Ethical Issues and Future Directions in Wildlife Management

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Recent progress in protection of wildlife and wildlife refuges is currently being undermined by the efforts of James Watt, U.S. Secretary of the Interior, who believes that commercial interests should take precedence over the preservation of pristine wilderness areas and wildlife sanctuaries. The consequent loss, as populations approach extinction because of programs like decimation of habitats and predator control, is more than simply aesthetic: genetic material unique to each species will be

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lost forever. Particular issues of immediate concern are the fate of bobcats and whales, inhumane trapping, and the Endangered Species Act. As a longer-term concern, the goal of wildlife management should be the preservation of all species as members in viable, healthy ecosystems.

Zusammenfassung

Gegenwärtig wird der Fortschritt im Schutz freilebender wilder Tiere und in der Erhaltung von Wildtier-Reservaten durch die Bemühungen von James Watt, Innenminister der USA, unterminiert. Er ist der Ansicht, dass kommerzielle Interessen Vorrang haben sollten über der Erhaltung von unberührter Wildnis und Wildtier-Reservaten. Der sich daraus ergebende Verlust, mit Tierpopulationen dem Aussterben ausgeliefert durch Programme wie die Verminderung des Lebensraumes und Raubtierkontrolle, greift tiefer als nur ästhetisch; genetisches Material, einzigartig wie es für jede Gattung ist, wird für immer verloren gehen. Besondere Probleme, die sofortige Beachtung finden müssten, betreffen das Schicksal der Wildkatzen und Wale, die inhumane Fallenstellerei und das Washingtoner Abkommen. In weiterer Sicht sollte Wildtier-Management der Erhaltung aller Gattungen als Bestandteil eines lebensfähigen, gesunden Oekosystems dienen.

The Issues and Mr. Watt

Let me begin by saying that I am not going to cover *all* of the future directions in wildlife management in this paper, nor am I going to cover *all* of the ethical issues involved. Furthermore, the directions and ethical issues will not fall neatly into categories. This paper will therefore be a little like a basket containing a mixture of apples, grapefruit, grapes, and acorns. In short, some of the issues mentioned will be immediately relevant and will be of concern for the next 4 to 5 months; other issues will be of concern for the next 20 years and beyond. However, all will lead to some serious ethical concerns that society and wildlife managers must address.

No discussion of future directions in wildlife management could begin without discussion of Washington, DC's favorite four-letter word: Watt. In 9 months, James G. Watt, Secretary of the Interior, has become a threat to this nation's wildlife and public lands in a way that is unparalleled in the modern history of this country. Therefore, many of the specific future possibilities that I am about to discuss seem oriented toward what will happen in the next few years if Mr. Watt's policies do not change tack and begin to reflect a more sensible approach to the preservation of this nation's wildlife and wild lands.

Predator Control

First, let me start by explaining the issue. Predator control is a program sponsored by the U.S. government, which spends more than $18 million in federal revenues on this effort every year. When cooperative funds and "in-kind" services provided by states, local governments, and private individuals are included, the total annual expenditures for the program probably exceed $30 million. The predator control program is supposedly directed toward protecting the livestock industry from losses allegedly suffered due to predatory wildlife—such as coyotes and foxes—eating livestock. The program is strongly supported by both the sheep industry and the cattle industry, although one has to use a lot of imagination to envisage a 12-lb fox chasing a 600-lb steer across the open range.

The dimensions of the destruction

caused by this program are awesome: at least 750,000 coyotes have been killed in the last 10 years. And coyotes are the only animals that are really counted by the program's practitioners. To this admittedly minimum number of dead coyotes must be added tens of thousands of foxes, golden eagles, bears, badgers, skunks, raccoons, martens, and hawks and owls, most of which are killed by "accident." Even bobcats and bald eagles are killed, although some believe that the bobcat is a threatened species, while the bald eagle has long been in the endangered category.

The techniques that are used for this destruction are degrading to the animals and even to the people who ultimately conduct the killing: poisons, leghold traps, aerial shooting, denning (the process of killing coyote puppies in their dens), and neck snares. As used, these techniques are nonselective (for the animal that is actually doing the damage) and brutally inhumane.

