



Civic-Service Clubs: A New Horizon for Wildlife Professionals

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CIVIC-SERVICE CLUBS—A NEW HORIZON FOR WILDLIFE PROFESSIONALS

Since the 1960s, people have developed a greater respect for nature and life itself (Scheffer 1976). Ranks of citizen groups interested in wildlife have grown (Jackson 1982) and environmental surveillance, such as impact assessments, has developed rapidly because of society's recognition of the importance of environmental quality (Proulx 1984).

Despite positive public attitudes, wildlife professionals are still trying to save habitats and species (Jackson 1982), to involve the public in management programs, and to better the profession's image. To accomplish these goals, biologists must find influential people who can participate in forming public opinion.

This paper discusses how wildlife professionals can get involved in civic-service clubs to achieve conservation objectives. Civic-service clubs are defined as organizations of national or interna-

tional scope in which civic-minded volunteers work to serve the needs of their communities, nations, and humanity, through fellowship and altruistic service.

ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS VS. CIVIC-SERVICE CLUBS

Wildlife professionals should seek the support of local environmental and conservation groups if those groups can provide strong and active public support. However, such groups are not always acceptable because (1) their objectives can vary considerably (Jackson 1982) and, sometimes, contradict each other; (2) some of them polarize environmental issues and thus can paralyze the development of a sound management program (Howard 1984); and (3)

they do not necessarily have among their ranks community leaders and decision-makers such as businessmen, administrators, and politicians.

On the other hand, civic-service clubs can provide wildlife managers with real public support for conservation programs. These clubs are gatherings of taxpayers who represent all walks of life. Their major objective is the betterment of their communities, as is the case for Apex, Civitan, Kinsmen, Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary, and many others. These people, usually respected by their community and its political groups (Brown 1982), have the means to gather large sums of money for projects and to convince regional planners, local landowners, and the public of the importance of projects. Among the objectives of the Kiwanis and Rotary clubs are the conservation of natural resources and the creation of a better environment. In Canada, the Kinsmen Clubs manage natural parks to promote physical fitness (Anon. 1981) and sponsor Scout groups who have planted 25 million seedlings in the last decade (Proulx 1985). In a nutshell, civic-service clubs represent thousands of people dispersed over the world and offer the potential support of millions of volunteers who care for their community and environment.

Even though a wildlife professional-service club relationship could significantly help in the execution of wildlife management programs (Shay 1980, Svoboda 1980), such a relationship has never been well established. In my opinion, this is because of a lack of participation of wildlife professionals in their community and an inappropriate approach in requesting the support of service clubs.

Hunters and people who know hunters generally favor hunting, whereas people who have no hunting acquaintances generally oppose hunting (Applegate 1973). Such an idea also applies to wildlife professionals seeking the support of service clubs. As a rule, civic-service clubs involve themselves in many different projects and expect from their members a

general concern for all the needs of their communities. Obviously, wildlife concerns are not the only problems of our communities. However, by involving themselves at the individual level, in nonwildlife projects, biologists could develop a friendship with other professionals and community leaders, and improve their skills in public relations, public speaking, management and administration, and other social skills lacking in the wildlife professional's academic training (Cookingham et al. 1980). Finally, they would become walking advertisements for the notion that the fate of the natural world and the human race are linked (McKenna and Lynott 1984).

WHICH CIVIC-SERVICE CLUB?

Theoretically, wildlife professionals could submit their management projects to any civic-service club which devotes activities to the betterment of its community. However, those which get involved in many different projects rather than only 1 type would be best to work with. Wildlife managers should consult local newspapers and governmental agencies to choose active and productive service clubs in their area.

HOW TO SELL A WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PROJECT TO A CIVIC-SERVICE CLUB

The procedure of acceptance of a project by a civic-service club is similar from club to club. First, a proposal must be submitted to the club's executive, who does a preliminary assessment of the value of the project. Second, if the club's executive feels that the project has merit, he nominates a viability committee consisting of club members whose functions are to (1) re-assess the pertinency of the project relative to the public's needs; (2) determine the amount of time needed to plan, organize, and execute the project; (3) estimate the number of man-hours and the costs involved in execution of the project; (4) assess

the viability of the project relative to the club's structure and resources; and (5) meet governmental and corporate agencies to try to convince them of the importance of the project and obtain funds and supplies. Third, upon the viability committee's recommendation, the club's executive presents the project to members to have it sanctioned. Finally, if the members approve the project, a project committee chairman and subcommittees are appointed to carry out the related work. Obviously, wildlife managers have higher chances of seeing their project accepted if they become members of the club. This permits them to communicate with other members before presenting a proposal to the club's executive and, later on, to be involved in each step of the acceptance process.

