"THE WORLD OUTSIDE AND THE PICTURES IN OUR HEADS": SOME THOUGHTS ON THE IDENTITY AND IMAGES OF WILDLIFE PROFESSIONALS

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"The World Outside & the Pictures in Our Heads"

Some Thoughts on the Identity & Images of Wildlife Professionals.

We wildlife professionals have been entrusted by society to make sure that wildlife is just as well off, if not better off, when we turn the helm over to the next generation as it was when the responsibility for it came to us. Our work is important. But it is getting more difficult because the threats to wildlife are increasing and the world is getting more complex. Fulfilling the public trust is getting harder. Conserving wildlife is the bottom line and that means we must perform effectively.

How good is our professional effectiveness and what are some of the constraints that limit our effectiveness? How may we improve our performance? Many of the problems that plague us lie largely within our minds; that is, in our conception of what we are as professionals, how we organize ourselves for collective action and how we understand and participate in the public policy process.

EFFECTIVENESS: A GOOD MAP IS ESSENTIAL

Many of us feel that we need to be much more effective and we see that the key to increased performance lies somewhere within our professional makeup, our agencies and our relationship with the public. To be effective, we need a detailed map—call it a framework for professional operation. Conventional maps not only show us mountains and valleys and roads and cities, but also permit us to see the relationship of soils to vegetation, the relationship of physiography to migration corridors and many other more complex interactions. With a good map, we can successfully negotiate the landscape and arrive at our destination.

To be effective in wildlife conservation, we also need a good map that tells us what is important to see on our professional journey, where to stop and what to do. If the map is incomplete, our understanding of the "landscape" will be incomplete. To be complete, the map must include four major features: scientific information; technical information; key information about our own identity (our view of ourselves) and our image (how others see us); and information about our organizations. The real measures of the map's utility are the three E's: effectiveness, efficiency and equality. First, we must get the job done; i.e., achieve concrete gains for wildlife, not just meet paper goals. Second, we must get it done in a timely and cost-effective way. Third, we must do it with consideration and fairness for all the people involved in the project. Trying to do wildlife conservation without a good map produces professionals who are confused, frustrated, angry and ineffective.

From my experiences in working with agency people throughout the west, I was struck by the fact that many people are grappling with the same overall problem—the performance of wildlife professionals. Several writers have recognized the complex of constraints we all face, although they have used different descriptions of them, attributed various causes for them and suggested different resolutions. Here's just a sampling:

In a 1985 paper, "Effectiveness—The Hallmark of the Natural Resource Management Profession," Jack Ward Thomas noted that conflicts between wildlifers and other management professions will likely intensify in the future if the present management framework remains unchanged. His solution? "No natural resource manager can be truly effective, over the long term, without mastery of biopolitics." He defined this term as the "biological and political skills to achieve goals and objectives in an acceptable manner while considering prevailing circumstances, and legal and ethical constraints." He was unable to find a single formal training program that teaches resource professionals the knowledge and skills needed to operate effectively in today's "biopolitical" world.

In 1981, Lynn Greenwalt wrote a paper called "Political Realities and Wildlife: Do Politicians Listen to Biologists?" in which he says that he learned about the constraints on himself the hard way over years of experience. He noted that these lessons are not taught in civics 101, or anywhere else for that matter. He also termed this problem "bio-politics" and concluded that it is important for wildlifers to be aware of it if we want to be heard and heeded.

Another 1985 paper, "Conservation in the Political Arena," was authored by Dan Heinz and Cliff Youmans, who also noted that most problems besetting effective wildlife conservation are political. Management decisions are, and will continue to be, political because of conflicting human values. Heinz and Youmans argued that the only way to bring about needed improvement is to apply pressures on the agencies from outside. This requires that wildlife professionals learn to participate in organizational and policy processes in a variety of ways, including developing an informed constituency.

The last example is something we've all heard, I'm sure. I most recently heard it from a wildlife student. When I was discussing some wildlife issues with him, he nodded wisely and said, "Yes, wildlife management is people management." So, we have two concepts—"biopolitics" and "wildlife management is people management"—that are usually offered to explain why some program did not turn out right. Let's get rid of these two so called "explanations." They are pseudo explanations. While appearing to explain something, they serve only to block the rigorous, empirical inquiry which is needed if wildlifers are to learn about the *professional*, *organizational* and *policy*

dimensions of wildlife work. Let us focus on these three "uncharted" regions of our map of professional effectiveness. Several branches of the social sciences already have very useful models and tools which could help us directly and immediately (e.g., policy sciences, Lasswell 1971).

