



# Game Trails

Conservation and outdoor news from Dallas Safari Club



## LEADING THE CHARGE

*Shane Mahoney ponders how hunters can maintain their conservation leadership role in the twenty-first century.*

The late nineteenth century witnessed a transformation in how we in North America viewed and cared for wildlife, and since that time, the hunter-conservationist movement has provided critical leadership for what is now a global phenomenon. As with many other historical American achievements, a national conservation ethic is now considered an essential part of public policy for all progressive countries. Despite this, it is not at all clear what philosophies will guide man's relationship with nature in the future, nor what role hunters will play in this crucial challenge for wildlife and humanity. If we are to be taken seriously in this inevitable debate, then as hunters, we must demonstrate our capacity to lead conservation both in practical and in intellectual terms.

The first critical step in this process is to recognize the inclusive identity of our conservation approach and to recommit ourselves as hunters to providing conservation leadership that is relevant to all citizens, hunters and nonhunters alike. While we must acknowledge the founding role played by those who pursued their conservation commitments with rod and gun in hand, we must also acknowledge the foresight and passions of those who saw non-lethal interactions as the epitome of man's stewardship role toward nature. It need not be pointed out to us that the conservation movement was founded with sufficient tolerance and generosity of mind that it enabled many different viewpoints to coalesce as a force for wildlife.

Rather it must be the role of hunters to identify equally the enduring legacies of John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt, men of passionate differences but of a shared vision that was greater than their personal preoccupations. It must be hunters who point out that this complex of viewpoints created a revolution in how

we cared for wildlife and set forth a movement sufficiently relevant that it could be embraced by all of North American society, not just hunters, who then, as now, were in the minority. We cannot afford to misidentify this broad palette as the legitimate and manifest basis for our incredible North American Model, for if we do, we must surrender our leadership role and be prepared to watch the great conservation movement that has brought us such success be waylaid by conflict and chance.

Believing as we do in the sustainable use model of wildlife conservation does not preclude us recognizing, appreciating, and treating with dignity and respect those who also commit their lives to wildlife, but hold different views. What it most certainly does mean, however, is that we must be prepared to honestly confront ourselves and ask questions that only true leaders ever do. What does real leadership entail? To what end and purpose is our leadership directed? And perhaps most profoundly, do we honestly believe that our policy and practice of wise consumptive use remains a critical factor for wildlife conservation in the future? If we are not prepared to ask ourselves these questions, we can certainly expect twenty-first-century society to ask them of us. And if we cannot provide convincing answers to our own satisfaction, we will undoubtedly fail to convince others as well.

John Quincy Adams said that if your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader. I believe as hunters we should adopt this as our creed and the measure of ourselves. If, in conservation, our actions do not have the effects Adams identifies, then surely we must accept that all we are doing is protecting our own traditions, and not inspiring others in society to engage in the fight for wildlife, wild places, and the rightful inheritance of every child to a world that is as natural and inspiring as the one we have shared. Yet surely these are the ideals to which we aspire; surely these are the motivations that must come to us in



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*Building a broad coalition is crucial to the success of wildlife conservation efforts around the world, which is why hunters should work closely with nonhunters to achieve common goals. Game and nongame species alike benefit from efforts to restore habitat and rebuild wildlife populations.*



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## continued

**SPORTS AFIELD**  
THE PREMIER HUNTING ADVENTURE MAGAZINE  
PARTNERS IN CONSERVATION

our days afield; and surely these are the reflections that launched our great conservation movement and the inspired leadership of Roosevelt and Muir. Did they not, in their thoughts and deeds, inspire us to dream more, learn more, do and become more?

I believe it is possible and even essential for hunters to play a leading role in conservation today, tomorrow, and beyond. While I also remain convinced that a diversity of views can only strengthen the fabric and appeal of conservation, I honestly believe that a vested self-interest model of sustainable wildlife use is critical to the long-term hope for wildlife and the habitats and natural systems upon which they, and we, rely. But I also believe that our leadership responsibility extends far beyond arguing for the rightful recognition of the role we as hunter-conservationists have played in North American and

global wildlife sustainability and preservation. And I see too much of this. Look backward too often or intently and we are bound to trip and fall.

Our vision must be clearer than this, and our hopes greater. Our philosophy must be more sophisticated and nuanced than seeking what we rightly deserve, but rather, we must reach for what we can achieve in the name of wildlife and our cherished engagements with it. We must begin to look to our future earned, not by the deeds of our past, but by our resolve to lead in conservation tomorrow. We must take upon ourselves the mantle worn by the Leopolds, the Roosevelts, the Grinnells and Hornadays, the Pinchots and Muirs, indeed by all who gave their lives and reputations to the one exercise that will eventually prove greater than all others. These individuals did not speak all with one voice, but their voices were

heard, and their appeal was for something more than their own recreation and opportunity. Like them, we must speak for society's responsibility to conserve wildlife for its own sake and for ours. We must convince our leaders—political, economic, and social—that a world where wildlife cannot thrive is a world where humanity must be lessened.

I believe it is our role to lead others who are unfamiliar with the outdoors, who may never stand exhausted on some high mountain peak, or look upon the breaking day across a field where deer and turkey emerge, ghostlike, from the heavy mists of morning. I believe it is our role to have them understand that wildlife is precious in a world where beauty is too often squandered and sold. And we ought to explain openly to them that we feel the burden of responsibility so intently because we hunters have experienced both the lives and deaths of animals on intimate terms.

The challenges facing wildlife in the twenty-first century are many, and our best hope for its future lies in developing the broadest and strongest coalition possible to ensure that the right decisions are made by those in positions of economic and political power. To achieve this social momentum, bold and vigorous leadership is required. The wildlife abundance we see today is not some beautiful accident but an exquisite success, won hard through the diverse efforts, ideas, and passions of many. As hunters, we now inherit this responsibility. Success in the future will be defined by wildlife abundance surely, but also by preserving a pluralistic access to wildlife that leaves room for the consumptive user and their most determined opponents. As hunters and anglers, we must take the high road of worthy ideals, critical thinking, and a willingness to challenge and improve ourselves. That is how we will inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more. That is how we must lead, and that is why we should.

—Shane P. Mahoney

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