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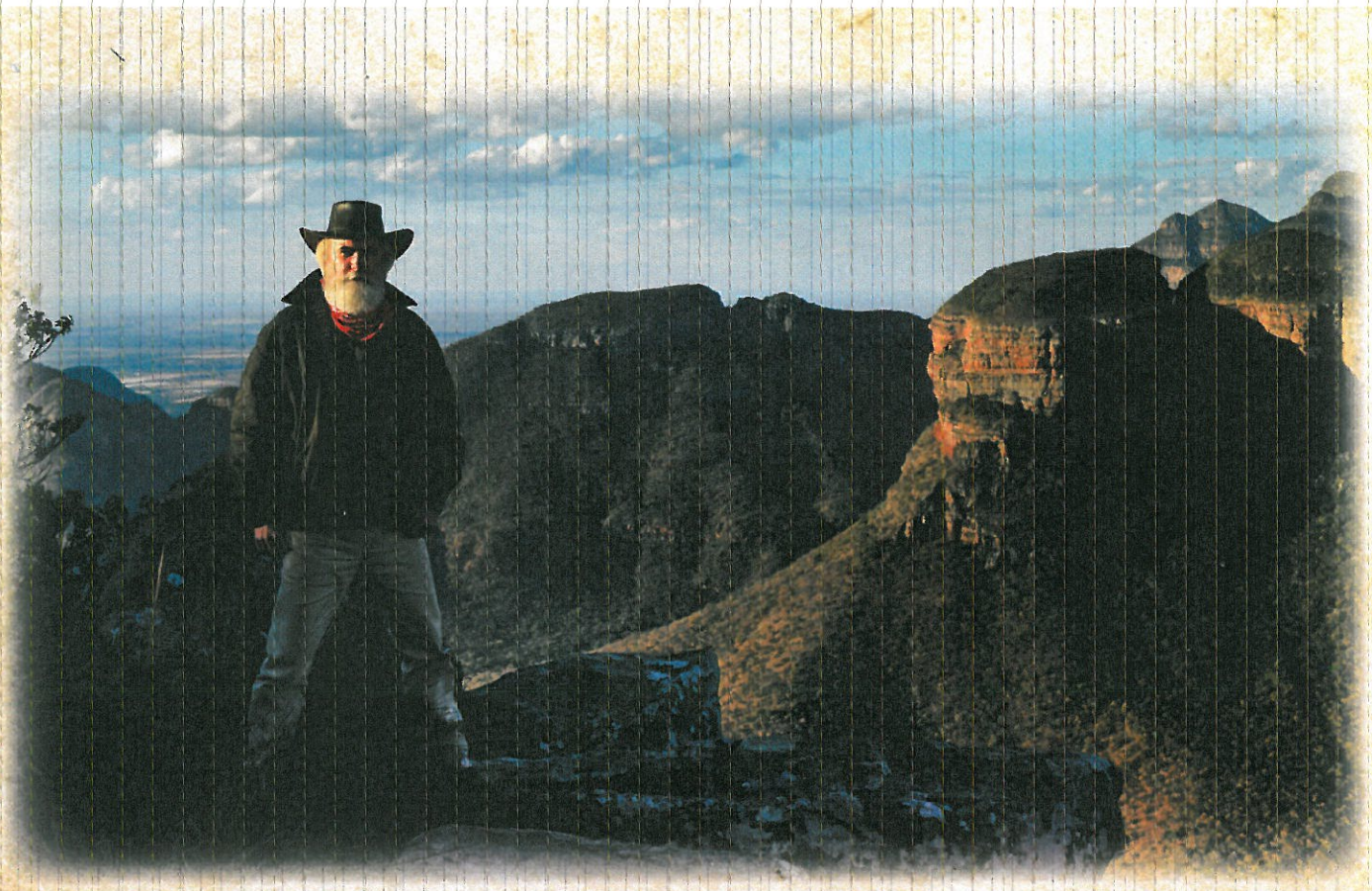
CONSERVATION Matters™

LIMITED EDITION

Guide Outfitters
Association of British Columbia
Wildlife Stewardship is our Priority™

International Wildlife Management Symposium

Managing Wildlife in the Next Century



There are two fundamental questions that from now on must inevitably haunt humanity. The first is: What do we want from the earth? This is a pragmatic question and focuses upon demands for resources and space. With seven billion of our species gnawing relentlessly at the roots of production and consuming the storehouses of the natural world at a ferocious pace, this is a question pregnant for strife and conflict. It will be the architect for a problematic future unprecedented at the global scale, though certainly there have been many historical examples of ecological collapse and human catastrophe at the regional and local levels. In this sense we know both the enemy and the future: it is us and it is ours. Yet this question is at least one where we can estimate the cost of our existence in terms we all can easily understand.

The second question is much harder to define and requires a more nuanced understanding of both the natural world and our basic humanity. It requires us to presume that the natural world is finite and that human beings are no less tied to its rhythms of production and recovery than are the great whales that swim the world's oceans or the carnivores that race their prey across the great grassland plains. This second question forces us to consider the limits to human population growth, the choices we must make regarding our demands upon natural systems and the fact that human beings everywhere, regardless of opportunity or advantage must, ultimately and inescapably, harvest from nature in order to survive. Much hinges on this second question, yet its metrics are incredibly difficult to define. Still, somehow we need to decide: What do we want for the earth? After all, its future is in our hands.

