



Forget the Couch-Potato Image

RETIREMENT OFFERS A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE—AND THRIVE

By Winifred B. Kessler



There is a common affliction among my peers in the wildlife profession that I'll call "fear of retiring." Rarely is this fear related to financial concerns. Rather, people who have been steadfastly contributing to wildlife science and conservation their entire careers often feel apprehensive about giving up work that largely defines who they are and what matters in their lives. The thought of this sense of purpose suddenly ending is a scary thought indeed, causing many to procrastinate in that big decision to pull the plug on working.

To all these people I say, "Fear no more!" Instead, think of retiring as emancipation that gives you unprecedented time and flexibility to pursue activities you enjoy—and to apply your considerable skills in service to the natural resources you care about.

Perhaps you question whether your services as a "wildlife has-been" will be needed and valued. Think again! Your personal storehouse of knowledge, experience, and passion can make a huge difference to countless projects, groups, and causes that benefit wildlife and conservation. I speak from experience. My federal service as a U.S. Forest Service regional director ended in 2010, but the pace of my activities has hardly slackened. That's because as my own fear of retiring set in, I put my name in for several service opportunities in the hope that one or two might materialize. The fact that they *all* came through has kept me busier than originally planned, but it's all good: The work is interesting, rewarding, and much less fettered than when I was a salaried civil servant.

Since retiring, I've been privileged to serve on The Wildlife Society (TWS) Council, including this past year as your president—a career highlight for sure. And I enjoy many other such rewarding roles. Serving on the Board of Directors for the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation (HCTF) in British Columbia, for example, I share the immense satisfaction of investing five to six million dollars every year in priority conservation projects throughout the province. As a member of the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council, I help

advise the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture about federal agency management activities that benefit wildlife and all the people who use and enjoy those resources. As a professional member of the Boone and Crockett Club, I'm able to contribute to the mission and achievements of North America's oldest conservation organization. And service to universities as an external advisor for graduate-student research keeps me in touch with the latest science and provides continuing contact with students, which is always energizing.

Pulling the plug affords opportunity to enjoy interests that you may have had for years, but simply did not have the time to pursue. One of my recently retired colleagues has decided to pursue her lifelong interest in dogs, including the training of service animals. Another colleague, close to retirement, is making plans for active involvement in conservation education and engagement of youth in outdoor activities. In my own case, I was able to realize my longtime goal of becoming a certified fitness instructor. Now I'm teaching aerobic fitness and weight-lifting classes, which helps keep up my physical and mental condition to do the conservation work and outdoor activities I love.

Our profession is full of committed and energetic people who remain active well after receiving their last paycheck. Several such retirees have stepped up to share their inspirational stories in this issue of *The Wildlife Professional*. These articles prove that the passion never dies, and that retired wildlifers find all kinds of meaningful ways to invest their time, talent, and wealth of knowledge. I hope your fear of retiring will vanish, replaced by dreams about the contributions and adventures to come! ■



Credit: U.S. Department of the Interior

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar greets TWS President Wini Kessler at a meeting of the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council in Washington, D.C. earlier this year. Kessler's service to the Council helps promote conservation.



Credit: Ray Massey

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