

Summary of 2015 Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society Past-President's Summit, February 16, 2015, Duluth, MN

Thanks to everyone for making the Past-President's Summit a great event. We really appreciate the time and effort for you all to come together during an already busy week. I think I speak for all of us when I say we had a great time getting together. The discussion was lively and was immensely helpful for the Strategic Planning Team to 1) get some new ideas and 2) keep us headed in the right direction for our strategic planning exercise.

We had 12 Past-Presidents of MNTWS and 1 Past-President of TWS in attendance (see photo). We were also joined by Strategic Planning Team members Thom Soule, Rich Olsen, and Steve Winter; TWS Council Representative Dave Anderson; and current Treasurer Lindsey Shartell.

I tried to summarize our discussion from Jodie Provost's notes (thanks, Jodie!), a few of my own scribbles, and some other correspondence I received (see next page).

Until next time!

Steve Windels
Past-President (2014)



Front row (left to right; year as President in parentheses): John Loegering (2009; North Central Section Past-Pres.), Wayne Briniger (2012), Jodie Provost (2013), Bill Faber (2003), Stacy Salvevold (2007), Peter Jordan (1980). Back row: Steve Windels (2014), Mike Larson (2011), Greg Hoch (2010), Kurt Haroldson (1995), Martha Minchak (2000), Carrol Henderson (1982), Dan Svedarsky (North Central Section Past-Pres.; TWS Past-Pres.). Dave Anderson (TWS Council Rep) is behind the camera.

Discussion Highlights:

1. Where has the chapter been effective in the past? What activities have worked well in professional development and in advocacy? What didn't work well?

- Annual meeting is one of the most effective things we do
 - Informs members about state of the science
 - Can be a catalyst to move fwd on issues (e.g., lead ammo)
 - But timing is critical!
 - Raises awareness of MNTWS
 - Provides sense of community/support system and networking opportunities
 - Can education, inspire, and empower!
- Workshops, demonstrations, field trips
 - E.g., lead demo workshops
- Collaborative meetings with other states (eg ND, WI)
- Advocacy based on science – objective and factual; counterbalances politics, etc.
 - Can be outward face of MNTWS; positive image to new members
- Via email: “The Chapter has been effective at continuing ed (including annual meetings, regional workshops), and reaching out to students (particularly over the past 5 years). Not sure environmental advocacy has been effective aside from last year’s focus on lead ammo.”

2. What is more important, doing a few things really well or doing many things in a “good enough” fashion? If it’s doing a few things well, how do we prioritize?

- Shotgun (lots of things and hope some have influence) vs. rifle (1 thing with full focus and force)
- Do we want to be reactive vs. proactive? Lead ammo is a good example of being proactive.

- It is hard to do a lot well; need to pick our battles carefully because we are time-limited
- Select things that give us biggest bang for the buck; low hanging (ripe!) fruit
 - E.g., advocate for Land and Water Conservation Funds
 - 20:80 principle – 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes
- Whatever we decide to focus on, have fun doing it!
- Ask members what **THEY** want to tackle; empower the Chapter to carrying the load
- Identify what you have then make a work plan based on that
- Carrol H: think of the 4 H's: habitat, high profile, holistic, hands-on
- Look to Section and TWS for guidance on issues to tackle
- Need to reach out to other conservation orgs, e.g, DU, PF, MDHA, etc.
- Via email: “This is likely the most important topic for discussion at the meeting. More important to do a few things really well. Prioritize by seeking input from members and having the Bd make the necessary decisions. My own top three recommendations would be continuing ed for members (via annual meeting presentations, regional workshops, etc), position statements on selected topics (that could be used by other environmental advocacy groups), and working with student chapters and students.”

3. Why have or haven't you remained involved once your presidential service was finished?

- Conservation Affairs Network may be a way for Past-Presidents (or other 'retired' officers) to stay active in chapter; these folks can continue to provide “oomph” and expertise to the Chapter

4. How do you see the board structure and statewide structure functioning the best moving into the future?

- We communicate much better than in the past; email, etc is big reason for this change

- It is INDIVIDUALS that make or break our organization more than our structure
- Via email: “Still important to maintain regional representation but I am not stuck on what the “regions” would look like. Otherwise, the current structure seems to be working.”

