

# *The Future of* **HUNTING** *in Vermont*

**August 7-9, 2006 Castleton State College**

**Conference Report**



*Sponsored by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department  
with funding from a National Shooting Sports Foundation Hunting Heritage Partnership Grant*

# INTRODUCTION

Vermont has a long and proud history of conservation and regulated hunting. However, hunting participation has been decreasing, and the average age of our hunters has been rising. This decline is everyone's business, not just the Vermont Fish and Wildlife's problem. Landowners, hunters, government, business, legislators, outdoor media, and the young people who will be the hunters of tomorrow all have a stake in the vitality of hunting and the hunting community. Accordingly, leaders from each of these stakeholder groups gathered in August 2006 to develop collaborations and assemble resources to maintain Vermont's rich hunting heritage.

## Goals of the Future of Hunting in Vermont Conference



1. Highlight the significance of, and causes behind, declining hunter retention and recruitment.
2. Review the public's understanding, acceptance, and approval of hunting.
3. Energize key stakeholders to work together to address the problem.
4. Develop specific strategies we can implement to positively influence the future of hunting in Vermont.



*While the vast majority of Vermonters (88%) support hunting, hunting license sales have decreased significantly (a 23% drop since 1983.)*

*"We have some daunting issues before us, but your presence alone shows you how much you care about Vermont's hunting heritage. We are grateful that you have agreed to be here."*

Wayne Laroche,  
Commissioner,  
Vermont Fish & Wildlife  
Department

## Executive Summary

The Future of Hunting in Vermont Conference took place August 7-9, 2006 at Castleton State College in Castleton, Vermont. Unlike most conferences with set agendas and speakers, this event used the Future Search model to empower participants, through guided facilitation, to create their own vision and the strategies to reach it.



Sixty-four members of the hunting and conservation community attended, including legislators, educators, media, businessmen and women, sportsmen's and conservation group representatives, social scientists, youth group leaders, youth hunters, federal managers and state fish and wildlife staff. To ensure a shared common knowledge of this complex issue, everyone received a package of materials prior to the event. The package included: recent research regarding hunting participation, recruitment and retention; a description of the North American Model of Wildlife Management; a summary of Future Search; and the goals of this conference.

The two-and-a-half day process began with a group expression of the history of hunting and conservation in Vermont, and was followed by the identification of current trends and the creation a positive vision of the future. Sixteen, fully supported goals were developed from this vision. Important, feasible and attainable within the near future, these goals fell into five similar themes:

- Increasing the number of responsible hunters, shooters and conservationists.
- Educating students, teachers and the public on the value of hunting and conservation.
- Celebrating our hunting heritage at both the state and local level.
- Building support for hunting and hunters in the public and with landowners.
- Building stable financial resources through political support for hunting, conservation and the Fish and Wildlife Department.
- Building a coalition of people dedicated to the future of hunting in Vermont.

At the end of the conference, the participants agreed that, while the challenges identified are many, the collective skills, commitment and energy of the leaders who gathered for this event can ensure a strong hunting legacy and culture in Vermont's future.

## Finding Goals in Common Ground

One of the primary steps in the conference process required small groups of mixed stakeholders to act out ideal future scenarios. These skits allowed the participants to avoid getting mired in problem solving and instead focus what they are willing to work towards. It became clear that the participants had much in common despite their many differences as these ideal scenarios were presented,

This common ground formed the bases for the following goals:



**Improving the recruitment of people into hunting and recognizing the importance of shooting sports in hunter recruitment and retention.** The group endorsed a system that allows people of all ages to try hunting in a tightly-controlled environment. Participants also recognized that people need

*"Most meaningful about this conference is getting together, discovering that we may have had misgivings, but we have common ground. This is important to every one of us."*

places to safely shoot, and the system of private fish and game club ranges needs to be augmented with accessible public ranges.

