THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB ON CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION

Why a Discussion of Conservation and Preservation

More people are engaging in and having a greater influence on natural resource issues than ever before through voter initiatives, public forums, and social media. They want to do what is best, yet are not necessarily familiar with the two primary approaches by which natural resources are managed—conservation and preservation. Conservation and preservation are terms everyone has heard of, but for many people they remain loosely defined and not well understood.

There is a growing belief that "letting nature take its course" with no human interference is the best philosophy for the treatment of natural resources. Many are mistakenly or intentionally calling this way of thinking conservation, though it is more closely aligned with preservation. These misconceptions are helping to shift the management of natural resources from a successful "hands-on" conservation approach to a "hands-off" preservation approach, which is proving to have serious negative implications.

Conservation and preservation are both concerned with protection and betterment of the environment, but they are based on different philosophies that produce different results. Conservation focuses on using and managing natural resources to benefit people, but in keeping within the limits of supply, regrowth, and change, both natural and human-influenced. It is the most widely used and accepted model for the management of natural resources, including wildlife, in North America.

Preservation is a philosophy that generally views people as a negative influence on nature, and seeks to keep natural resources in a pristine state by limiting use and excluding active management by people. Despite their dissimilarities, the Club has never viewed conservation and preservation as opposing schools of thought. Conservation is the overarching concept, with preservation being one of many management options within a broad conservation approach.

Conservation was developed and nationalized by the Boone and Crockett Club and its founder, Theodore Roosevelt, beginning in the late 19th century. One of the Club's founding members, Gifford Pinchot, is credited with first using the term "conservation" as it applied to natural resources. Given its history as the first conservation organization in North America and its continued focus on wildlife conservation today, the Club is concerned with the trend to improperly define conservation as preservation and the shift towards "letting nature take its course" without human interference.

This essay is intended to provide the essential points of what the Club has learned in over a century of leadership in developing and applying conservation and preservation. Everyone—from political leaders, journalists, educators, legislators, voters, to conservation-minded citizens—needs a common, factual understanding of conservation and preservation. Not everyone needs to know all the details, but knowing how they are practiced, what each can achieve, and the ecological realities involved is important if we are to evolve with better ideas and guard against misleading ones. Like a compass course, a small deviation in how we define and apply conservation today becomes an entirely different direction in the future, for good or ill.

The Origins of Conservation and Preservation

Conservation is a concept that emerged in North America[1] in response to a natural resource crisis. It was conceived in the latter half of the 19th century by a small group of people who were witnessing firsthand the eradication of wildlife from the preceding two hundred years of irresponsible land use practices and unregulated harvest. To accommodate human needs, forests had been clear-cut, prairies turned under by the plow, and wetlands drained. Some wildlife species had already gone extinct while others were close to being lost forever. Taming the wilderness was viewed as human progress, and there was no environmental science to tell people what they were doing would have devastating implications.

> *To waste, to destroy our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed.*
> —Theodore Roosevelt

In 1887, Theodore Roosevelt founded the Boone and Crockett Club along with a dozen of the most respected and influential men in America, all of whom were avid sportsmen. They committed themselves to reverse the wanton destruction of America's resources, which led to the setting aside of millions of acres as public lands, establishing national parks, forest reserves, and wildlife refuges, training people to professionally manage them, and devising mechanisms to fund these efforts. The Club used the term "conservation" to describe this new relationship between people and nature, and defined it as "wise and prudent use without waste."

One of the first major initiatives of the Club was the enlargement and protection of Yellowstone National Park. In 1872, the nation's first national park existed in name only. Yellowstone's borders, uses, and purposes were ill-defined or non-existent. Its wildlife and other resources were being plundered and there were plans to build a railroad to cross through the heart of the park. The Club worked diligently to secure Congressional legislation that added over four million acres to the Park, blocked the railroad, and established laws enforced by the U.S. Army to protect the park against poaching, timber harvesting, mineral extraction, defacing of rock formations and looting of archeological sites.

