



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation

Standing Position Statement

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation

Wildlife conservation in the United States and Canada began to develop a unique form in the mid-19th century. In recent years, the recognition of wildlife conservation in the U.S. and Canada as distinct from other forms worldwide has led to the adoption of the term “North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.” The following seven components have been cited as forming the bedrock of the Model:

Wildlife as Public Trust Resources;
Elimination of Markets for Game;
Allocation of Wildlife by Law;
Wildlife Should Only be Killed for a Legitimate Purpose;
Wildlife Are Considered an International Resource;
Science is the Proper Tool for Discharge of Wildlife Policy; and
Democracy of Hunting.

Key precursors to the development of a wildlife conservation movement included the Industrial Revolution and the United States Supreme Court ruling in *Martin v. Waddell*. The Industrial Revolution led to unsustainable hunting of game for markets to feed the growing urban industrial workforce. It also resulted in an urban class with more money and leisure time during the mid-19th century, many of whom hunted under self-imposed “sporting” conditions that promoted fair play, self-restraint, pioneer skills, and health. Conflicts between sport hunters and market hunters led to advocacy by the former for elimination of markets for game, allocation of wildlife by law rather than privilege, and restraint on the killing of wildlife for anything other than legitimate purposes, conditions that eventually prevailed.

The 1842 Supreme Court ruling in *Martin v. Waddell*, known as the Public Trust Doctrine, laid the groundwork in U.S. common law for the principle that wildlife resources are owned by no one, to be held in trust by government for the benefit of present and future generations. Coupled with the advocacy of sport hunters and other conservationists concerned with the dramatic declines in wildlife, the Public Trust Doctrine became the legal bedrock for state and federal governments in the U.S. to establish regulatory authority over wildlife. The advocates for wildlife conservation included many Canadians, and while Canada had not experienced human population pressures on its natural resources to the same extent as in the U.S. during the 19th century, alarm over the declines south of the border led to governmental protection of wildlife at the provincial and federal levels. The subsequent collaboration of U.S. and Canadian wildlife conservationists led to treaties establishing certain species of marine mammals and migratory birds as international resources.

During President Theodore Roosevelt’s administration, the role of science over partisanship as the proper tool to discharge wildlife policy was emphasized. This was ultimately reinforced and

implemented through actions such as the 1930 American Game Policy, as adopted at the 17th American Game Conference, and the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937. The development and implementation of these conservation principles in the U.S. and Canada, and their scientific application, led to increased professional management of hunting programs. Unlike many other conservation models applied elsewhere in the world, hunting in the U.S. and Canada has remained open to all citizens regardless of class, and hunting has become central to the success of the Model.

The policy of The Wildlife Society, in regard to the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, is to:

1. Promote and support adherence to the seven core components, identified by the Society, as the bedrock of the Model, by state, provincial, and federal governments, as well as private landowners and managers.
2. Foster educational opportunities to increase societal awareness of the Model and the importance of its components, especially among wildlife professionals and wildlife students.
3. Support the critical review of the Model for completeness and application under current and future conditions.
4. Support further refinement of the Model for distinctions and similarities among Canada, Mexico, and the U.S.
5. Support the identification of threats and challenges to the viability and application of the Model, and as appropriate, use the scientific and educational resources of the Society to deter these threats.