When wildlife managers submit projects to funding institutions, they tend to stress the positive impacts that their actions may have on wildlife. However, such impacts may not convince service-club members to get involved in wildlife management projects. The wildlife professionals who seek the support of civic-service clubs and their communities must, therefore, polish their approach and present arguments which are compatible with the objectives of those clubs.

Civic-service clubs may get involved in any project which has the potential to improve people's living conditions. When the Kiwanis Club of Sandpoint acquired a 50-ha wooded area bordering Mirror Lake in north-central Idaho and managed it for camping, they did it because a camp was their major youth-service activity (Anon. 1985). When the Oklahoma Weatherford Lions donated all the material and labor necessary to build a fishing ramp and dock for use by visitors to Crowder Lake, they did it because the lake had no facilities for youngsters, the elderly, or the handicapped to fish or enjoy the lake (White-Moore 1985). In both examples, civic-service clubs participated in the management of nat-

ural areas because their actions had an impact on the public.

Proulx (1985) suggested that Kinsmen get involved in the protection and re-establishment of natural areas in or near cities. His primary purpose was to provide wildlife with food and shelter. However, he sold the project on the basis that the destruction of natural habitats, along with pollution, detracted from the quality of life. He pointed out to the clubs that their involvement in environmental programs would help membership recruitment, which is always a priority of civic-service clubs. Proulx's (1985) article aroused enthusiasm among Kinsmen's membership because his program could solve health, economic, recreational, and educational problems.

AN EXAMPLE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF A PARK

In September 1980, the Kinsmen Club of Pointe-Claire was approached by Al Carpini, a life insurance agent, with a proposal to build a park in Kirkland, Quebec (Van de Sande 1981). The instigator of the project was not a member of this club. His project consisted in the transformation of bare sandy grounds (10 ha) into green areas where people could enjoy outdoor activities and relax.

Carpini chose the local Kinsmen Club because of its reputation of involvement in multi-purpose projects and because the Association of Kinsmen Clubs had previously built urban parks to promote physical fitness. Using audio-visual equipment, Carpini described parks which had been constructed in other communities. He convinced the club's members of the necessity of the project on the basis that those grounds were nothing more than a dumping area used by off-road vehicles, which disturbed wildlife, already scarce, and local residents. He stressed that the park could be used by people of all ages and that it would benefit the community both socially and es-

thetically. He estimated that the project would require several hundred man-hours and \$85,000.

At first, the project seemed too large for the club, which then had only 11 members. However, they needed an ambitious project to bring new life to the club (Van de Sande 1981). In fall 1980, a viability committee approached the Kirkland city council with the project idea, which was accepted. The mayor contacted Bell Canada and obtained as many wooden poles as needed for management of the park. Local merchants were also approached about providing the club with supplies and materials at reduced costs or free (Van de Sande 1981). The city provided heavy equipment for necessary earthwork.

The project started the following spring. By then, its instigator and other citizens had boosted the club's membership to 20. Two committees were organized: the ways and means committee to obtain materials and look after public relations, such as providing press releases, and the construction committee to look after the building of the park (Van de Sande 1981). The park was completed by fall 1981 and it cost the Kinsmen Club about \$500 (A. Van de Sande, Kinsmen Club of Pointe-Claire, pers. commun.). In the last 4 years, the city has continued to manage the park by planting small trees. According to Carpini, the real costs to build such a park were prohibitive for the Kirkland city council or an environment-concerned citizen, and only a civic-service club was able to accomplish such a project.

CONCLUSION

Wildlife managers must match their concerns with those of the people who are affected by their management plans. To obtain the support of the community and of regional decision-makers and politicians, they should address their concerns to the civic-service clubs

whose members have the political, financial, and social power to get projects underway and to make them a reality.

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