- 🐦 **Stabilizing the decline in hunter numbers, so hunting can continue as a cost-efficient tool for controlling wildlife populations.** The user-pay model of hunting generates the vast majority of the funding for wildlife management, habitat projects and wildlife law enforcement and must continue to be significant source into the future.
- 🐦 **The growing disconnect between children and the outdoors must be reversed.** This means conservationist-hunters working with educators, families and environmental groups. The group had a difficult time even grasping why some children prefer indoor recreation over natural areas.
- 🐦 **The economic activity that hunting generates was recognized as very important in Vermont,** especially for rural businesses. The harvest of game is also an important source of high quality, environmentally-friendly meat.
- 🐦 **Declining access to hunting lands, increased fragmentation of land and the commercialization of hunting were all identified as threats to the democratic hunting tradition.** The group acknowledged the bind many landowners are in; wanting to be good neighbors by keeping their land open, while protecting their land from overuse and disrespectful users. A need to generate a financial return from their land to at least cover taxes and maintenance was also recognized.  
A system that's financially supported by all wildlife users, including non-hunters, to help private landowners who allow significant public access is critically needed. Private "fee access" hunting can lead to the privatization of wildlife and degrade the public trust doctrine, which is central to the North American Model of Wildlife Management.
- 🐦 **Education emerged as an important strategy, and Vermont's school systems were singled out as the most efficient delivery system for educating youth about wildlife and the outdoors.** Much of the curriculum development, such as Project WILD, is already complete and proven effective. The barriers are instead political and logistical. The group also recognized that training is important for teachers, natural resource college students, and department and federal agency staff.



---

*Youth spend 44 hours a week watching TV, playing video and computer games, and using the internet.*

Richard Louv,  
"Last Child in the Woods"

---

---

*The growing disconnect between children and the outdoors must be reversed.*

---

---

*Perhaps the most significant breakthrough was the group's position that the future of hunting is up to everyone who cares about hunting, wildlife and habitat.*

---



### **Stable funding for Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department is essential.**

This includes gaining broad-based funding from all of users of wildlife, and all citizens of Vermont who benefit from Department programs. Stabilizing, even increasing, operational funding for the Department through a diversity of funding sources was important.



### **Hunter behavior and the public's image of hunters was also an area of concern.**

Hunter education's key role was acknowledged, as was wildlife law enforcement. Members of the media group agreed they could help by publicizing the importance of good hunter behavior, and by defining what society and landowners expect from hunters.

Perhaps the most significant breakthrough was the group's position that the future of hunting is up to everyone who cares about hunting, wildlife and habitat. No one group -- be it non-profit conservation organization or government agency -- can do it all. This overarching goal, calling for the continuation and expansion of the coalition, shows the participants agreed that this work must continue and that their organizations must help.

## **Strategies for the Future:**

The following strategies were unanimously agreed upon by all participants. These 16 strategies, based on the goals, are the first, clear, measurable steps that can move the group from the current reality to its preferred future of a strong hunting culture in Vermont. They are not listed in order of importance.

### **1. Have a private landowner "welcome wagon" outreach package in place by 2008.**

Used the welcome-wagon approach to orient new landowners to:

- The benefits of hunting for them and their land
- Community norms around hunting
- Wildlife management services the state and others provide
- The rules and regulations concerning hunting on private property.

### **2. Measurably increase access opportunities to private lands.**

Help adjacent landowners work together to form a community-based access program that could also serve as management units to benefit wildlife, landowners and hunters. Other strategies included developing incentive-based programs for landowners that allow access for hunting and changing current programs that reward landowners who allow access for traditional outdoor activities.

### **3. Educate and create incentives to address the effects of parcelization.**

Strategies include: bringing owners of contiguous parcels of land together to improve wildlife habitat; amending existing taxation programs so they reward owners of smaller tracts of land that are managed jointly; increasing participation in existing programs; increasing the Fish and Wildlife Department's role in this issue; and providing education for planners on the negative effects of parcelization.

**4. Increase by 10% the number of people, with a focus on families, introduced to shooting in Vermont through structured, educational programs by 2011.**

Strategies to meet this goal include: increasing youth involvement in organized shooting clubs such as 4-H Shooting Sports; building public ranges that are distributed across the state; and coordinating with fish and game clubs for youth and families to use their ranges and to build club membership.

