

WILDLIFE

Conservation model improves wildlife populations

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Conservation of wildlife populations and habitat in North America is unique to other conservation efforts across the globe.

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation is not a policy. Rather, it is a set of principles that wildlife managers use to shape policy and management decisions. Following are the seven principles that form the Model.

1. Wildlife is a public trust resource.

This is one of the most important principles of the Model. Wildlife is not owned by individuals. Even though individuals own land that wildlife resides on, wildlife is owned by the public. This highlights the importance of proper land stewardship on private lands to benefit public resources, and most landowners are good stewards of our shared wildlife populations.

2. Markets for game are eliminated.

Overexploitation of wildlife populations was one of the drivers to create this Model. Limiting markets for dead game animals and their parts reduced incentives for overexploitation of wildlife.

3. Allocation of wildlife is by law.

The government must manage wildlife for the benefit of current and future generations.

4. Wildlife should only be killed for legitimate purposes.

Many states have “wanton waste” laws that require hunters to make every effort to recover wounded or killed game and use edible portions of the animal. This principle emphasizes the importance of good hunting ethics.

5. Wildlife is an international resource.

Many wildlife species are migratory and spend their life cycle in multiple countries. As an example, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act is an agreement of the United States, Canada, Mexico, Japan and Russia to protect birds that migrate between these countries.

6. Wildlife policy should be science-based.

Policies affecting wildlife should be based on sound science.

7. Hunting is democratic.

Teddy Roosevelt felt strongly about the ability of citizens to have hunting opportunities. All citizens should have this opportunity not just those who are wealthy, own land or have

high status. It is important to have public land available for hunting so all can enjoy our wildlife resources.

There are several examples of success stories from the Model such as the recovered populations of white-tailed deer, wild turkey and waterfowl. However, there are threats to the Model. There is an increasing amount of game farms and commercialization of native wildlife species, which threatens to take away public ownership and could create a market for game animals. Policy relating to wildlife is increasingly decided by those not involved with wildlife management. Additionally, adequate funding for wildlife research is lacking, which limits our ability to make better policy decisions.

Wildlife conservation has long been funded and supported by hunters and anglers. However, wildlife conservation is important to many people who are nonhunters and nonanglers as well. Ecotourism is a major industry with several activities such as bird watching, photography and hiking. We all must do our part to ensure our wildlife populations are available for enjoyment by future generations. This democratic model for conservation is important for the long-term sustainability of our nation’s wildlife. ■