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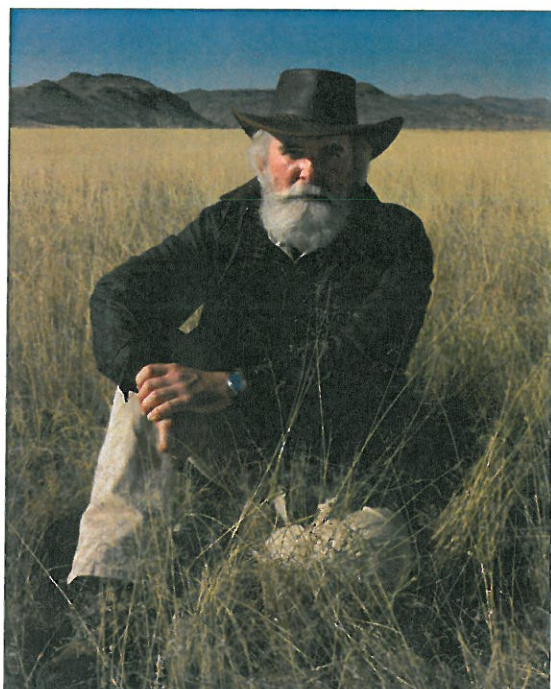


**“MUCH HAS
BEEN GIVEN US,
AND MUCH WILL
RIGHTFULLY
BE EXPECTED
FROM US.”**

**THEODORE
ROOSEVELT**

BY SHANE P. MAHONEY

CONSERVATION



Newfoundland's Shane Mahoney is a biologist, writer, hunter, angler and popular speaker on environmental and resource conservation. He is an expert on the North American Conservation Model.

Hunting in North America: A Pursuit of the Common Good

On Sept. 6, 1901, anarchist Leon Czolgosz shot President William McKinley who was attending the Pan-American Exhibition in Buffalo, New York. Although surrounded by 50 bodyguards, Czolgosz was able to walk up to McKinley and fire two shots at him, hitting him in the chest and abdomen. Incredibly, a mortally wounded McKinley shouted out “Be easy with him, boys” to his Secret Service agents as they aggressively subdued his assailant, making free with fists and pistol butts. The President died of his wounds a week later, and Vice President Theodore Roosevelt was sworn in as the nation's 26th president. Through these tragic events, the course of American history changed. For North American conservation, it changed irrevocably.

In the area of natural history, Theodore Roosevelt was beyond question the most learned of American presidents (with the possible exception of Thomas Jefferson), and with respect to enacting policies for the protection of wildlife and their habitats, he remains indisputably the greatest. His tenure marked a

crucial turning point for wildlife in North America, launching a crusade on behalf of the wild others that was as remarkable as it was unexpected. It emerged from an era of wanton destruction and launched one of conservation and restoration – a vital philosophical and practical overture remarkable, not only for its novelty and genius, but also certainly for its power and long-standing authority. Its inception remarks one of history's repeated triumphs: the collision of a rare persona within extraordinary times.

Hunter, naturalist and scholar, Roosevelt made concern for wild nature a respectable topic for political elites and for political agendas. He did so while articulating the notion of restrained self-interest as an essential process for the nation's good, embracing the public mind as a mechanism to ensure that natural resource use became a matter of social discourse and concern. This, beyond any other, was his greatest achievement. While it is common for writers and historians to emphasize his explicit policies and legislation for wildlife, it was the cultural change he made in the political mindset and the public conscience towards conservation that has the limitless power for improvement and progression. Because of this, the emergent concern for wildlife, spearheaded by hunters and anglers throughout the U.S. and Canada, could now find acceptance in legislatures and at political meetings, forging a chain of action that linked local grassroots and everyday concerns for nature with the corridors of power.

This was how the democratization of wildlife conservation occurred, and occurred so quickly as to resemble a revolution in thought, and as rapid an innovation in law and practice as could be imagined. Perhaps only a young democracy could achieve this. Hunters (and other naturalists) drove the debate at their community levels, and America's most prominent citizen-hunter, President Roosevelt, made natural resource conservation a national and international priority. He saw so clearly that the common good of all Americans was linked foundationally to the nation's use of its environmental riches. His achievements for the protection of America's natural grandeur and wild renewable resources remarkably influenced the psyche of the American people and, in doing so, unquestionably aided the confidence and capacity of the nation. As history has clearly shown, seldom has the potential of democracy to befit all citizens been so concretely defined or so explosively compelled by a single political leader. We are left wondering: where are the Roosevelts of today?

Certainly in all aspects of democracy, the common good is attained by the individual acting in a manner that considers the welfare of the state and the benefits that must accrue to all citizens, even to generations unborn. In his striving for conservation, Roosevelt set an example for all of us to follow – hunter and non-hunter alike – taking farsighted actions that continue to benefit all American citizens today. During his presidency (1901-1909), he expanded the national forests by some 150 million acres, created five national parks and established 18 national monuments, 51 federal bird reserves and four game preserves. But even these incredible endowments – an inheritance of inestimable wealth proclaimed for the nation for all time – does not complete Theodore Roosevelt's achievements in conservation. In 1887, he was instrumental in founding the long influential Boone & Crockett Club, and in 1908, organized the first ever Conference on Conservation, bringing to Washington the governors of states and the leadership of organizations and societies concerned with wildlife's welfare. For the first time in the history of North America, perhaps the world,

a national gathering was called to advance the idea of resource conservation, rather than exploitation. Created at that meeting was a "Conservation Pledge," a short hymn for the wild beauty and abundance of the American landscape and a call for citizen action to protect it. This doctrine was eventually disseminated to schools and agencies throughout the U.S.

