

EDUCATING AND INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF CONSERVATION LEADERS

FROM THE
PRESIDENT



Morrison Stevens, Sr.
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I thank Dr. Christine Thomas and Dr. Steven Leath for their informative articles on this very important subject. They did an excellent job of recapping the predicament that we are facing with substantial retirements in the next several years of experienced wildlife researchers, forestry experts, and senior managers at the state and federal level, as well as in our non-governmental organizations (NGOs). “The big question remains: Who is going to replace them?”

Drs. Thomas and Leath also discussed the change in demographics of the collegiate students who currently study natural resources and conservation. These “new” students, many of who come from suburban or more urban environments, appear to have a strong interest in wildlife and passion for wildlife conservation. However, they often lack hunting and fishing experience, exposure to rural environments, and a general appreciation of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. Once traditional curriculum will need to be revised to broaden the education of these new students, especially to include an investment in field research.

In June of 2014, I attended a meeting in Washington, D.C. with 28 undergraduate students in the Demmer Scholars Program, an internship program sponsored by Michigan State

University and instructed by B&C Professional Member, Mark Rey. The purpose of the program is to place advanced students interested in natural resources conservation into internship positions at the federal government or NGO level. At this meeting I had eight students at my table. Four of them grew up in a rural environment and the other four grew up in an urban environment. Four of them did not hunt. Think of the amount of field experience and training the new student will require! While these new students may be better at math, science, and communication than those of the previous generation, they may very likely lack the practical field experience that is crucial for a successful, respectable career in the natural resources arena.

To address this, your Club has been investing heavily over the past several years to assist in the inspiration, education, and professional development of future natural resource and conservation leaders. In 1987, the Club initiated a program of endowed professorship positions at major land-grant universities, each well respected in the wildlife, fisheries, and forestry fields. We began this series at the University of Montana, followed by Texas A&M University, Michigan State University, Oregon State University, Texas A&M at Kingsville, University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point, and

most recently SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in collaboration with the Maxwell School of Public Policy. The Club will raise approximately \$11.5 million in funding these programs. The purpose of these university programs are to take science-based students and refine their political and social skills so that they are able to become future leaders and advocates for our hunting heritage. Many of the graduates from these programs have found meaningful employment in federal wildlife agencies, relevant NGOs, state fish and game departments, legislature, forestry, and wildlife committees.

Another leadership initiative of your Club was the formation of the National Conservation Leadership Institute (NCLI) approximately 10 years ago. NCLI is now funded by many organizations and also receives financial support from the Club. The NCLI selects and trains 36 individuals each year for an intensive

eight-month experience at the National Conservation Training Center. Over 280 professionals have already graduated from this program and are working their way up the leadership ladder in the conservation community.

Our Club membership as well as the rest of the conservation community is very conscious of the big changes that are forthcoming, and we know what we need to do to succeed in developing future leadership. Be assured that the Boone and Crockett Club will continue to invest in university programs and expanded field experiences for this new generation, so they can mature into the type of wildlife experts we need to maintain a healthy North American Model, and provide the very critical education that is necessary for the development of future leaders. Many of the other NGOs are doing their share as well. Broadening these initiatives to attract the best minds possible will be our ultimate avenue to success. ■

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