A memoranda of understanding between the Fish and Wildlife Department and University of Vermont Extension Service supporting 4-H Shooting Sports and the hunter education programs was fully supported. Other strategies included increasing the number of youth in 4-H Shooting to 500 by 2010; matching every 4-H shooting sports club with a local Fish and Game Club; and building six family-friendly ranges distributed across the state by 2016.

**5. Coordinate and provide materials to all elementary teacher training programs on Project Learning Tree, Project WILD and Project WET.**

Wildlife-related grade level expectations should be added to Vermont standards. These standards need to be developed for different grade levels and then added to the student assessments.

In addition, introduce archery, air rifle marksmanship and hunter education in physical education curriculum. Several schools already offer hunter education, and others offer it as an extra-curricular activity.

Creating incentives for teachers and schools that teach wildlife-related programming was proposed. Fish and Game clubs, conservation organizations and local service clubs could develop awards in cooperation with the Department to be presented during sponsored luncheons at professional conferences. Teachers and schools must be reminded that their communities and parents value teaching about wildlife and appreciate their efforts. Publicity of these awards could encourage other teachers and schools to teach about wildlife.

Creation of a wildlife educator ambassador program would help spread the word about the benefits of wildlife to teachers and their students, assist with teacher training and provide mentorship.

---

*Teachers and schools must be reminded that their communities and parents value teaching about wildlife and appreciate their efforts.*

---



The group felt it was important that all Department employees understand hunting and the passion that hunters have about it.



**6. Beginning in 2007, require all Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department staff to complete a series of orientation events, including the hunter education course, over an 18-month period.**

The group felt it was important that all Department employees understand hunting and the passion that hunters have about it.

This goal fits with an employee training program the Department is currently working on to better serve its constituents. It was also agreed upon that staff with Forests, Parks and Recreation, the US Forest Service and US Fish and Wildlife Service should also be offered similar training.

**7. Vermont will offer to host the Conservation Leaders for Tomorrow (CLfT) workshop for regional graduate and undergraduate college students in 2008 and annually thereafter.**

CLfT is a national program for college students majoring in wildlife management who have never hunted. The goal is not to make them hunters, but to help them understand hunting and hunters. It is currently being piloted in Illinois with plans to expand to two additional locations in 2007.

**8. Lead and facilitate the development of a “Wildlife Management Techniques” curriculum- including the role of hunting- for agency employees, undergraduate and graduate students and Natural Resource college faculty in the Northeast by 2008.**

The Northeast Section of The Wildlife Society is currently working on this curriculum, and piloting it in Massachusetts. The curriculum will offer college credit, and include exposure to hunting and hunter education.

**9. Develop Legislation that will provide a means for stable, sustainable funding for the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department by Jan 15, 2008.**

This goal refers to raising new money for operational and non-dedicated funding of the Department. It could come from the state general fund, license fees or a dedicated tax. The team that developed this goal, along with Strategy 10, included several legislators. They agreed to take the lead on getting a bill introduced in the 2008 legislative session.

## **10. Develop legislation in support of a user-pay system for public access by January 15, 2008.**

These funds would be earmarked to help supplement current programs related to public access and other new programs developed including assistance to private landowners who allow access for hunting. Ideas discussed included habitat stamps and access to enrolled “walk in” program lands.

Strategies proposed included using the Governor’s Task Force for Fish and Wildlife Department Funding recommendations when they come out; building support through a coalition that includes the Department and the Governor; encouraging landowners who are in the current programs to allow hunting; and developing incentives such as state services and law enforcement; and funds to landowners who allow significant access for hunting through modifying existing taxation programs or creating new ones.

## **11. By 2008 hunting season, create and implement a “learner’s permit” to simplify the introduction to hunting.**

The “learner’s permit” or “apprentice license” would allow people to try hunting in a safe and structured environment prior to committing the time and energy (complete the hunter education course and buy a license).