Worst of all, perhaps, is that the program does not work. Even during the years of the most intense use of indiscriminate wildlife poisons such as Compound 1080, reported livestock losses rose by a factor of more than 2. (This figure is from data compiled by the U.S. Forest Service for sheep grazing on U.S. National Forests.)

All the while, predator control is justified as a "wildlife management program." But it is not a wildlife management program at all. It *is* a simplistic—and not very effective—political solution to the complex problems that do face the livestock industry.

For example, the livestock industry's major problems did not begin until about the time of World War II. Coincidentally and importantly, this was also the time when the industry began to lose its labor supply. People who had been sheepherders either went to war or (figuratively) went to Detroit to earn higher wages and make equipment for war. After the war, the exodus continued, with people moving to make higher wages; by now, by making cars.

Let me use a hypothetical example to explain the importance of this exodus. A sheep rancher walks out of his house in the morning and sees a coyote eating a dead lamb in the pasture. In actuality, the lamb died the night before while it was being born. The lamb would not have died if a herder had been present to aid in the birth or if shed lambing had been utilized. The rancher, however, seeing the coyote eating the dead lamb, becomes irate. He picks up his rifle and shoots the coyote. The rancher then feels better, but he has not solved any of his problems. Only when the industry begins to focus on its real problems will real solutions be found.

This leads me back to my first point, about Mr. Watt. Mr. Watt now wants to once again allow the use of poison—1080—for predator control. He is openly advocating the return to utilization of 1080 and the resumption of other techniques for mass destruction of the public's wildlife, on the public's land. While this kind of political reaction to pressure from the livestock industry might be expected, it is no more acceptable than trying to justify the program by calling it "wildlife management."

I believe that we must get out of the business of destroying this nation's wildlife as part of any kind of program; rather, we must apply ourselves to implementing and/or finding acceptable ways of stopping livestock losses without killing wildlife. These ways, clearly, must involve, among other things the use of nonlethal predator controls and livestock husbandry techniques. This nation must never again allow itself or its personnel to conduct war on the public's wildlife.

Bobcats

The issue with respect to bobcats

began, in the modern sense, in 1972. At that time, there was a massive international trade in the fur and skins of spotted cats, including cheetahs, ocelots, margays, jaguars, and tiger cats. The demand for these animals and others was pushing them toward extinction. The question was what to do about it. The answer was to construct an international treaty that protects animals and plants from the ravaging demands of international trade.

World leaders accomplished just that. A treaty, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, was drafted, negotiated, and then signed by about 90 nations in Washington, DC, in March 1973. (For simplicity, I will refer to the treaty as the "Endangered Species Treaty.") When the treaty was negotiated, all of the world's commercially important species of spotted cats were placed on a list in Appendix I of the Treaty, thereby giving the jaguar and leopard, as well as other cats, protection from commercial utilization in international trade.

In our jubilation about the treaty, we did not realize what would actually happen afterward. What happened was that pressure from the international fur trade shifted to what were essentially the only wild spotted cats left in the world that were then unprotected: the American bobcat and the Canadian lynx. The results of this shifting demand were devastating: the next few years saw a massive increase in the numbers of bobcat and lynx pelts in the international trade.

Largely as a result of this outcome, all of the unlisted cat species (*Felidae*) were added to the Appendices of the international treaty in 1976. In 1977, Defenders of Wildlife petitioned the U.S. government to protect the bobcat under our own U.S. Endangered Species Act.

(That petition, I should note, was accepted by the federal government in 1977, because we had presented, in the government's words, substantial evidence to show that the bobcat was indeed threatened or endangered. That finding notwithstanding, the U.S. government to this day has not acted upon our petition.)

But the bobcat had been added to Appendix II of the Endangered Species Treaty. So in 1979 Defenders of Wildlife brought suit in the U.S. District Court in Washington, DC, to halt the international trade in bobcats. We claimed in our lawsuit that the federal government had not complied with the provisions of the treaty which state that animals protected by the treaty cannot be exported unless the responsible governmental body in the U.S. makes a finding that such export "will not be detrimental to the survival of the species."

This is a very important concept because, as you will note, the language of the treaty puts the burden of proving that export will not be detrimental to the survival of the animal squarely on the government. In other words, *before* export is allowed, the government has to be certain that killing the animals for export will not result in harm to the species.