5. In the past, how were you able to find passionate people to be volunteer leaders? What worked well for you in recruiting? Would reimbursement of expenses make a difference in volunteering?

- Think adaptability, cross training, nimbleness. Be like the business community, which is always 20 years ahead of us!
- Give elected people leadership training and make sure they understand their roles and responsibilities
- We should all ALWAYS be recruiting people to the Board and committees
- Consider requiring volunteer service as part of membership
- Via email: “Fortunately, volunteer leaders would come forward (with some prompting at times; some younger members needed encouragement). I would stress the value of learning more about statewide issues, along with meeting peers from across the state. Reimbursement of expenses could make a difference and should be offered.”

6. What strategies have worked well when communicating externally with others?

- Teaming With Wildlife Fly-in is a v. good investment, advocacy for State Wildlife Grant \$
- Need “rockstars” to communicate our message (wildlifers are often not good communicators...)
- Work with partners who DO communicate well
- Invite MPR, outdoor writers, etc into the field or to events. The media is always looking for ideas/stories.

- Need communication and marketing training
- Need to think about what are our communication goals and audiences?
- Think about “building our brand”
- Fundraising as mechanism to get “foot in the door”
- Give presentations to other organizations, e.g, at THEIR annual meetings, about WHO WE ARE!

7. How do we better integrate with the student chapters? How important is that?

- Need students on the Board and push them to participate; other state, Section, and National orgs are doing this; good way to “get ‘em hooked”
- Student advisor role is essential; need to provide support and tools to help them succeed
- Strive to minimize the waxing and waning of the Chapter involvement
- Lot of colleges and universities in MN to tap into (besides 6 w student chapters)
- Take student to TWW Fly-In; apprentice for the future
- Support student conclave
- Have symposium w NC section meeting
- Tap social media expertise that students have
- Via email: “Liaisons assigned to student chapters; student chapter committee as part of the Bd; involve student chapters in regional workshops”

8. How should we interact with the NCS and parent organizations?

- TWS picks top 10 issues, use them as model/basis for our decisions when possible; use other states and Section, too
- Use Section leadership training opportunities (Vital Smarts, Franklin Covey)

- How can Chapter, Section, and TWS all help each other out? What can we learn from them?
What can they learn from us?
- Use Conservation Affairs Network to communicate up and down the organization
- Strengthen relationships in all realms, w Section and w TWS.

9. What should the Mission of MNTWS be?

- TWS has strategic plan with a mission so good timing for us to be thinking about this
- The planning process is as important as the product!
- OK to be a “science-based organization” but can also be effective by moving people’s HEADS and HEARTS; need to “move people” to do the right thing
- MNTWS has a different niche because we’re a professional org, based on science, with a reputation for integrity
- Many people (students, public, politicians) don’t see the difference between MNTWS and Duck Unlimited/Pheasants Forever ,etc. It’s important to us that they do know the difference!
 - Science-based, advocate for wildlife and our VALUES!
- People join MNTWS because they believe in the mission
- They want to belong with those who believe in wildlife science
 - But public has a high suspicion of science; anti-science sentiment is spreading
- From a note passed after the meeting: “The Mission of MNTWS is to facilitate an intellectual community for wildlife professionals while advocating for strong scientific process in wildlife and habitat conservation.”
- Via email: “Need to find our niche. Focus on continuing education, position statements (that can be used by other environmental orgs), and foster and support students and student chapters.”

BONUS QUESTION - WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT MNTWS?

- Sense of community
- Support group – emotional and intellectual
- Facility for honoring others
- One stop shop for students to meet professionals
- Venue for voice of people who cannot as individuals or thru their jobs
- Venue for meeting other professionals
- “Lights our fires” when work gets us down or we feel we are not supported
- Opportunity to hear about major issues/learn

Other thoughts (we wrote them on sheets but no can't remember which category they belong to)

- Strong chapters like MN have more wildlife professionals and membership resources
 - MN has high proportion of members who are members of NCS
- Partner! Utilize them on issues/opportunities
 - SWCD, NRCS, PF, Audubon etc
- Give leadership training if Board members need and desire; support them
- Pull interested people/those that lose elections in the fold
- Networking/contacts are v. valuable
- \$ generated from vendors @ annual meeting helps to do our work
- Strategic planning - important to use the process/outcomes wisely, use it as leverage
- \$ not limiting at present, people power is!

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