David Hoffmann

EFB390

12/13/22

Blinkers on the NAM

The development of the North American model of Wildlife conservation began in the 19th century when drastic declines in wildlife abundance arose from over trapping and hunting. This exploitation of wildlife was driven by economic demand for furs and other wildlife derived products. With species like wolves and other predators being removed from the population, biodiversity decreases, and the ecosystem as a whole is changed. The decline of wildlife populations caused a public outcry and legislators decided to develop guidelines to help moderate the harvesting of wildlife to ensure a steady population for the future. These guiding principles were officially synthesized into the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation in 2001. 7 tenets gave specific guidelines on how wildlife should be treated. The two main principles these tenets addressed were that wildlife were to be used by citizens for non-commercial purposes and that wildlife populations should be managed to keep an optimum level of individuals in the ecosystem.

While the NAM is better than nothing, there are many issues with the model that have arisen as the social climate changes. The model was created mostly by hunters and other consumptive wildlife users which leads to a one-dimensional perspective. Colonial views on wildlife management are present in the model which limits our ability to adapt and have a fluid system that can act with the ecosystems best interest in mind. What started as a method to keep hunting alive now must change to a model more focused on preserving biodiversity. Also, while hunters have an impact on the ecosystem, money is reinvested into management efforts from hunting licenses which offsets the impact. Other wildlife users can litter and negatively affect wildlife ecosystems while camping or enjoying other outdoor activities with no money being reinvested. There are ways we can address these issues while also creating a more inclusive and holistic model to view wildlife. Instead of trying to manage species on an individual level, viewing wildlife as pieces of a larger puzzle can be useful. Each species plays a vital role in the way an ecosystem functions. Focusing on only one can disturb the system in a consequential way if one were to ignore other pieces of the ecosystem.

The seven tenets of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation are as follows: Wildlife resources are a public trust, markets for game are eliminated, allocation of wildlife is by law, wildlife can be killed only for a legitimate purpose, wildlife is considered an international resource, science is the proper tool to discharge wildlife policy, and democracy of hunting is standard (Organ 2012). Wildlife resources are a public trust treats wildlife as something that cannot be owned by any one person. By designating wildlife as a public trust, it becomes equally accessible to every citizen. The second tenet, markets for game are eliminated, is intended to remove the economic incentive of harvesting wildlife. This tenet is easily worked around as there are clearly still markets for wildlife products. Allocation of wildlife by law gives the power to ensure wildlife are accessible for all and not over-harvested. By requiring permits and putting limits on hunting and fishing, populations can be kept at a sufficient level. The fourth tenet is very ambiguous. A “legitimate” purpose is hard to define when harvesting wildlife. While hunting is considered legitimate, there are game farms where animals are raised just to be hunted. This blurs the line between whether they are wildlife or not while also changing the definition of hunting. Is it still considered a hunt if the animal does not have free range and has nowhere to escape to? Wildlife as an international resource allows some collaboration between nations on wildlife management. This is particularly important with regards to migratory birds that cross borders frequently. The sixth tenet, science is the proper tool to discharge wildlife policy, is also not always adhered to. Since there are so many conflicting ideals in the scientific community, policy makers can pick and choose what fits their agenda. Democracy of hunting is standard states that everyone should be able to hunt. While it is partly true, it is hard for individuals with no access to firearms or land to participate in hunting. There is an economic barrier preventing this tenet from accomplishing what it is intended to.

The NAM is referred to as a model for wildlife conservation but more so functions as a tool to aid existing hunters. For example, if we were to return white tailed deer populations to their previous level, hunters would be upset that there are less deer to hunt even though it is in the ecosystems best interest. A focus on game species is the result of the hunter focused nature of the model which in turn neglects other important species that require management efforts (Serfass 2018). These seven tenets focus on considering wildlife a resource rather than a vital piece of the natural world. In fact, four of the tenets are focused on hunting and fails to touch on the value of wildlife in ecosystems and non-consumptive wildlife use (Wildlife for All 2022) Wildlife should not be managed to be harvested but should be managed with the ecosystem in mind. It is evident that the model was created with preserving hunting as the focus. This is clear with regards to the extermination of natural predators. There is no evidence to suggest that predators negatively impact prey abundance, but they are still killed due to the competition they pose (Jordan 2014). The term “based in science” is used to defend certain aspects of wildlife conservation that are baseless. With regards to the management of grizzly bears, the mortality limit for the population was founded on uncertainties, leading to an inaccurate estimation of healthy mortality numbers. Trophy hunting of these predators has been deemed acceptable based on this “scientific knowledge”, when even these inaccurate mortality limits have been exceeded in many provinces in Canada with no intervention (Artelle 2019). Trophy hunting is a controversial topic when considering wildlife conservation. Many see hunting for meat as a “legitimate cause” with an 84% approval, but large carnivore hunting for a trophy is much less accepted with a 29% approval (Darimont 2021). The definition of legitimate reason with regards to this topic becomes a problem as there is no consensus. “Legitimate” in this context is defined by the hunters when the general public’s voices should be considered. While the tenets have some redeemable aspects, many important pieces of the model are ignored in practice with inadequate means to enforce them.