Yellowstone was a pivotal event in American history. It was the first time Congress treated natural resources as a matter of national security, and the first time people voluntarily curbed their use of natural resources for the purposes of enjoying nature. More national parks followed, along with a system of wildlife refuges, national monuments, and other public lands. Even though hunting would now be restricted and even disallowed in some areas like Yellowstone, sportsmen not only accepted restrictions on hunting, they championed them. They voluntarily adopted a fair chase code developed by the Club that required game to be hunted under a set of ethical constraints. Sportsmen valued the outdoor experience that hunting offered and wanted wildlife to flourish and not be threatened with extinction, not only for themselves but for the generations to come.

The significant influence of sportsmen also prompted other massive changes, including the first coordinated system of wildlife laws and enforcement. The Lacey Act of 1900 (named after Club member,

[1] "North America" as used here does not include Mexico because conservation did not develop at the same time and under the same circumstances as it did in the U.S. and Canada, where conservation arose simultaneously.

Congressmen John F. Lacey) essentially brought an end to commercial market hunting by banning the interstate sale of illegally killed wildlife. Sportsmen also helped enact laws that set bag limits, regulated hunting seasons, and protected migratory birds. They also enacted legislation that taxed their hunting activities to ensure there would always be adequate and reliable funding for conservation efforts, including the Federal "Duck Stamp" Act and the Pittman-Robertson Act.[2] Many of these conservation laws were mirrored in Canada.

The legislation that initially enlarged Yellowstone also set aside 13 million acres of America's first timber reserves. In 1905, the U.S. Forest Service was created and Club member Gifford Pinchot served as the first chief forester. Although initially there was pressure to preserve and protect all forests from use like national parks, Pinchot prevailed in his view that some forests should be scientifically managed to produce timber and other resources for the long-term good of the people as a whole. This later led to the policy of "multiple use," including using forests for wildlife habitat, timber production, grazing, recreation, and watershed protection.

Some people at the time believed conservation was too focused on economic productivity and not strong enough to protect undeveloped lands of great natural beauty. One of the best known advocates of preservation was John Muir, who founded the Sierra Club and fought for Yosemite to become a national park in 1890. He believed scenic forests and mountains were sacred, sublime places that should be used only for enjoyment and inspiration and not as a resource for goods. Given the wanton exploitation of nature they had witnessed, Muir and other early preservationists saw only one choice for saving awe-inspiring landscapes—keep people out unless they were there for appreciation and solitude. It was the beginning of a national controversy that pitted Muir's idea of preservation against Pinchot's conservation ethic.

By this time, Club member and ardent conservationist George Bird Grinnell had already developed a broader view for the management of natural resources. Unlike Muir and many conservationists of the time, Grinnell believed preservation was merely one of many ways to manage lands within a larger conservation agenda. In joining Muir in opposing the construction of a dam in Yosemite's scenic Hetch Hetchy Valley to provide power and water to San Francisco, there was no inconsistency in Grinnell's stance. Conservation could mean timber extraction in one area or prohibiting use in another to protect watersheds or sensitive ecological areas. Grinnell's larger vision of conservation allowed him to achieve consumptive *and* aesthetic goals using science-informed, systematic management. This vision contributed greatly to the development of conservation over the next century.

The 1930s onward brought great advancements in the scientific knowledge of wildlife and habitat that would shape management policies and revolutionize the way people thought about nature. One of the most influential people of this period was Club member Aldo Leopold, who identified a broad spectrum of interrelationships of animals to plant communities, of plant communities to climate and soil chemistry, of predators to prey and, above all, of human influences to natural ecosystems.

[2] Under the Pittman-Robertson Act (1937), which the Club helped to pass, habitat restoration programs are financed through a federal excise tax imposed on the sale of firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment, generating billions of dollars since its inception. Sale of federally-issued duck stamps to all migratory bird hunters (created by Club member J.N. "Ding" Darling) has raised hundreds of millions for conservation of wetlands.

Leopold also developed a "land ethic," which expanded the definition of "community" to include not only humans, but the entire planet—its soils, waters, plants, and animals. Ethics directed all members of this community to treat one another with respect for the mutual benefit of all. At the time, having people think of themselves as an integral part of nature was something of a cultural revolution. This way of thinking remains a critical aspect of modern conservation.