We have argued this for years. And then, in February of 1981, the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled that the government's action in allowing these exports had been illegal, and further ruled:

> *Any doubt whether the killing of a particular number of bobcats will adversely affect the survival of the species must be resolved in favor of protecting the animals and not in favor of approving the export of their pelts.*

The ruling was, and remains, a fantastic victory for wildlife. The terms of the treaty have been upheld, and the Court has ordered the U.S. government

to comply fully with the protective provisions of the treaty.

That brings us back to the present, and to Mr. Watt. Now, the State Fish and Game Agencies, aided and supported by Mr. Watt, are demanding that the bobcat be removed from the protective provisions of the treaty and that uncontrolled trade in bobcats be allowed to resume.

Such actions would represent a travesty. This nation must maintain its international obligations; the government must meet its burden of proving that export will not be detrimental before allowing any international trade in our wildlife; and we must maintain our animals, as stated in the letter of the treaty, as viable components of the ecosystems in which they occur.

Marine Issues, Marine Sanctuaries, and Marine Mammals

There are several issues in this area that appear to be of overriding importance. Seemingly, the major issue is the question: Will humans exterminate the largest mammals that have ever lived on earth — the great whales?

Another issue, perhaps a lot closer to home — perhaps not — is whether our U.S. National Marine Sanctuaries will be a viable home for marine wildlife or whether they will simply become another home for oil wells and oil pollution. Secretary of the Interior Watt, as it happens, has advocated opening marine sanctuaries to commercial oil drilling.

To me, the answers to these questions seem self-evident. We cannot allow marine sanctuaries to become anything less than totally protected sanctuaries for all marine wildlife. Moreover, the nations of the world cannot allow the extirpation of the great whales by explosive harpoons that are fired from whaling vessels that are literally rusting into oblivion.

Endangered Species Act

The issue here is immediate, since the Endangered Species Act must be reauthorized by the U.S. Congress before October 1982. The major issue is: Will this nation maintain its commitment to the preservation of endangered and threatened forms of life?

Once again, the requisite answers seem reasonably clear. The nation ought to have enough respect for the sanctity of all life to demand that our activities not result in the extermination of life. But, if we as a nation cannot preserve life for *its* own sake, then we ought to at least demand the preservation of endangered and threatened life forms for *our* own sake.

I mean by this that the preservation of life on earth is inextricably tied to biological diversity, that is, the diversity of life and genetic information that is contained in all of the species that inhabit this planet. This diversity of genetic information is continually renewed and revitalized through breeding and evolution. Extinction, which results in the permanent loss of genetic material and evolutionary potential, thus threatens the health of a wide diversity of ecosystems and the survival of all life.

As individuals committed to the humane ethic and endangered species, it seems to me that our responses to these issues are clear: we must demand of our legislators that the Endangered Species Act be fully reauthorized and that this nation continue its commitment to the survival of endangered and threatened life.

Wildlife Refuges

Although this section will be brief, the question of how we handle wildlife refuges in this nation is very important for the effects these procedures will have on future directions in, and the ongoing formation of philosophy on, wildlife

management. The National Wildlife Refuge System consists of some 400 wildlife refuges encompassing some 90 million acres, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The main issue here is exactly what a refuge is.

It seems to me that refuges should *not* be areas where hundreds of thousands of wild animals are allowed to be killed by hunters and trappers, where trees are cut to be made into commercial lumber, where cattle are grazed, where pesticides are sprayed, or where dune buggies are allowed to run willy-nilly over the land that presumably provides habitat for wildlife.

Yet this is exactly what the Refuge System has become. More than 500,000 wild animals *are* shot each year in sport hunting programs, 146,000 *are* trapped, trees *are* cut, cattle *grazed,* pesticides *sprayed,* and recreational vehicles *run* amok. Indeed, a proposal that recently appeared in the *Federal Register* even suggested that those sand crabs that were not run over by beach buggies would easily be able to crawl over the ridges left by beach-buggy tires in the sand.

In my view, this situation is an abomination. The animals that come to the refuges for refuge are often shot, trapped, run over, or trampled, while their habitat is destroyed in the name of commerce.

This nation and its wildlife management community must demand a National Wildlife Refuge System that affords true refuge for the wildlife it is supposed to serve.

