

Hunting As Sustainable Use

International Conservationists Are Taking Notice of North America's Model.

BY SHANE P. MAHONEY

In a previous essay, I explained how the hunter-based model of wildlife conservation has been ignored by international efforts aimed at sustaining natural resources.

Instead, the international community was engaged in its own search for a new conservation paradigm. Something new was required, something that considered both human motivations and traditions, as well as the ecological necessities for wildlife species. This was the very logic on which our hunting based North American approach was founded.

For more than 20 years, the international focus was on protecting rather than using wildlife. Hunting was ignored as a solution to wildlife depletions until quite recently when this has changed, and changed significantly.

At the World Conservation Union meeting in Amman, Jordan, October 2000, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) adopted a policy statement on what

has become known as the "sustainable use" approach, now accepted as the guiding philosophy for protecting the biological diversity of the world, endorsed by virtually every important conservation organization.

The sustainable use approach recognizes that conservation problems are caused by a number of factors that include economic and cultural issues and, to achieve long term conservation successes, must include human traditions and concerns in the solutions. Conservation is imperiled where people see no advantage to themselves in protecting wildlife. To sustain wild creatures and the habitats they require, we need to develop programs that generate sustainable benefits to people, and in particular to local people. The sustainable use approach recognizes that the tourist who is elated to see wild animals in some foreign place is not the one who lives with the animals. Direct benefits to those whose lives are most impacted by wildlife are essential if wildlife is to prosper.

Like our North American model, the convention recognizes that the use of wildlife populations can only be maintained and should only proceed under circumstances where the species' ecological limits are understood. In other words, such uses should only occur under circumstances of science-based management, a founding principle of the North American Model. Furthermore, the convention recognizes that wildlife should only be used under circumstances that prohibit perverse incentives (such as unlimited commercial exploitation) and where laws and regulatory policies are well defined and enforced. These too are essential ingredients of the North American approach.

Hunting has been at the core of sustaining wildlife in North America for well over a century. Hunting is well regulated and supported by ongoing

wildlife research that has formed the principal economic, social and political support for wildlife conservation. True, other groups, especially those focused on habitat and wilderness protection have meaningfully assisted, but hunters have led and continue to lead the most successful, longest established wildlife conservation program in the world. It has been a challenge to engage non-hunters, and even hunters themselves in this history, even here in North America. It is really no surprise that the world community has failed to recognize our achievements, and the cohesive approach to wildlife conservation that we developed over one hundred years ago.

In the absence of such recognition hunting is more vulnerable to the criticisms of anti-hunting groups. But with the emergence of sustainable use as *the* accepted international approach for conservation, and with hunting being specifically recognised in this framework as a legitimate form of sustainable use, the debate over hunting has shifted considerably in our favor. Far from being passé, hunting is being positioned to increase its profile in the community of interests engaged in preserving the natural world.

Our North American story is one of continental proportions, lasting well over a century, and marked by wildlife recovery and return to abundance, as well as enormous economic benefit. In short, it is everything the sustainable use paradigm hopes for. We must bring this example to the heart of international debate, place its record of success on the ledgers of the United Nations and the IUCN, and present it to their assemblies and working groups.

**Hunt
Forever**

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