While this question seems intractable, I believe we already know a lot about what we really want, at least generally. I believe we want a world of wildlife and scenic diversity, a world of clean water and air, a world where mankind can be provisioned by working within nature rather than by destroying it, a world where human health and cultural diversity can be maintained and a world where traditional livelihoods can be supported and fostered. I believe the majority of people would accept these standards. I believe they would recognize within them the full potential for human beings to remain engaged in harvesting from nature; though certainly also ensuring that such harvests are not depletive, but are tied to the capacities of nature to supply, sustain and replenish. This is what an ecological approach to humanity entails.

What a truly ecological approach does not entail is preempting man's natural engagements with the rest of biodiversity or denying his inalienable dependence on the products of natural systems. An ecological approach does not include turning humanity from engaged participant to stylistic voyeur or rejecting his evolutionary and historic role as a predator, harvester and cultivator of the natural world. Nor does an ecological approach permit one to disregard the myriad of human cultures whose day to day lives are completely dependant upon and inevitably lead to animal use and animal death as an ongoing reality – fishers, hunters, ranchers, and farmers. In trying to disassemble humanity's taking of animal lives and describe it as foreign to moral living, or gratuitous, surely we must also deny the direct food and related economic dependencies of billions of people around the world. Are not these people and their cultures also part of the world's biodiversity and worthy of our interest, admiration and protection?

I believe they are. Indeed, I believe they represent the founding professions of humanity and as such are part of that

A VISION FOR CONSERVATION

by Shane P. Mahoney

original and historic landscape of human-nature engagement that we ought to be most concerned with preserving. For buried somewhere in these odysseys to existence are truths of great significance to humanity, lessons that were hard won by experience and practical engagement that inform how we can most successfully live within the natural world. These lessons have surely also confirmed our absolute dependence on the natural systems we capture and utilize. Precisely because of this knowledge, I also believe these human enterprises must be especially concerned for the natural world and for the lives of animals and the future of species.

Those of us who have been directly responsible for the deaths of animals bear an even greater burden of duty. We are now part of the very fabric of nature and have participated in its vital exchange. We have been witness to death, the passing of life and the undeniable end that awaits all living forms. By our hands has the fire of existence been extinguished in sentient creatures that have enthralled us since our earliest beginnings and continue as a source of fascination and beauty in our lives; creatures that lured us to art and religion and, eventually, to our very notions of humanity. As hunters we have experienced the natural world in ways most human beings never do and can appreciate its intricate designs as essential to the future of wildlife and our own species as well. Our days afield with wild creatures are now indelible parts of ourselves; their deaths an indelible part of our lives.

So it ought to be that we give back to nature more than others; and more than we have taken. Working to ensure the viability of nature and the sustainable use of wild resources ought to be an understood requirement of hunters, as much a part of the hunting experience as learning animal sign or how to safely and accurately use a firearm. Society ought to witness this commitment in our ranks and understand by it that hunting is indeed a force for conservation and not some frivolous indulgence. We cannot simply say we are conservationists and concerned for wildlife's future. We must demonstrate this and do so emphatically, over and over again. Only by doing so can we convince society of our concern for the wild others we pursue; the same wild others that have sustained us in so many ways over such a long and improbable arc of time.

Doing so will require a good deal of hunters. It will require an understanding of the role of wildlife science and research, of the complex challenges of wildlife management, and of the social and political forces that come to bear on wildlife issues. It will require speaking out on issues and expressing a willingness to learn from others who are knowledgeable about wildlife. It will require dialogue with a wide spectrum of groups whose roles and perspectives may differ considerably but who are equally active players on behalf of wildlife nevertheless. In short, it will require doing things like organizing this wildlife symposium.

The Guide Outfitters Association of British Columbia has clearly launched upon a conservation mission. Certainly the membership of their organization and its leadership must be concerned with the practical realities that confront their businesses. They have, after all, invested their lives and that of their families in these endeavors. Yet, they are clearly concerned with far more than this and are working for the conservation of wildlife in a much broader sense. They are, in fact, demonstrating what seemingly a large percentage of our society has failed to realize; namely, that conservation matters. They are also demonstrating what passion and commitment and broad thinking can achieve.

There are many conservation minded organizations of greater size and means than the Guide Outfitters Association of British Columbia; but very few can attest to having organized a meeting on wildlife conservation equal to the one described in the pages to follow. Bringing practitioners from around the globe together to discuss important issues facing wildlife is not an easy task. It is, however, a sign of commitment, maturity and poise that, if emulated by other organizations throughout North America, would quickly advance wildlife conservation to a vastly improved level of concern and discussion with governments and the public alike. It would also elevate the role of hunting as a force for wildlife conservation.

Let us hope this example is not lost on the wider hunting community but inspires it to do more in the name of conservation. For in the end it is not hunting, but conservation itself that must, and truly does, matter most. Wildlife are our sentinels of hope, no less today than in our distant past. We ought never to lose sight of this.