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Plenary Session—Welcome and Opening Remarks

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Plenary Session—Welcome and Opening Remarks

OPENING REMARKS

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I vastly appreciate the opportunity of being with you all today to help launch what, I am certain, will prove an extraordinary workshop. I bring you specific greetings and words of welcome from colleagues in eastern Washington and elsewhere in the interior Pacific Northwest and particularly from the organization that John Munn and I work for, the College of Agriculture and Home Economics and Cooperative Extension, Washington State University. We are delighted indeed to have this meeting in our corner of the world this year.

As our state's land grant university, Washington State University (WSU) has long supported wildlife biology and management as an area of emphasis. Wildlife is presently "housed" in the College of Agriculture's Department of Natural Resource Sciences (which I chair). We have what I believe is a vital, high quality and growing program. With regard to teaching, over 50% of our total student body of 450 is composed of wildlife majors (and enrollment in wildlife has roughly tripled since 1990). We have six faculty in wildlife with specializations in avian and mammalian ecology, habitat ecology, wildlife nutrition, population ecology, and animal damage management. Our research program, I believe, has achieved national and international reputation in several areas, such as nutritional ecology of large herbivores and predators—including moose, deer, elk, woodland caribou, and the only captive grizzly bear research facility in the country.

Having said all this, we remain hampered at WSU by lack of Extension Specialist support specifically in Wildlife. However, the strength (indeed, foundation) of our department lays in its interdisciplinary nature, whereby wildlife science is *integrated* with other natural resource fields. Consequently, wildlife concerns are incorporated within many (indeed, most) of the stewardship, continuing professional education, and youth extension programming conducted by forestry and range specialists and by our state extension faculty colleagues.

Now that you know a little about us, I'd like to impart a few personal perspectives on fish and wildlife extension needs and challenges in Washington. I will try to frame these opportunities within the theme of this week's meeting: Educational Challenges for the Next Century—Where Should We Be Going From Here.

In 1991, Jim Miller helped produce a National Guidance Statement for Extension Wildlife and Fisheries programs, a statement that clearly identified wildlife/fisheries as (I quote): "...*an integral* part of the total extension mission...." This underlaying principle, while certainly accepted by folks like *us*, in my experience is often not fully recognized (institutionally) by the land-grant universities which employ us. I therefore believe our first challenge is an internal one, to do a better job of educating our own organizations on the essentiality of properly supported wildlife extension programs that are well-integrated with those in other related fields.

With regard to subject matter focus, we certainly are not hampered by a shortage of topics for extension programming. Selected subjects of particular importance here in Washington, for example, include such areas as conservation biology and biological diversity, management for both game and non-game species, integration of wildlife with land management practices (such as agriculture, grazing, forestry, etc.), wetland/aquatic habitat conservation—and the list goes on and on.

I'm not going to dwell upon these and other subject matter areas overmuch, except to state my belief that we (here in Washington at least) need to be increasingly focused upon types of wildlife habitat that have "traditionally" been afforded less attention than "wild" lands. I am talking here about urban/suburban areas, the "urban-rural" interface, and intensively managed landscapes such as cropland and managed forests. These areas do provide highly significant habitats for certain species of wildlife; and comprise a part of the overall matrix of habitats serving wildlife populations on a landscape scale. Perhaps most importantly, these types of "non-wild" lands in aggregate comprise the "type" of habitat (and support the wildlife) with which most of our state's population comes into most regular contact.

I believe we need to focus upon a truly (to use an overused term) "holistic" approach to understanding and managing wildlife populations and habitats, as inter-related to the matrix of other natural resources and resource values existing in our state's ecosystems. This approach is implicit within the emerging paradigm of ecosystem management, and reinforces the notion that to be successful in wildlife conservation one must do more than myopically focus upon wildlife alone.

We also, in my opinion, have some challenges related to the audiences/clientele we serve in wildlife extension programs. While continuing education programs targeted

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to practicing natural resource professionals remain important, my considered opinion is that in the future we must devote proportionately greater attention to non-professional audiences such as:

- Rural and, particularly, urban youth, who will be the public opinion and decision makers of the future,
- The general public (that is, the opinion/decision makers of today), many of whom may not have intimate, day-to-day contact with wildlife but who nonetheless feel an affinity for wildlife, and
- The small, but important, proportion of the public who depend upon natural resources for socioeconomic sustenance, such as farmers, loggers, fishermen, etc., since this is a segment of society that can directly influence wildlife through day-to-day activities.

These constituencies need accurate, objective and usable information—particularly in light of the deluge of “dis”-information they are often exposed to.

This brings me to some “philosophic” thoughts on needs from extension fish and wildlife programs in the future. As professionals and public servants, I believe we must take particular pains to separate “fact from fancy” in educational programs. We have a responsibility to remain objective and impartial in programs that are soundly based upon science. Wildlife issues often can be contentious and, again, our audiences certainly receive more than a fair share of “partiality” from the media and from interest groups on both sides of questions. Despite human temptations to the contrary, we must not fall into the trap of partisanship, for reasons related to both professional ethics and loss of credibility.

I further believe that we need to integrate the “science” of fish and wildlife with socioeconomic values and needs in extension programming. Most of us got into the fields of natural resources as scientists. We thus have a tendency to view and educate upon fish and wildlife from a rather narrow, purely scientific (or, to some, “eco-centric”) standpoint. Society, however, views and assigns values to wildlife and other natural resources from economic, cultural, and/or aesthetic perspectives that often are based upon other factors. We need to recognize and integrate these socioeconomic factors right along with scientific principles when we provide extension education.

John Munn asked that I conclude my remarks with a perceived “Chief Need” for fish and wildlife programs of the 21st Century. Where should we be going from here (and how should we get there)? I would sum up my

recommendations, in a global sense, with two words (and both begin with the letter “C”): *Coordination* and *Collaboration*. By *Coordination*, I am referring to the challenges of integrating fish and wildlife concerns, issues, and principles with those of other fields of science that may be relevant, and (as noted previously) with the needs and desires of society. By *Collaboration*, I am referring not only to teamwork of wildlife extension professionals with those in other relevant fields in program delivery, but also to partnerships with and among our various constituencies.

The risks of not rising to this challenge—of remaining insular in fish and wildlife extension programs—are great indeed. Can fish and wildlife extension professionals be truly effective working solely from the perspective of fish and wildlife, and/or in isolation from fellow professionals in other resource fields? Probably not. Let me pose some additional questions of a more positive nature:

Would chances of success in preserving old-growth-dependent wildlife be improved by coordinated, active, and willing involvement of wildlife biologists, foresters, loggers, environmentalists, etc., working together rather than at “loggerheads,” as so often in the past?

Would chances of preserving or restoring anadromous fish be enhanced by fisheries biologists working together with agriculturalists, engineers, ranchers, etc., rather than in isolation from or in opposition to each other?

Would an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect, if not total agreement; and working forward to build upon points of mutual agreement help in moving disparate interest groups toward consensus in resolving problems—instead of today’s common recourse to litigation?

My answer to all these questions is a simple “Yes.”

In conclusion, I believe we have some real opportunities as fish and wildlife extension professionals as we progress toward the 21st Century. We are in a unique position to both impart coordination and collaboration in the programs we deliver (i.e., “lead by example”). We also are in a position to foster these mindsets of coordination and collaboration within the varied constituencies we serve. A number of models to achieve these goals have been around for some time as foci for extension efforts, such as Holistic Resource Management, Coordinated Resource Management Planning and, more recently, Collaborative Learning. These and other models all require a willingness of extension professionals to transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries; to work together with others in related fields; and to serve all concerned constituencies in progressing toward shared goals.