The new prosperity and growth in America following 1945 brought with it more commercial development of land for housing and agriculture, timber harvest and mineral extraction, concentrated farming and livestock operations, and a loss of wild habitat. Farming efficiency improved not only by mechanization, but by liberal use of pesticides and herbicides. Landscapes dominated by small towns and farms gave way to urban sprawl, and new highway systems provided easy access to once remote forests, mountains, and rangelands.

By the last quarter of the 20th century, the conservation movement in the United States and Canada had produced dramatic results, most notably in the recovery of many wildlife species, especially those classified as game. Other non-game species were slipping towards extinction largely due to a loss of habitat and the effect of chemicals. Pesticides were decimating the country's population of bald eagles, osprey and other species. Along with growing doubts about the ability of government to properly balance environmental values against scientific progress, America produced two of the most far-reaching and ambitious laws ever enacted—the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA).[3] Both of these acts seemed straightforward at the time, but have become controversial in their application.

In addition to the Wilderness Act and the ESA, the environmental movement also produced a flood of legislation governing the use and protection of natural resources. Today there are over 100 treaties, international agreements, federal statutes, executive orders and federal regulations that pertain to environmental and natural resource matters.[4]

Due to the sheer volume and complexity of relevant laws, policies, and judicial decisions, conflicts often arise. In addition, excessive litigation and overly bureaucratic processes are making sustainable use and active management—the cornerstones of conservation—more expensive, risk averse, and less financially rewarding than ever before. Nevertheless, conservation's history, inherent versatility, and ability to adapt to a changing world proves it should remain as the dominant approach for producing the outcomes people want—healthy, clean environments that contain sustainable populations of fish, birds, and other wildlife.

Philosophical Differences

The question of how to value nature—for its intrinsic or extrinsic value—is one of the fundamental dividing lines between conservation and preservation. Preservation focuses on the intrinsic value of nature, which means nature is valued for simply existing. Preservation is based on a belief that absent human influence, nature will take on pristine characteristics and attain a natural balance. This is why preservation is associated with the phrase, "letting nature take its course."

[3] Canada enacted similar laws, The National Parks Act of 1930 and The Species at Risk Act of 2002.
[4] This does not include state regulations, and in some cases local ordinances, that govern land use activities like forestry or agricultural operations that affect wildlife.

When nature has extrinsic value, it means it is valued for what it provides to people in goods and services. Conservation is based on this philosophy, but demands that natural resources be used only if they are managed in a responsible, sustainable manner so they provide for present-day needs without jeopardizing the supply of those resources for future generations. This includes using preservation as a conservation tool to protect the environment when necessary and scientifically warranted.

Other ideologies may seem aligned with preservation because of the idea of non-use, but they are based on moral judgments that have little to do with the intrinsic value of nature. Anti-hunting ideologies vary, but they are based on a moral opposition to killing animals because the motives for hunting, the outcomes (or both), are believed to have no validity. Animal rights is a separate ideology in which animals have legal and political rights of their own comparable to those of people. Under this legal framework, animals would no longer be considered property and the agencies that now manage wildlife in trust for the public would cease to exist. Unlike conservation, these ideologies lack coherent standards and are not based on any orderly, rational, or science-based methodologies.

Ecological Realities

Much of what people should know about conservation and preservation involves the science of living things and natural cycles. Populations of wildlife increase and decrease primarily due to birth and death rates. Forests and grasslands have cycles of growth, fire, decay, and re-seeding, and water supplies collect and flow from watersheds. Describing this as “renewal” is misleading. Ecological change is really the more accurate term because the wildlife, plants, lands, and waters do not have a pristine or "like new" state in which to return. They have only smaller or larger sizes and better or worse qualities for the purposes we have for them, whether that is to consume or appreciate or both. This is why conservation is guided by science and how human actions interplay with natural forces.

