

Foreword

I have often wondered when I went over the edge. Was it explaining the sex life of a lobster freshly plucked from Long Island Sound to an inner-city kid from Bridgeport? Perhaps it was Ornithology 101, which introduced me to the wonders of spring migration at Horicon Marsh in Wisconsin. Or maybe those hours of crouching half-frozen in a duck blind on Maryland's Eastern Shore had more lasting effects than the frostbite. Whatever the reasons, I count myself among the fortunate few that can claim a career in natural resource conservation. Put another way, I get paid for what I love to do.

Like many in the broad field of conservation, I have been successful in converting an early interest in all things natural into a full-time position as a *conservationist*. Many factors played a role in this career choice including education, mentors, persistence, and luck. Of this list, I would say that mentors and luck played the biggest role.

Welcome to a career where the career path is meandering and often without signposts. Welcome to a profession where positions are few, the hours are long, and salaries are a pittance compared to positions in other fields. On the other hand, welcome to a career that allows mixing career with vocation. You get to work with a lot of people just as dedicated and quixotic as you are, and if you do it right, in the words of Edward Abbey, you'll outlive the bastards.

Working to forge a balance between the environment and human needs is a challenging and demanding job. A want ad for such a task should read:

WANTED: Individual with strong scientific background to save the world. Demonstrated knowledge of politics, negotiation, finance, and people management a must. Experience in managing overworked and

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underpaid staff, working long hours, and ability to work miracles desirable. Salary negotiable, but less than you deserve.

Obviously, few mortals have the credentials to apply for such a position. Yet every day, conservation organizations, large and small, government or private, seek recruits to fill job descriptions that are larger than life.

The qualifications for a successful and effective career in natural resource conservation, however, are not overstated. To find personal and professional rewards in this field, a wealth of skills must be added to one's professional arsenal. A strong scientific background must be grounded with an ability to communicate and understand the political arena in which our game is only one of many. In short, it is not enough to be a good biologist. An effective conservationist must go beyond a single discipline to become a good communicator, people manager, and politician. If you are successful in that, you will likely find that others are looking to you as a leader.

Once, after presenting a lecture on conservation challenges and leadership at the Yale School of Forestry, I was asked by a student, "Do you consider yourself a leader?" My immediate reply: "No, I still consider myself a student." Afterwards, John Gordon, Joyce Berry, and I returned to the question of who are the leaders of the conservation profession. Recognizing that we lacked a useful definition of what constitutes an effective leader, we were hard pressed to define conservation leadership. This book is our answer.

Recently, as a sort of introductory primer on conservation, I assembled a small collection of books and articles that I now press on new staff and interns. Alongside the well-known volumes of Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac*, Stephen Fox's *John Muir and His Legacy*, and other stalwarts, I have Edward Abbey's *Monkey Wrench Gang* (my radical side) and Norman Maclean's *A River Runs Through It* (my literary side). When it comes to explaining what it is to be a professional, I turn to Jack Ward Thomas. Addressing a conference on the present challenges, Jack concludes:

These are indeed interesting times, a time of testing. It is useless to look back for the good old days—they are gone. It is pointless to look around for others to lead—they aren't there. For better or worse, we're it. Whether we recognize it or not, we are agents of change in how natural resources are

treated, considered, and used. If we succeed there will be accolades from historians. If we fail historians will, doubtless, take little notice—but history will be much different.

If we as natural resource professionals are not willing to take on the leadership responsibilities and the onerous duties entailed in management, administration, budgeting, popular communication, and politics, who will? Who will shape the conservation agenda in your absence? Failure to master the multiple disciplines of natural resources management will not only limit your work as a professional; it will likely lead to personal frustration and lack of career advancement as well.

To use a baseball metaphor, you get to first base largely with your formal education. But as you advance along the base paths, exposed all the while to an increasingly political world, you will have difficulty scoring a run if you continue to rely solely on your skills in biology. You may get thrown out stealing second, may rarely even see third base, and may never get the satisfaction of sliding home. Like it or not the buzzwords—*politics, communications, conflict resolution, and balanced budget*—are here to stay. Mastering your profession will require attention to these disciplines of Biopolitics. It is the only game in town. You can either play it well as a leader, or you can sit on the sidelines.

It is no fun being a loser. Winning is a different story, however, and makes the game worthwhile. We are told that leaders are formed by education, experience, and challenges. Winston Churchill is quoted as stating, "Play for more than you can afford to lose and you will learn the game." The problem is we can't *afford* to lose. It remains to be seen what the final score will be. Personally, I am looking forward to playing the next inning. Remember, conservation is among those rare opportunities where we can combine a profession with a vocation and hobby. If we get paid for doing something we love to do, we should do it well.

—Whitney Tilt
Project Director,
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