



The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation

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Wildlife conservation varies worldwide in its form, function, and underlying principles. The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation is a set of guiding principles that, collectively applied, has led to the form, function, and successes of wildlife conservation and management in the United States and Canada.

In 2007 The Wildlife Society, in cooperation with the Boone and Crockett Club, convened an expert committee to consider the past performance and future challenges to the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (Model). This technical review documents the history and development of these principles, and evaluates current and potential future challenges to their application. As wildlife conservation in Mexico developed separately, the Model does not refer to the system in place there; a separate analysis of wildlife conservation in Mexico is considered. An outline of the model, key findings, and recommendations of this review are:

THE MODEL:

The seven components or principles describing the key properties of the Model are:

1. Wildlife resources are a public trust.
2. Markets for game are eliminated.
3. Allocation of wildlife is by law.
4. Wildlife can be killed only for a legitimate purpose.
5. Wildlife is considered an international resource.
6. Science is the proper tool to discharge wildlife policy.
7. Democracy of hunting is standard.

These components formed the foundation of wildlife conservation and management in Canada and the U.S., but questions have arisen at times as to whether scrutiny of conservation programs would still reveal many of these as operationally intact.



Instructor Bob Byrne, left, mentors two participants during the first CLfT workshop offered exclusively to non-hunters from state and federal natural resource management agencies in 2010. *Credit: Conservation Leaders for Tomorrow*

FINDINGS:

- ◆ **The Public Trust Doctrine is rooted in statutory and case law, with strength varying by state or province.** Threats to the Doctrine include inappropriate claims of wildlife ownership; unregulated commercial sale of wildlife; prohibitions or unreasonable restriction on access to and use of wildlife; and a value system endorsing an animal rights philosophy. (p. 12)
- ◆ **Markets for game still exist.** The collection of amphibians and reptiles for the pet trade is largely unregulated and game farms, preserves, and tournaments place market pressures on wildlife for the financial gain of individuals. (p. 15)
- ◆ **Clearly defined laws exist regarding seasons, bag limits, methods of take, and areas in which seasons apply, however, enforcement of these laws is not as clearly defined.** Enforcement priorities often depend on available resources and societal desires. Decisions on land use, even on public lands, indirectly impact allocation of wildlife because of land use changes associated with land development. (p. 18)
- ◆ **Examples can be found of management programs that contradict the notion that wildlife can only be killed for a legitimate purpose.** Widespread prairie dog hunting, predator control, pheasant stocking, and other population manipulations raise questions for the model, and require a more articulate definition of “legitimate” purposes. (p. 19)
- ◆ **The increasing politicization of wildlife management threatens the effectiveness of the Model.** Rapid turnover of state agency directors, the makeup of boards and commissions, and a multitude of conservation organizations all provide examples of politicization and the proper use of science to advance wildlife policy. (p. 23)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ◆ **Wildlife should be managed under the principles of the Model.** The Model is not exclusive to game species. Biodiversity conservation in North America will be enhanced if the Model's principles are applied to nongame wildlife. Transformative processes will be necessary to enable the wildlife management institution to implement application of the Model to all species.
- ◆ **Key administrators and stakeholders across the U.S., Canada, and Mexico should convene every 10 years** to revisit key challenges facing wildlife conservation, assess the Model's principles and their application and adequacy, and develop joint strategies for consistent continental conservation delivery.



Commissioners representing Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. at the 1909 North American Conservation Congress. *Credit: Forest History Society*



Caribou females and calves in Newfoundland's Northern Peninsula during a herd compositional survey. *Credit: John Organ*

- ◆ **Governance models that are not in concert with contemporary societal needs or address only limited special interests risk having the wildlife management enterprise lose relevance to society.** The Model's future will rest on its effectiveness within an institutional framework fostering greater participatory decision making. Bold steps are needed to ensure that governance fosters relevance.
- ◆ **Efforts should be initiated and expanded to inform North Americans about the Model and the importance of citizen engagement in sustaining the future of biodiversity.** It is often considered synonymous with the user-pay, user-benefit funding model, which is purely a mechanism for funding implementation of the Model's principles. Such misconceptions lead to the notion that the Model is narrow in scope and exclusive of all but game species.

The Model's future rests to a high degree on the adaptability and application of its principles to contemporary wildlife conservation needs. To remain viable in the future, it must remain relevant. To that extent, the Model must be viewed as a dynamic set of principles that can grow and evolve. It is not the intent or purpose of this review to revise, modify or otherwise alter the Model. It is meant for us to understand, evaluate, and celebrate how conservation has been achieved in the U.S. and Canada, and to assess whether we are prepared to address challenges that lay ahead.

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Canada lynx kittens removed from den for marking as part of a long-term research study. *Credit: John Organ*