The idea of letting nature take its course is seductive in its simplicity and can be of great value to scientists in certain cases, but it has significant shortcomings as the overriding approach for natural resources, especially wildlife and its habitat. Any belief that nature unmanaged and unused will take on perfect characteristics contradicts the ecological fact that with or without human influence, ecological forces will continue working and changing nature's characteristics. Natural disturbances, such as lightning-caused fires, insects, disease outbreaks, drought, floods, high winds, climate change, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions will influence landscapes. These events are unpredictable, except that they will happen. Their timing, frequency, scale, and effect vary, but they will create patterns and circumstances to the benefit or detriment of individual plant and animal species. Thus, any kind of “balance of nature” that can be achieved is temporary and unpredictable.

The notion that pristine wilderness still exists in North America (or anywhere else in the world) is deeply rooted in the American culture. From writings to nature documentaries, the illusion of untouched wilderness in faraway places is perpetuated. It is a myth. Humans have been influencing and altering North American landscapes, both positively and negatively, long before the arrival of European immigrants. While it is very important to identify relatively untouched areas of significant ecological value and protect them for future generations, we must acknowledge that many of the environmental changes that exist today occurred quite apart from human intervention.

Scientists believe that both natural and human-caused influences are now very likely to change the signature characteristics of virtually all protected areas. Wilderness and national parks will survive in the future only through the most vigilant and enlightened management of the ecosystems involved. Repressing active stewardship of land and wildlife because some people believe humans are not a part of nature not only defies ecological realities, it also ignores the sociological fact that people, eventually, will not like the results or at least not be satisfied with them—no one (regardless of how they value nature) wants catastrophic wildfires, or towering coniferous forests and lush alpine meadows to slowly shift to drought-resistant scrub.

> *Nature just can't take its course because frankly, there is no location on Earth where humankind has not had an impact. From radioactive materials and dust in polar ice, to ever-expanding distributions of invasive species, the evidence is clear that disruption of natural processes is a global phenomenon. Humans are a significant component of natural ecosystems (contributing the good and the bad) and the notion of suddenly removing their influence is both illogical and impossible. Natural ecosystems are just too altered to be left alone.*—Dr. Bruce D. Leopold

Conservation in Practice

When President Theodore Roosevelt adopted conservation as a keystone of his administration, he contributed much more than an idea about limiting use of the nation's resources in a new, sustainable manner. He knew that to ensure the renewal of what we take would sometimes require action. This was a revelation in its time, and it served as a precursor to active management that is the cornerstone of modern conservation practice.

Modern conservation is often applied at the scale of ecosystems, which may be small like a pond or large like an entire watershed, but they are considered subsets of one another that inevitably change over space and time. Determining the proper scale of an ecosystem and every factor involved—the inputs, the outputs, interactions, random and non-random events—and how wildlife populations will respond to management interventions requires a very sophisticated scientific approach. This approach must be based on "disinterested science," which means research performed without bias, untainted by personal motives, political agendas, or funding sources, and peer-reviewed. This science, then, informs the decision-making and implementation process.

Ecosystem management also draws on Leopold's land ethic that recognizes people as a part of ecosystems, not separate from them. Knowledge of people's interests, and the institutions and political boundaries that are involved is just as important as relying on disinterested science to make decisions and compromises about ecosystems.

> *If natural resource management decisions relied totally on science—which some advocate—and did not consider the needs and desires of people affected and gain their acceptance, or at least acquiescence in the management of resources that directly affects them, it is more than likely that the plan would fail in the longer term.*—Dr. Jack Ward Thomas

National forests comprise a large segment of the ecosystems in the western United States. Most have evolved with fires, insect and disease outbreaks, and blow-downs to retain biodiversity and forest health. But decades of forest management aimed at suppressing natural fires and insect outbreaks, as well as

years of managing forests for intensive timber production and then dramatically scaling this back, has helped produce very "unnatural" conditions in many forests.

Conservation can reverse these conditions through a variety of actions, such as harvesting trees and using controlled burns to mimic natural disturbances. These disturbances reduce build-ups of forest litter (fuel) and overgrowth to encourage a variety of successional stages for wildlife, biodiversity, and that prevent larger, hotter, more devastating fires from occurring that can destroy even old-growth forests. Preservation takes the opposite approach. It seeks to halt management actions and multiple use on the mistaken assumption the forests can and will return to their former "natural" condition.