Thus from the highest office was declared the priority of conserving wildlife, and an appeal to the people to take upon themselves the role of custodians and protectors. Roosevelt was not only speaking to hunters of course, but to all members of society. Wildlife, in his view, was to be protected by a fortress of the concerned – an army of men and women who would resist the destruction of wild nature and preserve it. He attempted to pour into every seam of American consciousness the notion that wildlife mattered, and mattered profoundly, to the nation's future. He went further, by prescribing in and around wild nature the notion of wise use of resources, and suggesting that *those who shared most in their taking would and should participate most in their protection*. Democratic engagement was needed to secure wildlife's future, and persons of all positions, classes and professions were to be involved. But let there be no mistake: hunters and anglers were to lead. Their failure to do so would be a failure of the nation, a failure of democracy itself: those who might do more would have failed while those who could not do more would have suffered unknowingly. What greater affront to the "greatest good for the greatest many" could be imagined?

This was an approach eventually mirrored in Aldo Leopold's writings, another hunter-citizen to have lasting impact on the conservation front. Leopold's land ethic was itself a cry for democratic engagement with the natural world, and an appeal for



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democratic protest against its loss. Both he and Roosevelt shared common cause, both men viewed hunters as having a direct and profound responsibility for conservation. How could they have envisioned otherwise? Both were dyed-in-the-wool hunters. Both had come to their philosophical positions in the pursuit of wilderness takings, both of the physical kind – the animals they killed, and the intellectual kind – the truths they learned. Truths about man and his place in nature mattered to these men, as it matters to all hunters of genuine sensibilities. As Roosevelt stated so many times, the true hunter loves all wild creations, understands the value of wilderness and stands stalwartly against the loss of both. Today, we hunters are again called to action, and not just to save our cherished tradition.

All hunters claim a deep and abiding love for wildlife, and indeed hunters have contributed enormously to the protection and enhancement of wildlife on the North American continent. But still, we must do more. It must be hunters who articulate the history of the wise use movement and of the North American conservation legacy. It must be hunters who bring to the widest possible public the deepest possible recognition of why hunting matters, and why it so profoundly engages the conservation ideals of community and civic responsibility, and why hunting, for these and many other reasons, remains relevant in modern times. We must begin to demonstrate,

with the descriptor “hunter naturalist” prominently displayed, the historical legitimacy of the “hunter citizen,” namely one who works for the good of all by preserving all that is good in the world. For us as conservationists, the best of the world resides in wild nature and in the hearts and minds of those dedicated to its protection.

We must undertake to broaden this constituency and to establish a society knowledgeable and engaged in the fight for a sustaining and sustainable world. We can achieve this not by preaching our rights or squawking pathetically like fettered hens, nor by denigrating those who do not agree with hunting, but who may in fact believe in conservation every bit as much as we do. We will accomplish this by example, by demonstrating that as hunters we care deeply about nature, and that we believe in and act for the conservation of all life. We must demonstrate, without faltering, that we work to preserve wild animals and wild places for the citizenry of today and tomorrow – and not just for our traditions, but for all traditions that center around enjoyment of the natural world.

This is the democracy of conservation, and this must be the vocation of every citizen-hunter. We are millions strong. Let us be the millions committed. Let us take conservation to the heart of public debate, not only in self-interest, but in the interest of all. Let us honor Roosevelt; let us proclaim our allegiance to Leopold's vision. Let us prove that hunting is in pursuit of the common good! GT

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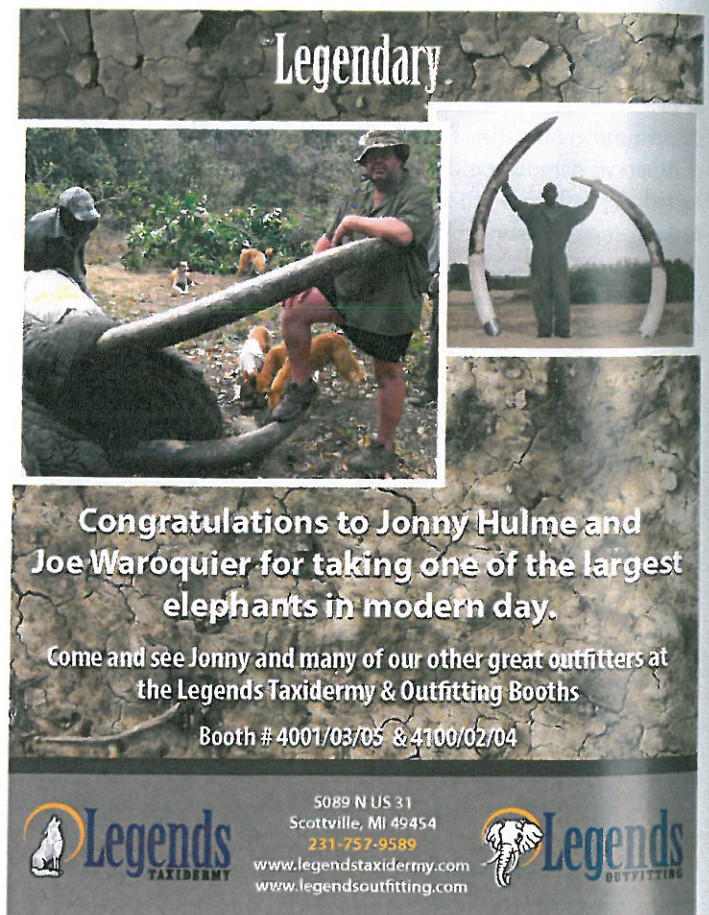
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