A suggested framework and criteria included: the permit would be good for one year only; would not be renewable; and would cost between \$5 and \$20. The permit would allow the participant to hunt with an adult licensed hunter as long as they were under direct control of the mentor. Only one firearm would be allowed between the mentor and new hunters, and they would hunt on the mentors bag limit. The permit would be good for small game and turkey only. The group felt opening it to big game would be politically difficult, but desirable. There would be no age restriction, and participants could be residents or not. Excluded would be guides and fee hunting operations.

## **12. Convene a broad-based, diverse coalition to work together to address wildlife-related issues identified as common ground goals at this conference. Measures include hosting a follow-up to this conference within one year and tracking the accomplishment of major goals.**

This goal seeks to keep the coalition engaged with this future search conference and working toward the goals. It also aims to include stakeholders who were under represented or absent, as long as they support hunting and wildlife use.

The process of working together for common ground objectives is expected to: build trust; help pool resources; build synergy; and coordinate efforts to address. The expected outcome is to meet the goals and implement the strategies identified during this future search conference and any new ones identified by the coalition. First steps include:

- Introducing the idea at the September Wildlife Congress
- Building a contact list of individuals and organizations
- Convening a follow up to this conference within one year.



*“As the charts were developed, it struck me that the challenges are huge. Our strength is in the collective attributes we all have. Thanks for being so engaged at each and every level. This is a beginning and history will not forget that you were here and the work we have done.”*

*Thomas Decker.*

*Director of Operations,  
Vermont Fish & Wildlife  
Department*

### **13. Measurably strengthen and improve relationships between hunters and their publics.**

Proposed objectives include: hosting at least three landowner appreciation dinners at Fish and Game clubs with help from other conservation organizations; increasing the number of press releases and stories by the outdoor press highlighting the high compliance rate of hunters with wildlife laws and safety rules.

### **14. Add wildlife management curriculum to every Vermont school by 2010, to be taught K-12.**

The tools and delivery techniques to accomplish this are already in place and now need implementation. Strategies are similar to Goal 5.

### **15. There will be a 4-H Shooting Sports Program in every Vermont County by 2010.**

The value of Vermont’s existing 4-H Shooting Sports program was recognized as an important venue to foster interest, safety, marksmanship and ethics in hunting. It was agreed that an enhancement of this program would be an important element to achieving the goals of this conference.

### **16. Every Vermont youth has access to a Department mentoring and Hunter Education program by 2011.**

One strategy discussed was to develop a web page that shows all youth hunting and shooting programs available around the state. It was also suggested that the Department’s webpage be linked to other related websites and vice versa.

## **Call for Action**

The preceding goals and their resulting strategies are significant. They are not compromises or statements of informed consent. Everyone at this conference agreed to them with no reservations. Thus these participants reaffirmed that the future of hunting is very important to them, their organization or group, and to the citizens of Vermont. They accept that the future of hunting is not someone else’s job – it is up to all of us. Everyone has a stake in hunting’s vitality. Everyone must contribute and take responsibility to ensure future generations of Vermonter’s will inherit our proud hunting heritage.

The underlying issues such as education and access are critical, but in many ways these are more symptoms than a cause. People will support hunting and even consider



being hunters if hunting is deemed to be important to society and if hunters are deemed worthy of their chosen activity.

This conference succeeded in developing the initial collaborations and cooperative efforts needed to maintain and improve Vermont’s rich hunting heritage. Now is the time to act decisively.

# Appendix A

Major support for this conference came from a National Shooting Sports Foundation grant.

Thanks to Castleton State College for the use of their outstanding facilities.

