

## LEAP OF FAITH: PART THREE

*If we hope to save wildlife and hunting, hunters must lead a new coalition for conservation.*

*In this third and final essay in his series on the importance of public dialogue, Shane Mahoney suggests that powerful winds of change are sweeping across the conservation landscape.*

*He argues that for the twenty-first century, building a formidable inclusive coalition is the only way to conserve wildlife and to maintain hunting as a vital force in our society. Building such a coalition will require bold new leadership that engages with the general public and reaches across the conservation aisle.*



DALLAS SAFARI CLUB

*Can hunting and conservation groups work together to form a strong coalition to protect our wildlife and hunting heritage?*

In 1887, William F. Cody brought his great and already spectacularly successful Wild West Show to Europe, landing his entourage of buffalo, mules, mustangs, cowboys, and Native Americans at Albert Dock and making his way to the great and grimy city of London. Here, he would begin an impressive tour of the continent with a command performance for Queen Victoria in a great arena built especially for the show.

It would be during this performance that a little-remembered but spectacular gesture would occur—one that might remind us all that change may be painful but must eventually be embraced and honored. Our hunting community ought to pay heed.

After the introductions, it was customary that a lone horseman would circle the arena holding aloft the American flag. It was during this command performance in London that as the standard bearer passed in front of the Queen, her Majesty arose and bowed to the emblem of American independence—a bold and remarkable gesture that had her entire assembly of ladies, gentlemen, and military personnel scrambling to their feet and bowing and saluting with fervor.

It was a signal moment. Perhaps for the first time since the defeat of the great British war machine by the ragtag militias of America, the British Empire's sovereign office stood to honor the Stars and Stripes. Somehow, a new relationship was born, honoring what the two countries shared, leaving aside the differences and misunderstandings that had led them to tension and ultimately to war. The new bonds have proven strong.

Like the relationships between nations, those within the conservation movement are sometimes conflicted and always complex. Composed of an extraordinary range of institutions and actors, it is inevitable that the movement possesses a chemistry of tension, competition, argument, and even mistrust. The divide between hunters and those opposed is well known, but the reality is that competition and antagonism exist to some degree across the entire conservation spectrum. When viewed from the perspective of the wildlife that we are all ostensibly trying to save, it most certainly appears that the conservation community is deeply fissured. This is a reality that wildlife and the conservation movement simply cannot afford.

While we might be tempted to accept this reality as an inevitable part of the human condition, we cannot and must not let the issue stand there. Far too much is at stake—for hunting, angling, and conservation.

We cannot forget that the conservation movement harbors deep within its core one of the great, hopeful, and beautiful ideas of mankind: Humans can live and prosper in a world where wildlife and wild places also thrive. There is inspiration in this, and in the very fact that it still remains possible to maintain those wild others whose lives and beauty have

inspired us for so long. To do so, however, will require not just reaching out to the general public. Along with this, the diverse conservation community must join hands in common purpose. It will not be enough to make the public aware, as large a task as that is. I am convinced it will also require the formation of a bold new coalition for conservation.

And why is this necessary? It is necessary because the current state of conflict within the conservation movement is incredibly wasteful of resources, suffocates idea-sharing and progress, serves as an impediment to rapid strategic improvements in conservation policy, and comes at a time where financial resources are and will be constrained for the foreseeable future. It is necessary because we live in a time when ever-greater pressures are being placed on wildlife, when fewer people are taking up hunting and angling, where increasingly citizens are becoming more distant from nature and less knowledgeable of just what it takes to maintain wildlife.

It is necessary because the conflicts within the conservation movement are confusing to the general public and because the relevance of hunting is becoming less and less clear to the broad majority of citizens. It is necessary, above all else, because we simply cannot—we must not—lose wildlife!

Just imagine for a moment that such conflict in our ranks did not exist. Imagine if all of us—hunter and nonhunter alike—could set aside the differences we feel and focus on those things we hold in common: things like abundant wildlife, clean water, healthy ecosystems, beautiful landscapes, humane treatment of all animals, opportunities for children to enjoy the outdoors. Imagine if we decided that our collective human and financial resources were united in common cause and that our political strength could

be centered on the truly critical issues about which we could all or in majority agree. Think of the power of this alliance, the sheer voting force, the politically transformative power of our conservation community to accomplish truly great things. Ponder for just a moment the achievements we could attain for wildlife and ask yourself if any of the petty excuses we offer up every day as to why this cannot occur are so real, so compelling, that we cannot rise above them.

In the first two parts of this series, I argued that hunters must begin a dialogue with the general public explaining the modern relevance and societal value of hunting and angling. I made suggestions for some of the means by which we could do this and how such means should be focused on engaging with society at large rather than just within our own chosen groups.

But in this essay, I am obviously suggesting something much larger, something bolder and hopefully more inspiring. I am suggesting that the hunting community step up to lead a broad new conservation coalition—one that will include former antagonists, competitors, and old friends alike, one that can and will communicate effectively with the broad public.

By doing so, not only will we be explaining the core challenges to conserving wildlife but we will also be explaining the relevance and value of hunting from its biological, economic, and social perspectives. Remember too that our new coalition would address the same “general public” who will determine the future of hunting and angling, and indeed all conservation efforts, either by their support, their opposition—or by their indifference.

The question for the hunting and angling community is: Who will step up to lead this coalition of the center? Who will eventually emerge as the leaders of what is now inevitable—a

New Conservation Order where the old rules will not apply and where new strategies will be won or the battle will be lost? Will the hunting community slowly decline in relevance and importance, or will it shake itself free of its retreat to fortress mentality and seize the opportunity to, yet again, carry the banner of conservation before the inspired citizens of our nations?

It will require both courage of conviction and boldness of action to make such transformations, and not all institutions or individuals are possessed of the grit it takes to do this. I am convinced, however, that such leaders will arise; indeed, I believe they are already rising.

Of course there will be many who will say this is impossible; just a pipe dream that can never become a reality. But I would remind such naysayers of a British Queen standing to honor the flag of upstart America and the handful of citizen hunters who launched a crusade over one hundred years ago to save the wildlife of this continent. There were many who said these too were fantasies of fools and idealists. How gloriously wrong they were. 🐾



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### About DSC

An independent organization since 1982, DSC has become an international leader in conserving wildlife and wilderness lands, educating youth and the general public, and promoting and protecting the rights and interests of hunters worldwide. Get involved at [www.biggame.org](http://www.biggame.org).