Grasslands are also a large component of western landscapes. Prior to the late 1800s, bison were the dominant grazers on many grasslands and their actions were critical to the evolution of these ecosystems. Domestic cattle and sheep eventually replaced bison as the primary grazers in many areas. Initially, their grazing was unmanaged and detrimental effects occurred in many areas. Now, where grazing is wisely managed, grass, plant, and native wildlife species benefit and grassland ecosystems stay healthy. Attempting to "preserve" grasslands that have evolved with controlled, frequent grazing by eliminating this practice will only harm such ecosystems.

Conservation professionals sometimes seek to reestablish a wildlife (or plant) species into an historic range. For a wildlife species, this usually involves protecting newly located animals from hunting and other impacts until the population grows large enough to withstand die-offs from predators, harsh weather, and disease. Short-term preservation then shifts to long-term active management, which brings benefits of keeping a wildlife population in balance with its food sources, other wildlife, and people. Game species whose numbers are controlled by public hunting also offer the important benefit of providing funding for further research and conservation efforts. Long-term preservation typically would not generate the same self-perpetuating and important benefits that a conservation approach provides.

The conservation principles of sustainable use and active management, delivered at the scale of ecosystems, have the greatest chance of producing the goods and services that people want as well as retaining long-term ecological integrity. Conservation provides the means and knowledge to produce timber from the most productive growing areas to meet much of the demand for wood products while allowing less intensive management over the majority of the forested landscape. This enhances biodiversity while localizing the impacts of our demands for these products. We have the ability to locate and manage intensive industries (such as energy development) and urban growth so that it aids conservation—consolidating daily life and extractive industries in some places allows other places to produce the benefits of wilderness, scenery, and wildlife habitat.

Conservation means development as much as it does protection.—Theodore Roosevelt

Preservation in Practice

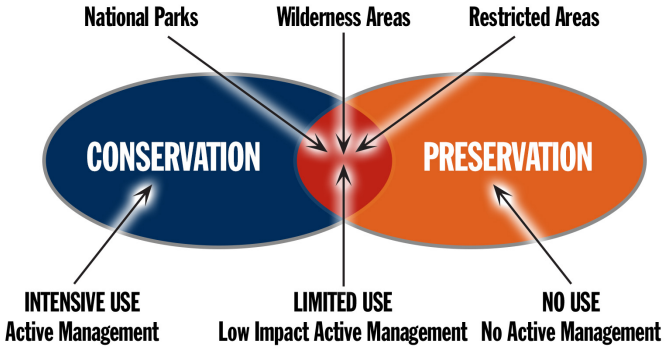
Preservation has helped to protect some of the most spectacular places in North America. Over 100 million acres of public land in the United States receive the highest level of protection from the federal government in the form of national parks and monuments, wilderness areas, wild and scenic rivers, and other similar designations. Within these protected systems, human influence is supposed to be substantially unnoticeable, and in some instances, human activities are off-limits or strictly limited to protect ecological integrity.

Even where preservation is the primary emphasis, it is not used as a sole strategy. For example, in national parks the overarching vision is to preserve natural wonders, but another key part of that vision is facilitating human use and enjoyment of the parks. That is why roads, trails, campgrounds, and lodges are constructed and concessions built to enhance visitor services. Park managers no longer try to create the illusion of conditions that existed before the arrival of the Europeans, but instead actively manage through a variety of conservation tools for the future, such as protecting cooler habitats that some species will need to survive in a warming climate, or ensuring a predator species does not drastically reduce the population of another species visitors come to see.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 (which the Club helped to enact) created areas "where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." Wilderness advocates believed that at last there would be protected areas where nature could be left alone and there was no need for human management or influence. The federal agencies responsible for wilderness areas knew that drawing boundary lines, prohibiting roads, and limiting uses would not be enough to preserve the wilderness values of natural beauty, solitude, or the recreational opportunities people wanted. Wilderness areas would be threatened by overuse from hikers and campers, and the influence of large-scale, natural processes, such as fire, harmful invasive species, and pollution. Wilderness management emerged as a necessary discipline to mitigate these threats.