## **Conference committee/organizers:**

Thomas Decker, Chief of Operations, Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department

Mark Scott, Education Manager

Chris Saunders, Hunter Education Coordinator

Facilitators and Conference Design – Gil Steil, Alice Kitchel

Gil Steil and Associates

Stenographer – Ellen Hinman, VT Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation

Report Compiler – Eric Nuse, Eric C. Nuse and Associates

Report Editors – Christopher Saunders, Tom Decker, Mark Scott and Wayne Laroche

Guest lecturer – Monica Linnenbrink, DJ Case & Associates

## Future of Hunting Conference Participants

(Note people in bold were invited but not able to attend)

Tom Decker	VT Fish & Wildlife
Mark Scott	VT Fish & Wildlife
John Hall	VT Fish & Wildlife
Ron Regan	VT Fish & Wildlife
Wayne Laroche	VT Fish & Wildlife
Kim Royar	VT Fish & Wildlife
Brendan Cosgrove	VT Fish & Wildlife
Paul Hamelin	VT Fish & Wildlife
Paul Gaudreau	VT Fish & Wildlife
Chris Saunders	VT Fish & Wildlife
Ed O'Leary	Forests, Parks & Recreation
Keith Weaver	United States Fish & Wildlife Service





Robert Helm	Legislator
Steve Adams	Legislator
Rob Borowske	VT Fish & Wildlife Board
Lisa Muzzey	UVM Extension Service
Thomas Cram	Mid-Vermont Youth Hunting Group
Rod Zwick	Lyndon State College
Robert Muth	University of Massachusetts - Amherst
Harry Zinn	Penn State University
Jan Dizzard	Amherst College
Eric Nuse	Eric Nuse & Associates
Ann Lavery	Educator
Mark Goodrich	Educator
Tom Stearns	Kehoe Conservation Camp
Jessica Donaghy	4-H Shooting Sports
Rob Hoelscher	USDA Forest Service
Kenyon Simpson	Cornell Cooperative Ext.
Susan Langlois	Mass Hunter Ed Program
Roy Marble	VT Federation of Sportsman's Club
Tim Muzzey	4-H Shooting Sports
Dave Potter	Legislator
Lawrence Pyne	Media
Joel Williams	Media
Clint Gray	VT Bearhound Association
Chris Sanborn	Business, R & L Archery
Dan Eastman	Business, Wildlife Habitat Consultants
Stephen Wright	National Wildlife Federation
Rick Schoonover	Vermont Trapper's Association
Nancy Bell	Educator/Conservation
Paul Karczmarzyk	Ruffed Grouse Society
George Gay	Northern Forest Alliance
Putnam Blodgett	Landowner
Cassandra Decker	4-H Shooting Sports
James Ehlers	Media
Matt Crawford	Media/The Burlington Free Press

Dennis Jensen  
Gary Moore  
Pat Berry  
Dale Decker  
David Trombley  
John Gosselin  
Gordon Batcheller  
Peter Upton  
Will Smith  
**Steve McLeod**

**Gray Stevens**  
**Steve Long**  
**Jonathon Wood**  
**Don Tebbits**  
**Lars Jacobs**  
**Ross Stevens**  
**Tim Lajoie**  
**Loren Shaw**  
**John Organ**  
**Jay Kennedy**  
**Doug Lantagne**  
**John Sayles**  
**Bob Goodrich**  
**John Daigle**  
**Lisa Chase**  
**Bill Gerrish**  
**Sherb Lang**  
**Robert Rooks**  
**Jody Enck**  
**Tom Torti**

Media/Rutland Herald/Times Argus  
Media  
Vermont Natural Resources Council  
Parent/4-H Shooting Sports  
Landowner/Educator  
Business, The Upland Almanac  
NY Division of Environmental Conservation  
Landowner  
Student  
**Vermont All-Terrain Vehicle Association/  
Vermont Traditions Coalition  
Vermont Outdoor Guide Association  
Northern Woodlands Magazine  
VT Forests, Parks & Recreation  
4-H Shooting Sports  
Business, Old Jake Turkey Calls  
Northwood Leadership Center  
Media  
Legislator  
US Fish & Wildlife  
Business, Beagle Outdoor Wear  
University of VT Extension  
Agency of Natural Resources  
Boy Scouts of America  
University of Maine  
University of VT Extension  
Sportsman  
Hunters, Anglers & Trappers  
VT Fish & Wildlife  
Cornell University  
Vermont Agency of Natural Resources**



## Appendix B

### Process - A Future Search Conference

Future Search is a planning process that seeks to develop consensus even among people with diverse interests and views. This conference was designed around four basic principles:

1. Bring together the representatives of hunting organizations and view points involved with hunting and hunters in the same room.
2. Develop desired future-of-hunting scenarios rather than problem solving.
3. Work together on a series of structural tasks.
4. Work as peers in small, self-managed groups.