Public view of wildlife has been shifting in recent decades. More and more people are beginning to view wildlife as an equal to us and that the Earth we live on is to be shared (Cooney 2020). These are ideas and values often associated with indigenous perspectives. Some managers have suggested that developing a new model that works hand in hand with indigenous peoples may be beneficial (Artelle 2021). Collaborative management can help us to move away from our western ideas of how wildlife should be managed. This cultural shift that is occurring conflicts with hunters’ traditional ideals that suggest that we need to dominate wildlife rather than nurture it. Conservation is no longer about preserving the ability to hunt, but more about preserving the natural world as a whole; with wildlife being an integral piece of it. When the term conservation was first used with regards to wildlife, its definition was “wise use, without waste” (Burroughs 2022). Now, we view conservation as a means to preserve biodiversity and view wildlife as an important part of our culture rather than a resource not to be wasted. This shift conflicts with the NAMWC that focuses so much on hunting. The model must be altered in a way that satisfies both hunters and wildlife advocates. There are many ways we can work to accomplish this task. To start, we can create more ways to allocate funding to conservation efforts. In an interview with Nate Weir, he suggested a tax on outdoor goods that are purchased. This would help secure funds as people shift away from hunting and to other outdoor recreational activities. Since 1991, the portion of adults who hunt has reduced from 7.3% to just 4.4% in 2016 (Rott 2018). Other options to locate funds outside of hunting could include demanding a portion of profits from resource extracting companies, state lottery proceeds, and state and local bonds (Larson, 2021). Funding derived from resource extracting companies could prove to be extremely useful as these companies generate billions of dollars in revenue and have such a large impact on wildlife habitats.

The hunting centric nature of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation views wildlife as a resource that needs to be managed to ensure we have a stable population to harvest from. Viewing wildlife as a resource limits our ability to manage wildlife correctly. Instead, wildlife should be viewed as a cornerstone to our social, political, cultural, economic, and environmental systems. Doing so includes managing wildlife ecosystems instead of individual species. To use this in practice, managers must work to define key variables within an ecosystem that indicate the health of the ecosystem and ensure they stay within acceptable ranges (Mawdsley 2009). While this can be difficult to implement due to the departure from traditional methods, with trial and error it can be useful in evolving the way we manage wildlife. New ideas and practices must be employed as it is clear that the methods that have been used in the past are not quite effective. Many species are still in danger of extinction and the biodiversity of our ecosystems are suffering as a result. Without intervention and an overhaul of the North American Model, we will continue to see a decrease in biodiversity.

*References*

Artelle, K. A., M. S. Adams, H. M. Bryan, C. T. Darimont, J. (‘Cúagilákv) Housty, W. G. (Dúqváísḷa) Housty, J. E. Moody, M. F. Moody, D. (Muq’vas G. Neasloss, C. N. Service, and J. Walkus. 2021. Decolonial Model of Environmental Management and Conservation: Insights from Indigenous-led Grizzly Bear Stewardship in the Great Bear Rainforest. Ethics, Policy & Environment 24:283–323.

Artelle, K. A. 2019. Is Wildlife Conservation Policy Based in Science? American Scientist 107:38–46.

Burroughs, T. M. 2022. Changing the Stories We Live By: Revolutionizing the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation Through Transformative Conservation.

Darimont, C. T., H. Hall, L. Eckert, I. Mihalik, K. Artelle, A. Treves, and P. C. Paquet. 2021. Large carnivore hunting and the social license to hunt. Conservation Biology 35:1111–1119.

Jaycoon 2020. Fair Chase Colonialism: An Environmental Justice Critique of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (Pt 2). 2020, December 12. .

Jordan, L. 2014, December 17. The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation and Who Pays for It – 10,000 Birds. (n.d.). .

*References (cont.)*

Larson, L. R., M. N. Peterson, R. V. Furstenberg, V. R. Vayer, K. J. Lee, D. Y. Choi, K. Stevenson, A. A. Ahlers, C. Anhalt-Depies, T. Bethke, J. T. Bruskotter, C. J. Chizinski, B. Clark, A. A. Dayer, K. H. Dunning, B. Ghasemi, L. Gigliotti, A. Graefe, K. Irwin, S. J. Keith, M. Kelly, G. Kyle, E. Metcalf, W. Morse, M. D. Needham, N. C. Poudyal, M. Quartuch, S. Rodriguez, C. Romulo, R. L. Sharp, W. Siemer, M. T. Springer, B. Stayton, R. Stedman, T. Stein, T. R. Van Deelen, J. Whiting, R. L. Winkler, and K. M. Woosnam. 2021. The future of wildlife conservation funding: What options do U.S. college students support? Conservation Science and Practice 3:e505.

Mawdsley, J. R., R. O’malley, and D. S. Ojima. 2009. A Review of Climate-Change Adaptation Strategies for Wildlife Management and Biodiversity Conservation. Conservation Biology 23:1080–1089.

Organ, J.F., V. Geist, S.P. Mahoney, S. Williams, P.R. Krausman, G.R. Batcheller, T.A. Decker, R. Carmichael, P. Nanjappa, R. Regan, R.A. Medellin, R. Cantu, R.E. McCabe, S. Craven, G.M. Vecellio, and D.J. Decker. 2012. The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. The Wildlife Society Technical Review 12-04. The Wildlife Society, Bethesda, Maryland, USA.

Rott, N. 2018, March 20. Decline In Hunters Threatens How U.S. Pays For Conservation. NPR.

Serfass, T. L., R. P. Brooks, and J. T. Bruskotter. (n.d.). North American Model of Wildlife Conservation: Empowerment and Exclusivity Hinder Advances in Wildlife Conservation:18.

Wildlife for All, 2022. Debunking the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. Wildlife for All (https://wildlifeforall.us/myth-busters/north-american-model-of-wildlife-conservation-a-reality-check/ n.d.). .

Wehr, N. November 28, 2022. Email interview.