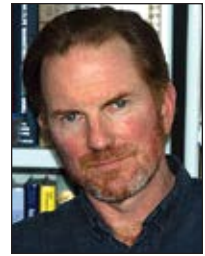


WILDLIFE GOVERNANCE

SCIENCE BLASTS



JOHN F. ORGAN

B&C PROFESSIONAL MEMBER
Director of the Cooperative Fish
and Wildlife Research Units

Steve Williams, in his “Capitol Comments” article titled “Relevancy of Conservation” (*Fair Chase* spring 2016), stated, “Conservation will remain relevant if we design agency structures and programs with an understanding of the public’s needs and desires.” Steve further stated, “the loss of relevancy is a function of our inability to understand the social impacts of a changing world. There are social sciences to consider.” One of those social sciences is political science, the field of inquiry concerned with understanding politics. Politics is fundamentally about decision-making, power, and governance. It is based on values and results in allocation of resources.

Steve’s timely article addresses the issue of relevancy of our wildlife management agencies to broader societal interests that is forefront in North American wildlife conservation today. The issue is a priority of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America’s Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources that Steve is a key member of. This issue of relevancy is not new; for example, in 1996, Shane Mahoney and I, spurred on by colleagues, initiated a series of workshops across North America with conservation professionals, titled “Maintaining Leadership.” These workshops, which

continued through 2001, were designed to prompt transformative thinking towards new approaches to address future conservation challenges, while building off of our historic successes. As Steve outlined, the issue of relevancy is becoming critical now, as reflected in proximal symptoms such as lack of funding for wildlife conservation at federal, provincial, and state levels, and eroding political support.

One approach to taking the issue head-on is to look beyond the symptoms and focus on the core: how agencies and the wildlife conservation institution are governed. This is where political science comes in. Last March at the 82nd North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a special session titled “Wildlife Governance Principles – Guidance for More Effective Wildlife Management” was held. To underscore the urgency Steve gave in his article, this session—one of four concurrent sessions—was standing-room only. The session was organized by Dr. Dan Decker of Cornell University (recipient of The Wildlife Society’s Aldo Leopold Medal), Ann Forstchen of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and Chris Smith of the Wildlife Management Institute.

A set of wildlife governance principles was put forth at this session. These principles, outlined below, have their roots firmly attached to a key tenet of wildlife conservation: the public trust in wildlife—the *raison d’être* of wildlife conservation agencies. These principles combine elements of public-trust thinking and standards of good governance:

1. Wildlife governance will be adaptable and responsive to citizens’ current needs and interests while also being forward-looking to conserve options of future generations.
2. Wildlife governance will seek and incorporate multiple and diverse perspectives.
3. Wildlife governance will apply social and ecological science, citizens’ knowledge, and trust administrators’ judgment.
4. Wildlife governance will produce multiple, sustainable benefits for all beneficiaries.
5. Wildlife governance will ensure that trust administrators are responsible for maintaining trust resources and allocating benefits from the trust.
6. Wildlife governance will be publicly accessible and transparent.
7. Wildlife governance will ensure that trust administrators are publicly accountable.
8. Wildlife governance will include means for citizens to become informed and engaged in decision-making.
9. Wildlife governance will include opportunities for trust administrators to meet their obligations in partnerships with non-governmental entities.
10. Wildlife governance will facilitate collaboration and coordination across ecological, jurisdictional, and ownership boundaries.

Will these principles alone alter the course of conservation? Not likely, but I will argue that without their implementation, society will become further disenfranchised from wildlife conservation, and the agencies mandated with securing the public trust in wildlife will not have adequate resources and political standing to do their jobs. The trends, as Steve outlined, are visible and palpable. Public response to events such as the killing of Cecil the lion, with broad-brush attacks on hunting, is symptomatic of societal disconnect from conservation programs. How do we better inform people about conservation? We engage them in the enterprise. Will traditional programs and pursuits erode as a result? Not if the engagement is designed to foster and develop common ground among all users and interests.

The reality is, those who have desires and needs relative to nature and wildlife will seek out sources to fulfill those needs. My preference is that those needs and desires are filled principally by the agencies established by law to manage the trust, in partnership with conservation organizations, which can foster appreciation and respect among all users of the validity and importance of diverse interests. More than ever, we need unity among all those who care about the future of our wildlife heritage if we desire future generations to be able to engage in the pursuits we have enjoyed. ■

RUGGED STRONG UNCOMPROMISING



The Double Rifle Safari Case
Available in 2, 3 & 4 Gun



- Exclusive Scope Saver System
- Cushioned Baffle Rifle Separation
- Storage Compartments
- Recessed Wheels & Luggage Carrier System
- Heavy Duty .080 Aluminum
- Contour Cut Bottom for Zero Stress Points on Your Rifle



Americase

800.972.2737 Americase.com

Visit us online to view our complete line of cases and accessories.

How do we better inform people about conservation? We engage them in the enterprise. Will traditional programs and pursuits erode as a result? Not if the engagement is designed to foster and develop common ground among all users and interests.