The goal was to develop consensus on what the future of hunting in Vermont should be. The participants represented all aspects of the hunting and wildlife management system, including state and federal government, hunting, conservation and environmental organizations, legislators, outdoor and shooting sports educators, public school teachers, college professors, outdoor/hunting writers, landowners, foresters, young hunters and sportspersons.

Participants carried out five tasks, working in small groups that represented a mix of backgrounds. They addressed:

- 1: The Past: global, individual, and hunting histories in Vermont
- 2: The Present: trends affecting hunting in Vermont
- 3: Prouds and sorries of their past actions
- 4: The Future of Hunting: scenarios that dramatize a desired future
- 5: Consensus building and fully supported goals for the future





The Future Search process honors diversity, explores common ground, tackles complexity and ambiguity, and trusts people's ability to learn from experience. Participants explored areas along the hunting continuum: its history, ideals, barriers, opportunities, and trends within and without.

**Task 1** Established the group's history, differences, similarities, and shared values.

**Task 2** Pooled perceptions of world trends into a more complete picture, perhaps more complete than any one person had before. The implications of this history on the present and future were recognized. There was no pressure to shift positions. Everybody heard all the other perspectives.

**Task 3** Called for an assessment by each stakeholder group of what they are proud of and sorry about as related to hunting. Lists are viewed as current reality, not problems to be solved.

**Task 4** Asked small groups to act out ideal future scenarios. By presenting dreams as if they had already happened, participants grounded themselves in what they really want and what they are willing to work for.

**Task 5** All groups identified the themes of consensus, aspects of the scenarios that appear in many, if not most, of the scenarios. There was a startling overlap among the scenarios presented. If all could not agree upon an aspect, it was not included in the consensus or the action planning that followed. Based on this common ground, goals and strategies to achieve these goals, were developed that were deemed important, doable and which everyone was willing to support without reservation.

Throughout this process, participants were exposed, perhaps for the first time, where others stood on issues. As a result, the group became more secure with the notion that they were planning a shared future. Much more common ground was uncovered than most would have predicted. This can only help generate energy and galvanize interested parties to work together toward the important and mutually agreed upon goals.

---

*As a result, the group became more secure with the notion that they were planning a shared future.*

---

## Appendix C

### Hunters are the key to North America's Wildlife Conservation Model

*Adopted from an article in the New Hampshire Wildlife Journal, by Eric Aldrich*

*There's nothing quite like it anywhere else in the world – a system that keeps wildlife as a public and sustainable resource, scientifically managed by professionals – thanks to hunters and hunting.*

There's nothing quite like it anywhere else in the world – a system that keeps wildlife as a public and sustainable resource, scientifically managed by professionals – thanks to hunters and hunting.

Hunting, as some folks tend to forget, has been a human activity for a long, long time... as long as there have been humans.

But something happened to hunting around the late 1800s and early 1900s that changed it forever. It became regulated. The relatively new profession of wildlife biology supported those regulations with science. License fees and excise taxes – paid for by hunters themselves – supported the enforcement and the science. Money was also set aside to protect habitat, conduct research and teach hunters to be safe and ethical.

At the time, those visionary moves were essential because of the pathetic status of North America's wildlife population. In New Hampshire alone, white-tailed deer, moose, black bear, beaver, wild turkey, and many waterfowl species were either few in number or gone entirely in the early 1900s.

Now, throughout the continent, many species are back for all to enjoy, not just hunters.

### Why Do we Mention This?

Because sometimes we forget. Sometimes, we get so accustomed to the way things are that we forget how they used to be ... and what it's like elsewhere in the world.