SOME SUGGESTIONS

First, our notions of professionalism—i.e., our core values, those we fall back on when the going gets tough—are incomplete. We tend, for one thing, to overemphasize the scientific and technical aspects of our conservation work to the exclusion of other key elements (see "Bounded Rationality," Simon 1957). We perceive that solutions for better conservation lie in technical arguments. Our underlying assumption, i.e., our sense of professionalism, tells us that more science and better data alone will be a cure-all and bring about better decisions and programs. Bill Burch's third law of resource management says: "Resource managers, when confronted with social value decisions, will seek to convert them into technical decisions."

This, unfortunately, fosters a "technocratic" approach to problem-solving. We seize on terms and phrases like "biopolitics," "image," "wildlife-management-is-people-management" and think we understand the problem and can apply a quick fix to it; i.e., hold a meeting, conduct training sessions, take a class, read a book and—presto!—solve the problem that confronts us. I recently saw a "request-for-proposal" for a project to teach environmental history and ethics to biologists, with the stated justification that this would relieve the constraints on these professionals' performances. Such approaches are doomed to failure. Knowing about Leopold's "land ethic" is vital, but it doesn't tell us how to negotiate complex bureaucracies and policy arenas.

Another limiting aspect of our sense of professionalism is a "moralistic" involvement in our work. We tend to see issues as black and white and other individuals and organizations as "good" and "bad" guys (see Etzioni 1975). For example, I know a young woman new to wildlife who is devoted to a particular conservation cause. She has nothing but contempt for the ranchers and stockmen who oppose her cause. And she doesn't understand why she can't get her diatribes against them published. Most often, straight from the university, we are dedicated to wildlife, to conservation, using very simple maps of professionalism. And then, if we are not careful, after some time we get captured, as it were, by the agency we work for, so that our primary allegiance is no longer to wildlife, but to the agency (i.e., we become "careerists," see Wilson 1980). This can lead to an overemphasis on placing agency interests first and conformity to what we perceive to be "our side"—the right side (see the "closure" problem, Janis 1971).

All these aspects of our sense of professionalism, those unexamined and fundamental assumptions on which we base our every act, can pose barriers to understanding problems and cooperating to solve them.

We need to broaden our concept of professionalism to include legitimate self-examination. What does it mean to be a professional; what is our role in society; and, in our agencies, what are the problems shared by wildlife professionals across agency lines?

Another thing we can do is get rid of our biases against the social sciences. I have discovered that the policy sciences, organizational sociology and cognitive psychology literature are full of ideas useful to us. These complement our existing technical strengths in the field of wildlife biology. There is no excuse for ignorance or even continuing contempt for these valuable fields of knowledge. The private sector uses them. So should we. Unfortunately, there is no single course or book one can go to pick up this knowledge. Again, no quick fixes. (see references).

The second part of the map which we need for increased effectiveness, efficiency and equality is a better understanding of organizations. Most of us think of the organizations we work for as unique entities. But students of organizational behavior have demonstrated that organizations have many common properties, structures, modes of operations and recurring problems. Most wildlife professionals work in government agencies—bureaucracies dominated by rules, roles and regulations and driven by standard operating procedures and political self-interest (see Allison 1971). Although bureaucracies are efficient tools in some settings, they do not always promote wildlife or professionalism. But organizational problems (e.g., inappropriate structure) are often not recognized as such. Instead, they are often attributed to individuals who are "trouble-makers" or "boat-rockers." On other occasions, they are seen as being caused by to too little authority or too little funding. Organizational designers, however, recognize four pathologies that commonly afflict bureaucracies:

(1) Both information and decisions move along rigid hierarchies and are subject to top-down control.

(2) People get promoted to levels at which they are incompetent.

(3) Very short-term, narrow views of problems and solutions are often dominate and result in sub-optimal pro-

grams.

(4) Routinization of jobs leads to dissatisfaction and alienation.

FINDING THE ANSWERS

So, what's the answer—change the bureaucracies? After decades of working on the problem, organizational designers have concluded that this can't be done. But there are some things we can do to improve matters.

We can inform ourselves about organizations and develop models in our minds of how we as professional workers, best fit in, how our organization relates to others it deals with and, most important, how to use informal networks within our agencies to promote wildlife. This does not mean by-passing any laws, or undermining our organizations, or padding budgets, or any other unethical activities. It means creating new communication networks, vertically and horizontally, within and beyond agencies in order to generate and evaluate new ideas and gain access to resources.

One basic goal in improving organizations should be to push decision-making and access to resources down to the lowest levels—to the people closest to the task and to those with the most firsthand knowledge of it. Our bureaucracies are generally top-heavy with top-down controls. By comparison, Lockheed's now famous and successful "skunk works" division serves as one solution. Its aim is to get results cheaper, sooner and better through application of common sense to tough problems (Johnson 1985).

