

ABOUT SHANE

Shane Mahoney is considered one of the leading international authorities on wildlife conservation. A rare combination of historian, scientist and philosopher he brings a unique perspective to wildlife issues that has motivated and inspired audiences around the world. Named one of the 10 Most Influential Canadian Conservationists by *Outdoor Canada Magazine* and nominated for Person of the Year by *Outdoor Life Magazine*, he has received numerous awards including the Public Service Award of Excellence from the government of Newfoundland and Labrador and International Conservationist of the Year by Safari Club International. Born and raised in Newfoundland he brings to his writings and lectures a profound commitment to rural societies and the sustainable use of natural resources, including wildlife and fish.

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Throughout time man has been linked by an inevitable interdependence with wild creatures. As both hunter and prey we enjoined the miracle of wild death and resurrection, and saw our future mirrored in the muscle and blood of the wild others who walked the savannahs, grazed the alpine meadows and wandered the great tundra regions of Africa, Asia and Europe. But we drew more than physical sustenance from those we pursued and killed. It is my belief that we developed our concepts of beauty, our talents for technical innovation, our art and our religion from engagements with those animals we observed, pursued, captured and escaped from. In this profoundly natural sense, wild nature gave us ourselves. That is why the loss of wild creatures and the landscapes they roam is of such consequence to the health and well being of humanity today.

By world standards North Americans enjoy a continent that teems with accessible wildlife, offering all citizens, hunters and non-hunters alike the opportunity to witness the subtlety and grandeur inherent in the natural world. We remain connected to our distant past by such opportunity, and find in the noisome flights of geese, the graceful ballet of the whitetail, or the sight of elk grazing in the golden mists of morning something

CONSERVATION MATTERS

with Shane Mahoney

North American Wildlife Conservation: Revolutions Every Citizen Should Know

that stirs us in a special way, one we find very hard to explain. Somehow we all recognize that just being in the presence of wild creatures gives us what no other experience can. We inherently recognize that we are in the presence of beauty and that before us stands a life giving force. The stirring of this deep awareness leaves a lasting impression that allows us to step outside our normal lives and wonder about the world and our place in it. That is why for so many people experiences in nature are often described as spiritual or even religious.

Unfortunately the wild abundance of America today is often taken for granted. Citizens of Canada and the United States have come to expect wildlife diversity

as part of their cultural experience and remain largely uninformed of the heroic efforts that led to this priceless wild legacy and the complex infrastructure that ensures its continued presence in our lives. They have no idea that wildlife was rescued on a massive scale one hundred and twenty years ago. In the absence of such awareness an impression has taken hold that wildlife exists free of human endeavor, or that only in the absence of human influence can wildlife thrive! Much is threatened by this lack of understanding, not only wildlife diversity but also our cherished tradition of open access to it. Hunting and sustainable use in all forms are especially at risk.

Addressing this lack of awareness by North

American society is beyond question one of the great social responsibilities for the conservation movement in this 21st century. We will undertake a massive effort to enlighten the citizenry of this continent on the philosophy and practicalities of conservation or we will watch in painful awareness the loss of one of the great intellectual and cultural achievements of the United States, quickly and wisely joined by Canada, and recently discovered by international organizations the world over—sustainable use. In the absence of such knowledge we will enter a world without light, one in which conservation policy and law will be based upon inclination and ignorance. The

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results will be opportunistic, chaotic and doomed to failure. We must remember that wildlife conservation and the protection of human cultural traditions can only be accomplished by long term strategies based upon deep knowledge, compassionate enlightenment and unwavering commitment.

This is exactly what a small group of dedicated leaders and a legion of hunter-naturalists and wilderness proponents provided in late nineteenth century North America, the seminal period which founded the sustainable use movement and gave to the world the very principles of conservation. In what can only be termed a revolution, men like George Bird Grinnell, President Theodore Roosevelt, John Muir and Gifford Pinchot in the United States, and Prime Minister Sir

Wilfred Laurier, Gordon Hewitt and Clifford Sifton in Canada stood firm against a three hundred year old tradition of slaughtering North American wildlife and destroying habitat in pursuit of profit. In a cyclone of change they inspired two young societies to launch wildlife refuges and reserves, National Forests, National Parks, substantial and effective legislation for the protection of wildlife, and an ethic that saw sustainability and democratic access to wildlife by diverse traditions as the principles to be preserved and promulgated. In building this extraordinary movement they challenged and eventually destroyed the myth of inexhaustibility that had underlain the abuse of North American wildlife for so long.

By the 1930s it was clear, however, that

even these great achievements were not enough. Wildlife had recovered on a massive scale but some species were disappearing despite complete protection, while others were prospering despite liberal hunting seasons. How could this be explained? There was a deficit of scientific knowledge. The shock wave of conservation's first revolution had reached a foreign shore and seemingly the limits of its imaginative drive had been defined and found wanting. But again there would be heroes; again the hunter-naturalists of North America would stand firm for conservation. In the United States particularly a new tide was already running. With imaginative new legislation to provide funding (the Wildlife Restoration Act) and political and professional visionaries like "Ding" Darling and Aldo Leopold to guide the



The Guide Outfitters Association of British Columbia (GOABC) wants to start a fundamental shift among hunters from caring about hunting to caring about all wildlife. Ranchers care about cattle and anglers care about fish, but hunters seem to only care about their sport. Hunters must be committed to the responsible use of wildlife resources and passionate about preserving a diversity of wildlife species. The GOABC is a strong supporter of the North American Wildlife Conservation Model, which stipulates that law and science should be managed wildlife. This model is the result of hunters and anglers who were dedicated conservation. As anti-hunting pressure becomes louder, it becomes increasingly important to continue and enhance the legacy of the hunter conservationist.

new wave of passion and concern, the age of wildlife management was born. A second revolution, incited and carried by the wise use philosophy of American hunters, was launched.

Now, in this new century, we are again challenged to rise in the name of wildlife. A web of social, environmental and political change has ensnared the sustainable use conservation movement. The earlier achievements, so hard won and passionately defended, and so successful for wildlife, are under siege. It is our time now; the challenge has fallen to us. We can watch this miracle of wildlife recovery die, and fail those who fought for our rights and privileges, or we can stand with pride and lead North American conservation yet again. The third revolution is ours to fashion, ours to undertake.

This third revolution must engender a massive mobilization of intellect and passion for the cause, but it must begin with an all out effort to bring conservation history to the citizenry of Canada and the United States. In the absence of this all other efforts will fail. The appalling truth is that only the tiniest fraction of the public has any idea of the history referenced here. This reality is more than an embarrassing truth, however; it is freighted with powerful consequences. Without knowing the power of hunting to instill conservation ideals and without knowledge of what it takes to maintain conservation programs the public will continue to believe that wildlife exists by accident, and that hunting is a tradition that has outlived its time. Our efforts will decide how this debate unfolds. If we stay

out of this struggle, then we'd best be prepared to put up and shut up. If we engage, we must do so with all the strength we have.

In future articles this theme will be explored and this history will be explained in more detail; and this call to action rejoined. I will bring to Mountain Hunter Magazine and to the guide outfitters of British Columbia and all its partners and affiliates the North American Wildlife Conservation Model, one of the great social and intellectual achievements of Canada and the United States. The cry will go out. Let us be part of the third revolution, not the company on whose watch the movement failed. Both wildlife and hunting are at stake. So is the pride of nations, a continent's wild legacy and a sacred part of ourselves.