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THE FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE- EXTENSION CONNECTION

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THE FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE—EXTENSION CONNECTION

DUNCAN MACDONALD, National Education and Training Center, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, 304 Webb, Arlington, VA 22203

We go back a long, long way! When the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) first established an office to cooperate directly with the Extension System's fish and wildlife component, I was a mere lad of 49. I became involved 4 years later, still a very young man! Now that the program and I have matured it's a good time to reflect on past accomplishments and associations and to look ahead to a continuing productive relationship.

It a real pleasure to be here with the progenitor of the Service's effort, Jack Berryman, whose wisdom and support we have all benefited from over the years. Likewise our long, congenial, and productive relationship with Jim Miller has provided the grease to keep it all going. Throughout my tenure as the Service Extension Czar, I have been ably and loyally assisted by Dan Stiles, whose impact on our cooperative effort cannot be over-emphasized. Likewise so many of you Specialists have been there from the outset, albeit some in different states, that I truly feel that I am in a roomful of good friends, not just productive cooperators.

Our collaborative history is one of which we can all be proud. The more than \$6 million that has gone into our products and programs has generated, I believe, some of the most cost-effective and influential communications efforts going in the wildlife and fisheries fields. You people are so good at packaging and distributing sound and balanced information, and in targeting specific audiences, that overseeing this effort has been remarkably easy. I like to cite the small stream management brochure produced by Virginia Cooperative Extension back in 1984. It was attractive, full of practical information, and was carefully distributed to farmers and landowners who had small streams on their property. The FWS COULDN'T DO THAT! We have also gotten a huge amount of mileage from the companion pieces on biodiversity produced by Kentucky in 1994, one to a non-technical audience and one for more knowledgeable folks. What could be more timely in terms of resource priorities! I'd be remiss in not mentioning the Wildlife Habitat Judging program. So many of you have worked tirelessly to expand and improve this great educational tool. It's been a privilege to be associated with this effort and we are all pleased to be able to continue our support.

Basking in reflected glory feels good, but we need also to address the future. Dan and I now toil in the Education Division of the National Education and Training Center (NETC). Note no mention of Extension in the Division name. Our incoming Division Chief is Mike Smith, who is "one of the good guys," and also one who knows and appreciates the potentials of Extension. Dan has perhaps 7 or 8 months to go until retirement, and I will

most likely exit gracefully (?) about a year later. We have with us Regional Extension Coordinators from the Service who will retain some institutional memory about this program. The Director of NETC, Rick Lemon, is concerned about developing a transition capability in the Division, but personnel slots and funds are scarce these days. I hope and believe that there will be a knowledgeable "body" at NETC to carry on after Dan and I have retired, but this is not fully assured. Likewise, there is the black cloud of downsizing and funding cut-backs hanging over us. This is by no means unique to the FWS or to NETC, but IT IS THERE! We have been able to maintain close to \$100,000 in our extension budget for projects until this year. We STILL are not sure how much we will have for the rest of this fiscal year, and I would be pleasantly surprised if we come up with anything more than \$50,000 in the next fiscal year. This is our precious "seed money" with which we attempt to cost-share your proposals with other Service entities. What this means, pure and simple, is that your proposals MUST be attractive to FWS managers or few of them will be funded.

On the bright side, the entire FWS seems hell-bent to correct past neglect of what we currently term "outreach." There's a high-profile Refuge Outreach Program, a parallel Endangered Species Outreach Program, a Wetlands Outreach Program, etc. etc. Our "Ecosystems Approach" effort also recognizes the imperative of working with partners outside our special jurisdictions. I believe that the Extension System is uniquely equipped to provide some of the most vital communications links that will enable us to accomplish our mutual resource objectives. The challenge is there. We need only to be alert for opportunities, to keep personal communications lines open, particularly between Specialists and the Regional Extension Coordinators, to propose and seek innovative funding schemes and multiple partners for appropriate projects. I believe that, on the whole, we have neglected the potential of working with our state natural resources agencies in cooperative efforts and should work to increase such opportunities.

While year-end funding is still likely to be available for projects, I think we should be putting resource-oriented proposals in front of managers early in their planning cycle. (Hopefully we'll have funding in FY97 earlier than halfway through the year!) Dollars will be short, but if the Service is truly committed to "Outreach," and I think that it is, then good proposals will be funded.

You folks don't do "fluff," you do the "good stuff." I think my colleagues in the Service have now begun to realize that extension is often the very best place to enlist help to solve resource management problems that require

communication with the public. Some of them may need to be led by the nose—but you're pretty good at that, too! Have at 'em, and we'll do all we can to help.

As always, this workshop has been a pleasure and an inspiration. Dan and I don't expect to be at the next one in person, but we'll be there in spirit!