The trend in government agencies toward task forces, interagency teams and coordinators is encouraging. But in my experience, these groups are seldom made up of task-oriented professionals—a population biologist, a habitat expert and a species expert, for example. Too often, a team consists of a representative of the USFWS, a representative from the state, a representative of the BLM, etc., each having the political interests of his respective agency at heart. Interagency rivalries and stereotypes are thus perpetuated and less is done for wildlife than could be done.

Many students leave our universities with advanced degrees in the subjects of organization and management, but wildlifers get no such training and our profession suffers for it. And wildlife suffers for it. We need to create flexible and open organizational systems that can act quickly in response to wildlife's needs, use our professional knowledge more effectively, show more progress for the time and money spent and truly support their professional workers. Again, there are no ready sources for this kind of knowledge, but I suggest looking into the topics of organization design and theory and management and decision analysis (see Maguire 1986).

The third part of the operational map we professionals need is a better understanding of the larger policy dynamics we are caught up in. We often think of policy as something somebody else makes—somebody in the legislature or in the central office. Policy scientists—those who work with the entire public policy process—have identified six stages in this complex dynamic of politics plus data: initiation, estimation, selection, implementation, evaluation and termination (Brewer and deLeon 1983). Wildlife professionals can figure prominently in the implementation phase and can also play roles in all other phases as well. Real policy is made in implementation, since this is where we do things to and for wildlife directly. Our allies in the nongovernmental conservation community can help agency administrators and professionals in the policy process because they play major roles in the initiation, estimation, selection and evaluation phases of it. But we all must understand the policy process and our roles explicitly in order to be most effective.

We need a useful working model of the policy process (see Lasswell 1971, Brewer and deLeon 1983). Understanding the process will help give us the knowledge to participate effectively in it. These models of policy and of organizations should be systematic and practical tools. These tools are as important to our wildlife conservation work as are models of population ecology and statistics. For instance, we've all heard nonbiologists give faulty explanations of some wildlife phenomenon. *We* know these so-called "explanations" don't make sense because our training and education have provided us with a model of how things actually do work. In the same way, we need an equally powerful model of how our world actually works—that is, we need a complete map of the policy process.

But this doesn't just point to a course in political science or civics. Policy sciences, a relatively little known field, offers tools for complex problem-solving, critical thinking and practical results. Ron Brunner at the University of Colorado's Center for Public Policy teaches such material, but there are very few others anywhere in the country. Brunner says:

"The objective of this...is to prepare students to participate effectively and responsibly in the policy decision process through the systematic use of adequate conceptual tools....To do anything less is unecessarily to accept 'blinders' that will frustrate your efforts to achieve the intended results."

OTHER NEEDED STEPS

I have suggested that we need a reorientation and broadening of our professional attitudes, our knowledge of organizations and the policy process in order to achieve more effective performance—to fill out professional effectiveness map. We need, in general, a subtler, holistic style of problem-solving. But without modernizing the bureaucracies, a large part of the potential gains will be foregone. We need to re-focus and expand our perspectives in order to recognize and fill in missing parts of our professional working map. But we don't need to re-invent the wheel. Much of the missing map already exists within our collective experience and within other disciplines. Our responsibilities to wildlife, to society and to ourselves demand that we move forward quickly. Here are a few final, general suggestions for building the roadmaps that we need:

First, practicing professionals should work more closely with university wildlife programs to develop curricula that include their own considerable experience—experience which will maximize later opportunities for students to be most effective. Many university professors have not worked in the agencies and, therefore, don't know what the constraints are in such settings. Thus, effective participation in organizational life and in the policy dynamic is little appreciated, understood or taught.

Second, the Wildlife Society might form a committee on effectiveness to examine the role of wildlife professionals in their employing agencies, how to strengthen these roles and how to use professional knowledge more effectively at all levels—area, district and state and in research, management, administration, programs and policy. Knowledge is power, and we must understand that we will be asking administrators much more than just permission to use our knowledge more effectively. In fact, we will be asking them to include us in decision-making--a request which will be resisted by some.

Third, this committee could also meet with the public relations branches of its members' agencies to encourage increased public education about our important work and our professional contributions. This would not be publicity seeking, but simply an effort to gain the visibility and genuine recognition that our profession deserves.

Fourth, wildlife professionals should encourage the *Wildlife Society Bulletin*, and other professional publications, to bring discussions of real world professional concerns to the fore. We need to share and capitalize on the wealth of experience within our profession. Our professional journals need to address these subjects directly.

Fifth, and last, agency professionals should request in-service training programs. Traditional programs try to knock some of the rough corners off biologists so we'll dress more neatly and write and speak better, but do little to remedy the fundamental constraints we face. In-service programs should include updated technical knowledge, to be sure, but they also should emphasize professional, organizational and policy knowledge—knowledge essential to complete our map for professional effectiveness, efficiency and equality.

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