

VALUE OF SCIENCE

This issue's president's column highlights the value of science and the importance of communicating sound science in wildlife management and conservation. Though I am not a trained scientist, I am an accountant and thus understand the importance of communication in my own profession. For example, as an accountant, I rely a lot on facts and data rather than feelings or emotion when I communicate about the decisions I make in the workplace. I think, for the most part, many scientists have the same preference. The challenge therefore, for me and for scientists, is communicating relevant wildlife, forestry, and conservation science to our non-hunting human population, the 70 percent that do not hunt, but directly control our right to hunt.

When we go back in time to the early 1800s, most of rural America was made up of subsistence hunters. These people were pro-hunting because they required hunting for their meals. As this country grew, market hunting developed alongside rail construction, which opened up more markets for wild game and continued subsistence hunting. Over time, hunting evolved into more of a recreational pastime. However in the late 1800s, it was clear even without scientific evidence that buffalo and passenger pigeon populations were declining dramatically, in addition to elk and deer populations.

Thus in 1887, the Boone and Crockett Club was formed by hunting and conservation advocates to address the obvious decline in big game species. Around this time in 1892, the Sierra Club was formed by John Muir, which focused on conservation of our natural resources. This organization is considered one of our country's earliest leaders in conservation efforts. The Boone and Crockett Club introduced legislation that changed hunting in the United States forever with the advent of seasons, bag limits, and the elimination of market hunting. The practice of hunting was refined and managed by various states based on the populations of the species that were relevant to their geography. This was further refined during the era of Gifford Pinchot, who is considered the father of forestry management in the United States. Then Aldo Leopold, who is considered the father of wildlife management, took scientific management to new levels, demonstrating the value and art of scientific communication.

Until the development of computers, extensive databases, and the Google search engine, the Boone and Crockett Club relied on the publication of papers and books to get important scientific news and research out to resource users in government, other universities, and NGOs. In the current era that we live in, there is an insurmountable amount of data available to us. A lot of this data is generated as a result of

huge scientific efforts and billions of dollars spent each year by governments and universities. One of B&C's big challenges is communicating this valid and relevant scientific knowledge in a way that educates our membership and galvanizes policy makers to utilize this information to promote the management and conservation of wildlife and our forests. The scientific community must improve their methods of communication science to the non-technical and often emotional audiences that knowingly or unknowingly have an interest in the health of our shared natural resources.

Scientists should listen to and understand the arguments of the general public if they hope to relate to them. Scientists should also recall that their audience is not an empty vessel and that any audience requires a communication model or method that is able to interest and engage them. It is important to note that the natural resource and wildlife conservation community, including the Boone and

FROM THE
PRESIDENT



Morrison Stevens, Sr.
PRESIDENT

Crockett Club and the Sierra Club, has consistently worked towards the development of science-based methodologies to preserve our resources for future generations.

Until the advent of the anti-hunting community represented by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), which was organized in 1954, and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), which was organized in 1980, science was geared for use by universities, governments, and NGOs, and not necessarily the general public. While the anti-hunters are a significant minority of the overall human population, so is the hunting community. It is important that our dedicated science professionals become better communicators in order to inform and change policy based on our scientific effort. Effective

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communication does become more challenging when the issues are complex. However, it is critical that we learn how to share and communicate our scientific messages in credible, policy-neutral ways. Proper communication of the results of major, ground-breaking scientific work can impact policy and government decisions, which can then drive sound management of our resources with the consensus of the public.

The Boone and Crockett Club encourages all university science and conservation departments to design programs to educate undergraduate students, graduate students, and post-doctoral fellows in effective communication. With the rise of technology, the ability for these students and professionals to reach even bigger audiences increases.