Wilderness managers look at how to perform necessary actions that cause the least impact to the wilderness resource and its character. Sometimes the minimum human intrusion means using a primitive non-mechanized tool like a cross-cut saw or an axe, and sometimes it means a controlled burn, grazing, or public hunting. These are the tools of conservation that are necessary to ensure that ecological changes do not disrupt sensitive ecosystems beyond their capacity to remain resilient. Without these tools, we run the risk of losing habitat quality for many species we value and cherish, changing scenic vistas, and turning favorite camping spots into impassible blow-downs.

The debate centers around how to address the unprecedented ecological conditions of today and the surge in recreational uses while respecting wilderness values. Preservation as a stand-alone, predominant strategy does not have enough versatility to achieve desired outcomes in wilderness areas or national parks/monuments. The better approach is to view preservation as a part of a flexible conservation continuum, with intensive management at one end and limited human intervention at the other.



The Role of Hunting in Wildlife Conservation

The conservation of wildlife can be particularly controversial because of the innate connection people have with animals—because we are animals ourselves. As long as humans have existed we have consumed, respected, feared, worshiped, protected and even empathized with wild animals. The debate is not about *if* we want wildlife in North America, but rather what space should they occupy, how many is too few, and how many is too many. It is also about the methods we employ to enhance a species or control their numbers.

Whether a person has qualms about killing wild animals or not, they need to recognize that hunters are the most consistent and reliable advocates for wilderness and wildlife, and public hunting is an irreplaceable tool for wildlife conservation and professional game managers. Conservation was initiated and has been fueled in large part by the vested interest of sportsmen and sportswomen in hunting game species. The funding that public hunting provides is predominately a "user pay" system, and the sale of hunting licenses, tags, stamps, and hunting equipment, produces hundreds of millions of dollars in fees and excise taxes annually. Those funds are mobilized for the research of wildlife diseases, maintaining/improving habitat and watersheds, removing surplus or nuisance animals, enforcing wildlife laws and other conservation functions. When hunting or hunting access is reduced or eliminated, user-pay funding is lost and important conservation functions either disappear or become a burden that falls on all taxpayers.

Advocacy for wildlife and its habitat is also apparent in the scope and size of the conservation efforts being conducted by hunter-owners of private lands—from quail plantations to ranches that contain elk and deer. Stream restoration, prescribed burns, tailored timber harvests, restoration of native plant species and other conservation projects can be expensive and never ending. In some cases, landowners find it necessary to hire biologists, foresters, and ecosystem managers to determine what conservation projects will benefit the species of most interest to the owner but at the same time contribute to overall goals for the ecosystem where the property lies.

Private landowners are creating some of the best habitat for wildlife in North America at their own expense not only because they feel it is the right thing to do, but also because of their foundational interest in hunting and fishing. Because a majority of wildlife now inhabits or utilizes private lands, our laws and policies need to appreciate the drives for self-interest and land stewardship that exist among private landowners, and the incentives that enable such stewardship.

> *The central thesis of game management is this: game can be restored by the creative use of the same tools which have heretofore destroyed it - ax, plow, cow, fire, and gun…Management is their purposeful and continuing alignment."*—Aldo Leopold

Current Threats

When the Boone and Crockett Club was established, exploitation from market hunting and irresponsible land practices were the greatest threat to wildlife in North America. The primary threat today is habitat loss and the shift towards a "hands-off" preservation approach.

Part of this shift toward preservation and inaction has to with the decades of lawmaking that took place to reverse post-World War II land use policies that emphasized production of food, fuel, and goods without properly evaluating the effects on ecosystems. Taken one at a time, the laws are hard to argue against and they have produced long-lasting benefits. Natural resource policies have become so prohibitive and bureaucratically process-driven, however, they are now skewing decisions into the opposite flawed result: by curtailing intervention in ecosystems, we are limiting conservation opportunities to manage ecosystems using what Aldo Leopold termed "a positive exercise of skill and insight, not merely a negative exercise of abstinence or caution."

