and others that lie in wait to thwart a process that has, and continues, to evolve. With efforts from conservation organizations like the Boone and Crockett Club and The Wildlife Society we are on pretty solid ground to ensure that the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation is the bedrock of wildlife conservation and management and not a fad. ■

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