Trapping

No discussion of the future direction of wildlife issues would be complete without a discussion of trapping. I hasten to add, however, that I am not going to go into great detail on this topic.

The major issue with trapping, it seems to me, is: Will we continue, as a society, to condone the use of one of the most barbaric and cruel devices ever devised—the leghold trap? By comparison, the guillotine, also a barbaric device, was an absolute pleasure.

Currently, the steel leghold trap accounts for the death and maiming of some 15 million wild animals each year, in this country alone. In my view, no *truly* civilized people can continue to condone this kind of torture and destruction of life.

I want to add at this point that I do not want to be misunderstood in this article, nor do I want my remarks to be misconstrued. There are now many areas of former controversy where conservation organizations, including Defenders of Wildlife, The Humane Society, wildlife management groups, and the State Fish and Game Agencies, now agree. Indeed, paraphrasing a reasonably current commercial, "We've come a long way, baby." We now have nongame wildlife programs, National Parks, some true wildlife refuges, and a public consciousness that has been raised substantially. But as my personal prognosis of future directions indicates, we still have a long way to go.

This leads me to two major issues of ethics and, importantly, to the question of our own survival.

The first issue is not difficult to understand: We must treat other life—wildlife—with the same dignity and respect that we would ask for ourselves. To do otherwise not only degrades wildlife but also degrades the human species. The concept is simple: children who see torture find it easy to perpetrate torture. If we want compassionate treatment for ourselves, we must start by setting the example of providing humane treatment to all life.

The second issue is a little more dif-

ficult, and to illustrate the issue, I want to close with a story.

On weekends around Washington, DC, I go to the shores of the Chesapeake Bay where I collect fossils of animals that were alive 12 to 20 million years ago. At home I have a fossil shark's tooth that measures a full 4 inches from top to bottom. The shark that contained this tooth was apparently about 60 ft long and was the predecessor of today's great white shark.

Even in my pocket I carry the bone of a fossilized animal. This also came from the shores of the Chesapeake Bay and is probably about 15 million years old. I carry this for the sobering effect that it has on my day-to-day actions. I will probably live no more than a hundred years. There was life on this planet 15 million years ago, and more of that life flourishes today. How fleeting are the impacts that *I* can have. Beyond that, these fossils provide me with a "15-million-year yardstick" with which to measure the actions of today.

The fossil record on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay shows abundant life existing 15 million years ago. Among the species which you find, aside from the shark's teeth, are scallops, whales, manatees, and sea turtles. How did these animals survive during those years? I don't think you have to be a biologist to answer the question. The animals survived because they were viable, healthy parts of functioning ecosystems. They thrived because they found the conditions that made life and reproduction possible for them.

But what of these animals today? Whales have been driven to extinction by the exploding harpoon and the greed of man; only just over 1,000 manatees survive in the United States (they die in large part because they are run over by boats); sea turtles have been destroyed throughout the world wherever they once found pristine nesting beaches; and water pollution is destroying the East Coast scallops.

But let us shift our attention to another animal: the bobcat, which I mentioned earlier. The bobcat did not even show up in the fossil record until about 3 million years ago. That is, it evolved from other life forms 3 million years ago and has survived to this day, because it found the conditions upon which its life depends.

As I said earlier, we have been through about 2 years of court action designed to protect bobcats. During that time, we have been faced with every conceivable argument for why bobcats should be killed and their hides made into fur coats. We have been told by wildlife managers that bobcats need to be killed to stop diseases in bobcats and to halt bobcat overpopulation.

How do these arguments compare when measured against the 15-million-year yardstick of life? Without excessively elucidating the obvious, I will just say that the bobcat did not survive for the last 3 million years because wildlife managers were patrolling the woods limiting disease and population levels. Indeed, bobcats only survived because they were part of viable, healthy, functioning ecosystems. In these ecosystems, bobcats found what they needed to survive. In fact, disease probably did occur, but it only served to remove the unhealthy animals, thereby leaving the healthy ones more able to survive. And overpopulation, if it ever did occur, was taken care of by natural mortality within the ecosystems.

This leads to my last ethical issue, which touches upon the one overriding goal for wildlife management for the future. That is, the only goal for wildlife management should be to preserve viable, natural wildlife populations and the ecosystems on which they depend. Measured against a 15-million-year yardstick, no other goal makes any sense.