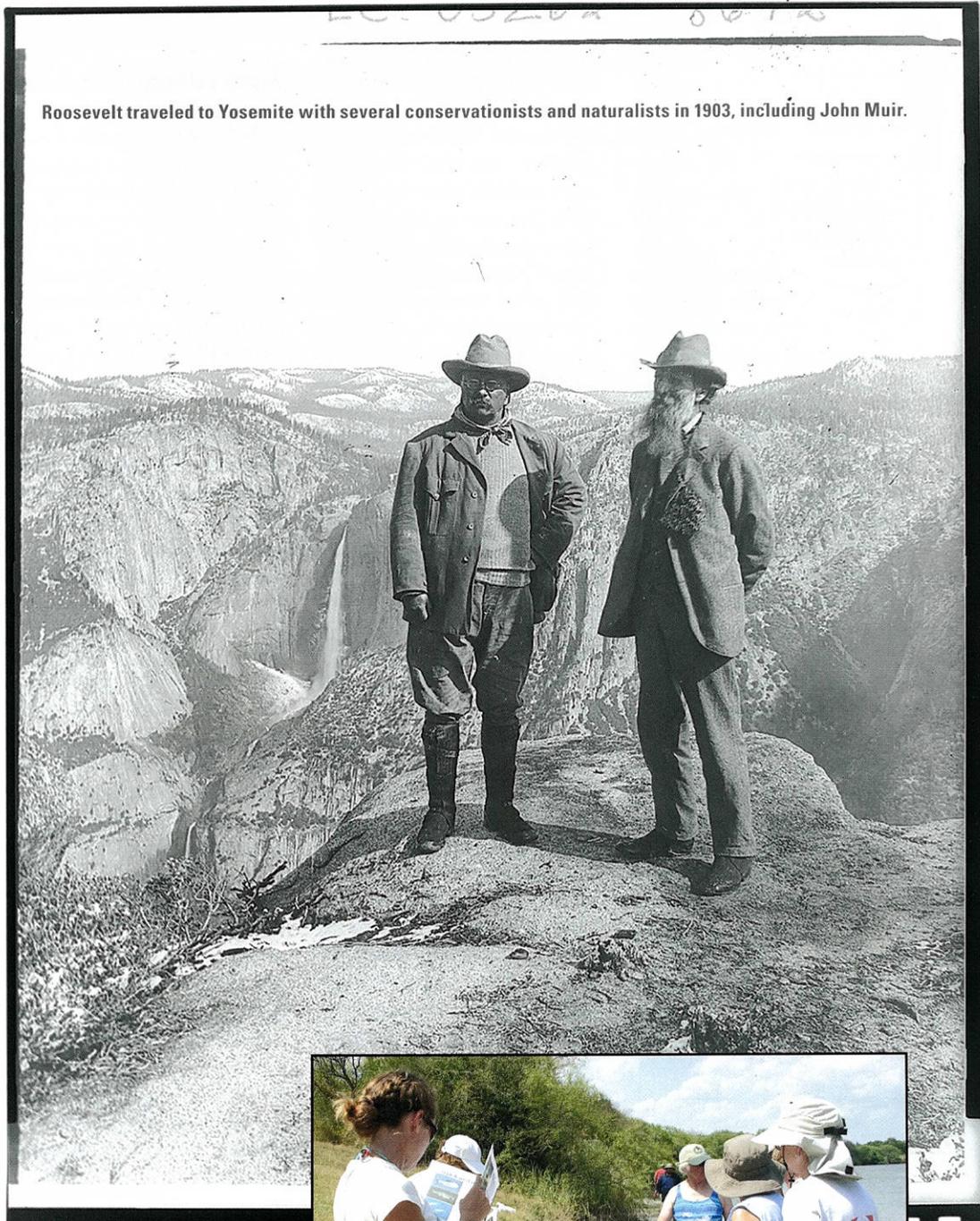
Our Club has taken on a responsibility to train bright students in effective communication through our university endowed professorships and research fellowships at major universities around the country. It is important that sound science is developed for the proper management of forests and wildlife. It is almost more important that this science be appropriately shared and communicated to the audiences that need it the most, which are the government, NGOs, and the 70 percent of Americans that are non-hunters.

This last audience group is a particularly important one, since the hunting population in this country has

declined substantially throughout the years. Thus, the future of our hunting privilege is dependent upon our ability to educate and inform the non-hunting community and others through effective and thoughtful communication. ■



Roosevelt traveled to Yosemite with several conservationists and naturalists in 1903, including John Muir.



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Read more about our University Endowed Professorships and Programs on page 66.