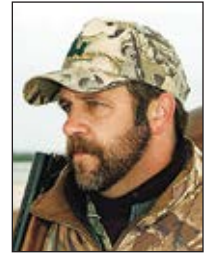


TIME FOR A SCIENCE LESSON

CAPITOL COMMENTS



Steven Williams, Ph.D.
B&C PROFESSIONAL MEMBER
PRESIDENT
Wildlife Management Institute

Natural events have dominated the news this summer: first, the solar eclipse that occurred in August; and second, the hurricanes that ravaged Texas, Florida, and the Caribbean in August and September. Scientists predicted each of these events. In fact, the solar eclipse was predicted 26 years prior, providing the exact date and time. Hurricane tracking, although not exact, was accurate enough to deliver advance warnings to residents in the hurricanes' paths. Science provided the evidence behind these forecasts, amazing achievements in and of themselves. However, science continues to be ignored in Washington, D.C., and across the country.

I watched the news during the hurricanes, as did most Americans. I was absolutely stunned by the ignorance of a group of commentators who didn't understand the basics of meteorology. I watched as they chattered amongst themselves, marveling at how warm waters, atmospheric moisture, high and low pressure systems could combine to develop the massive hurricanes we experienced. Their seeming fascination with these dynamics, but lack of understanding of science, was breathtaking. As they admired the ability of forecasters to predict hurricane paths, wind speeds, and rainfall amounts, it occurred to me that these individuals were probably like a large segment of our citizens—almost completely devoid of a basic understanding and appreciation of science.

Consider this, there is a large proportion of people who believe that dinosaurs existed at the same time as humans, that humans first appeared on earth in our current form, that evolutionary theory is wrong (if not immoral), that climate change is not occurring or occurring only naturally, and that genetically modified foods are dangerous for our health. A study reported that 82 percent of Americans supported labeling of genetically modified food, 80 percent also supported mandated labeling of foods that contain DNA. Think about that. With the exception of the dirt I occasionally consume, all my food contains DNA, but 80 percent of survey respondents thought it was important to be labeled as such (although I doubt they know what DNA is). It is interesting to note that people with and without a high degree of education share some of these beliefs. When science conflicts with our values, we often believe what comports with our values, science be damned.

Why should we care? We should care because science is an endeavor to understand the world—how it is organized, how it functions, and how it changes. Government is a system designed to control and manage a community, a state, or a nation. Science provides information to the government to assist in managing the use of resources for the benefit of its community's citizens. Science and government must be linked. The accumulated knowledge of federal scientists and their colleagues at the state level

and academic institutions are essential for sound policy decisions.

However, the disparagement of scientists by those who deny climate change, evolution, medical advancements such as vaccinations, and basic life requirements of imperiled species endangers our democracy. A misinformed or uninformed voting public, in the words of Neil Degrasse Tyson is leading to "the unraveling of an informed democracy." The fact that "alternative facts" has entered our vernacular is dumbfounding. Recent research available at the Social Science Research Network (ssrn.com/abstract=3004631) indicated that voters might be uninterested in the truth. "Alternative facts" were shown to influence voters even when presented evidence that the alternative facts were not true. Our political representatives reflect

their constituents' values; however, I believe we must hold them to a higher level of accountability when it comes to matters of science knowledge and application.

So the climate change deniers brush off the threats of sea level rise, more severe storms, changing weather patterns, and changing habitat conditions. Some of these very same individuals are making resource policy and budgetary decisions as we speak. Meanwhile, insurance companies, urban planners, and the Department of Defense have been studying and

Government is a system designed to control and manage a community, a state, or a nation. Science provides information to the government to assist in managing the use of resources for the benefit of its community's citizens. Science and government must be linked. The accumulated knowledge of federal scientists and their colleagues at the state level and academic institutions are essential for sound policy decisions.

preparing for these impacts for years. The same commentators I referred to earlier were so impressed with FEMA's response to the hurricanes and waxed on about the importance of the government's response. They seemed to be unable to process the link between the government's response and the science necessary to appropriately stage supplies, conduct search and rescue operations, provide medical service, restore power grids, repair infrastructure, and provide transportation. Their newfound fascination with science made me think that they may have been raised on a different planet (presumably one that was flat). How could they praise the government's response to disasters without the recognition of the accumulated knowledge provided by scientists and the importance of that science?

Boone and Crockett Club members should appreciate the science behind the management of our nation's natural resources. Further, members should respect that science and not let personal beliefs or values, not backed by evidence, cloud our decision-making process. Finally, we should hold our political representatives to science-based, decision-making. Polemics and dogma do not pave the way for progress. Science has produced the bountiful fish and wildlife resources we enjoy today.

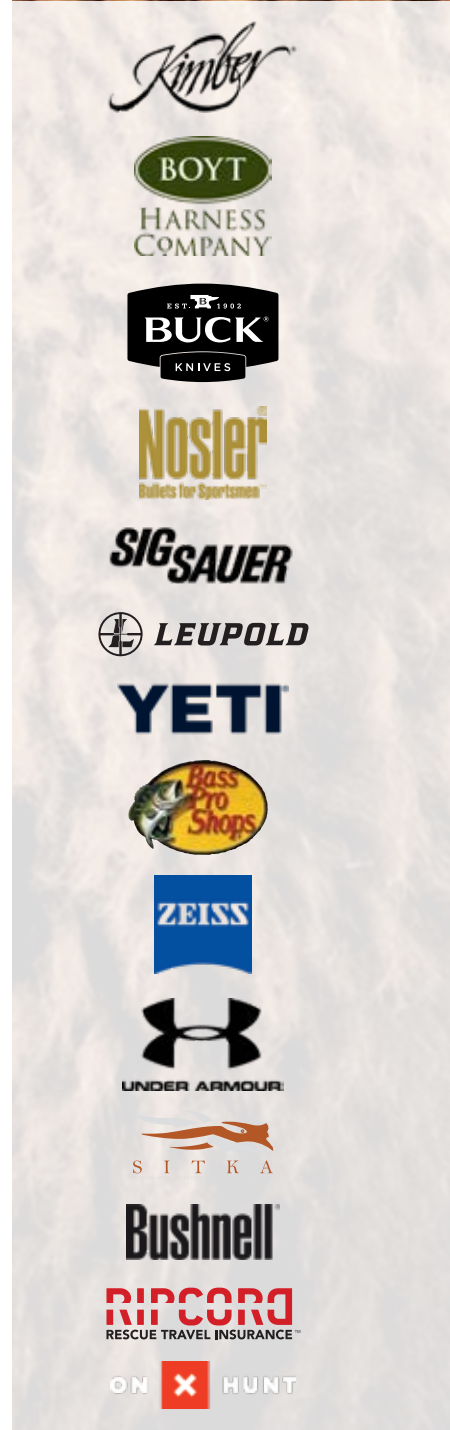
And, oh by the way, science calculates that the next total solar eclipse will be visible in the United States on April 8, 2024. In Harrisburg, PA, it will be at its maximum eclipse at 2:17:16 p.m. Don't forget your glasses. ■

Steve Williams

B&C Staff participated in the eclipse this past August with homemade viewers.



WWW.ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/HARVERINO



THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB ASKS THAT YOU PLEASE THANK OUR TRAILBLAZERS WITH YOUR PATRONAGE.