Understanding Our Roots
THE NORTH AMERICAN MODEL OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

By Bruce D. Leopold, Ph.D.

As President of The Wildlife Society, it is my honor to introduce this special, single-topic issue of The Wildlife Professional, focused on exploring the origins and legacy of what has come to be known as the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, and explaining the role of hunting as a key element of the Model itself.

Regrettably, few graduate students studying for careers in wildlife know about the Model and its seven underlying principles, and many wildlife professionals and policymakers have never even heard of it. This is why we are presenting this issue of our magazine—to explain one of the world’s most successful approaches to wildlife and habitat conservation.

Only recently have wildlife conservationists come to define the seven principles (described in the feature article on page 22) as “the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.” Each of the principles arose independently in a different context as wildlife management evolved in North America, many as a direct result of colonists’ anger over how wildlife resources were controlled in England. Rather than endorse elite control of wildlife as private property, the Model’s principles ensure that wildlife remains available to all, conserve for future generations.

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation wasn’t written all at once like the Declaration of Independence or even the United States Constitution. Yet for wildlife, it carries equal weight, and its prominence as a model for wildlife conservation is now praised by nations around the globe. As important, the goals of The Wildlife Society are inextricably linked to the North American Model and its principles, such as the wise and sustainable use of our natural resources, managing through science-based knowledge, and hunting as a core conservation tool.

Understanding the Model has become even more important today as we face multiple challenges, such as finding funding for non-game wildlife management, fencing of lands, private ownership of wildlife within enclosures, and manipulation of science to support specific agendas. It is therefore critical that all of our members understand the teachings of the Model and how it has shaped natural resource policy in North America. Our members must also consistently convey the achievements of the Model as they speak before civic groups, testify before congressional panels or state wildlife commissions, write essays and journal papers, or teach university courses in wildlife management.

The North American Model should be understood not only by members of TWS, but by all natural resource groups and the public at large. It has played a critical role in how our forests, grasslands, deserts, rivers, and lakes have been managed. Thus, we need to join with our partners in the Coalition of Natural Resource Societies—the American Fisheries Society, Society of American Foresters, and Society of Range Management—and with other conservation groups to spread the word. This issue of the magazine can help focus the message.

The Work of Many Hands
My hope is that the North American Model will become as familiar to wildlife professionals as Aldo Leopold, widely considered the father of our profession. When I was an undergraduate, Leopold’s Game Management and A Sand County Almanac were required reading. These classic texts have had a profound impact on wildlife professionals and on natural resource management, and Leopold’s teachings echo throughout the principles of the North American Model. Yet the Model does not reflect the contributions of just one individual, but the collective thoughts and actions of many who shared one common goal: to conserve this nation’s natural resources for perpetuity.

From hunters and anglers to U.S. presidents, from conservation leaders and congressmen to the courts, many groups and individuals have shaped the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. I am confident that this special issue of our member magazine will serve as an important resource for professionals and the public at large by shedding light on the history, motivations, challenges, and future of the North American Model, one of the greatest wildlife conservation success stories on Earth.