> *Regrettably, there seems to be no easy way to halt the preservationist steamroller driven by emotions and perceptions rather than science and rational thought.* —Dr. Bruce D. Leopold

The shift toward preservation is also a consequence of taking decisions out of the hands of expert wildlife agencies and placing them into the hands of judges and voters. Voter ballot initiatives are being brought by activist groups using emotional arguments that try to replace the conclusions of highly trained professionals informed by science, often to the detriment of an ecosystem or species. Activists also frequently misuse the Endangered Species Act to seek listing of an animal or plant species even though science demonstrates that listing is not warranted or the recovery goals for de-listing have been met. Once listed, a species receives federal protection from destruction of critical habitat and other impacts that is used to halt timber harvests, housing projects, renewable energy development, and block almost every discretionary agency decision. Misuse of the ESA has generated significant economic and social costs—including job losses, negative pressures on other non-listed wildlife, and limits on beneficial development.

ESA litigation against government agencies is virtually nonstop because activists can recover their legal fees even if they win only a small part of the case or settle out of court. Most lawsuits are settled out of court, but the legal fees awarded to such groups each year can total millions of dollars annually. These awards are paid out of agency funds that would otherwise be dedicated to useful conservation or preservation efforts. After more than 40 years, the ESA should be modernized and reinvigorated to address the extinction threats species face today, more clearly define criteria for listing and de-listing species, provide yardsticks for success and failure of programs, and remove economic incentives for suing agencies.

Misinformation about what conservation is, and what it is not, is also a contributing factor. Just because someone calls themselves a conservationist or says they are a member of a conservation organization does not make it so. Many groups with anti-conservation agendas have intentionally adopted the term "conservationist" to replace the undesirable labels they have earned or deserve. They trade on the long-standing, positive image of conservation to shield themselves from criticism, gain political credibility, and create a more favorable, mainstream public image to draw more funding from people who mistakenly think they are supporting conservation. Other people call themselves conservationists or say they are supporting a conservation effort simply because they are unaware of what conservation really means.

Because of the widespread misuse and misunderstanding of the term, it can be difficult at times to distinguish if someone is actually promoting wildlife conservation or some other approach. A good litmus test for recognizing the difference is to carefully examine the proposition. If a proposal aims to protect a

resource or save a species through active management or sustainable use, it is probably conservation. If it seeks to protect or save a resource by opposing or banning all active management of a species (especially on a permanent basis), it is probably something else. Journalists, educators, and other professional conveyors of information can help by respecting the finer points of conservation, preservation, and other ideologies such as animal rights and anti-hunting, when referring to them.

Conclusion

Conservation became the dominant and most widely accepted model for the treatment of natural resources because it accounted for the fact that growing human population could not (and should not) be kept completely separated from nature. So long as people exist, there will continue to be a demand for food, protection from the elements, clean water, and energy. These needs must be addressed, at least in part, by using the natural resources that exist in North America. Conservation allows us to say "no" when ecological risk is too great, but also recognizes that the forests and wildlife of North America were saved from overexploitation *through* the actions of humans, not in spite of them. The appropriate response to the challenges and conditions we face today is not a retreat to inaction or relying primarily on preservation, but instituting new, active approaches to ecosystem management that produce more socially acceptable and sustainable results.

The most critical element to the future of conservation is informed, citizen engagement. Conservation is not just something a biologist goes out and does, a hunter participates in by purchasing a license, or a rancher contributes to by providing winter range to wildlife. Conservation is a social responsibility. In North America, most of the debates about natural resources are ordered through governmental agencies, but non-governmental agencies, local community groups and individuals also do a lot of conservation work. That is why everyone who cares about wildlife and other natural resources needs to remember the key points contained in this essay as well as other reliable sources in order to advance natural resources policies and practices in a positive, constructive manner.

> *Like all species, humans must exploit the environmental in order to live. There is no question of that. The most important questions for people is how such will be accomplished in a sustainable and socially acceptable fashion. We must debate the future on the basis of today's conditions and what is desired for tomorrow.*—Dr. Jack Ward Thomas

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