There's a fellow in Calgary, in Canada's Alberta Province, who wants to remind us that hunting is THE reason for conservation's success in North America. He's Valerius Geist, a German native who immigrated to Canada as a young teenager in 1953 and began hunting two years later.



*Linda Morse, Morrisville, VT*

Geist studied wildlife biology in western Canada, earned a doctorate in animal behavior, and wrote several books on big game mammals of North America.

By the 1980s, Geist could see that his own colleagues (wildlife biologists for the most part) had forgotten what their predecessors had built: a phenomenal environmental success story, the restoration of wildlife in North America.

“When I came over here from Germany, it was a real eye-opener,” Geist said. “Hunting is different. Conservation is different. The whole model here that ties hunting and conservation together is unique and very successful.”

It’s called the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. There’s nothing like it elsewhere in the world. And hunters – whether they’re in New Hampshire, Alberta, or Oregon – are the system’s backbone of success.

To remind biologists (and anyone else) about why this model is unique and successful, Geist and two colleagues presented a paper at this year’s North American Wildlife Management and Research Conference. The other co-authors are Shane P. Mahoney of the Newfoundland and Labrador Wildlife Division, and John F. Organ, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Hadley, Mass.

“We wrote this for the simple reason that, what is so obvious has been forgotten by many people,” Geist said. “Even our own colleagues had forgotten the history of the wildlife conservation movement here.”

## **What is the North American Model?**

The North American model has endured despite widespread changes in society, technology and in the landscape of the continent. It has also become a “system of sustainable development of a renewable natural resource that is without parallel in the world,” the authors say.

Canada, could have adopted Great Britain’s model of hunting and wildlife conservation, but instead chose to follow the path being developed in the United States.

Furthermore, the North American model has benefited not only huntable wildlife, according to the authors. Countless species of songbirds and shorebirds were protected, becoming specifically designated as nongame species.

So, what is the North American model? Geist, Mahoney and Organ identify seven features that make it distinct.

### **1. Wildlife is a public resource.**

This is a notion that dates back to the Bible, in legal codes of ancient Rome. A wild animal was owned by no one, until it was physically possessed. The concept was solidified in the United States, to the extent that wildlife was held in common ownership by the state for the benefit of all people. And it has withstood tests in the U.S. courts.

### **2. Markets for trade in wildlife were eliminated.**

Making it illegal to buy and sell meat and parts of game and nongame species removed a huge threat to sustaining those species. At the same time, however, allowing markets for furbearers have helped manage them as a sustainable resource, in conjunction with restrictive regulations, and advocacy of trappers for land stewardship.



### 3. Allocation of wildlife by law.

States allocate surplus wildlife by law, not by market pressures, land ownership or special privilege. The public gets a say in how wildlife resources are allocated; the process fosters public involvement in managing wildlife.

### 4. Wildlife can only be killed for a legitimate purpose.

The law prohibits killing wildlife for frivolous reasons. Under the “Code of the Sportsman,” hunters use as much as they can. The harvest of wild animals must serve a practical purpose if society is going to accept it.

### 5. Wildlife species are considered an international resource.

Some species, such as migratory birds, transcend boundaries, and one country’s management can easily affect a species in another country.

### 6. Science is the proper tool for discharge of wildlife policy.

This is a key concept of wildlife management. It has its roots in the Prussian Forestry System, according to the authors, and arose in this country as the basis of wildlife management by the convincing forcefulness of Theodore Roosevelt and Aldo Leopold. By spawning the profession of wildlife management, North Americans were decades ahead of their global neighbors.

In the United States, the concept of science-based, professional wildlife management really took off with passage of the 1937 Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program. In this phenomenally successful program, excise taxes on hunting equipment are returned to states for wildlife management, restoration and research, along with hunter education. Steve Weber, a lifelong hunter and now chief of New Hampshire Fish and Game’s Wildlife Division, says those dollars go a long way. “Because of sport hunting and the Federal Aid dollars that it provides to state agencies like New Hampshire Fish and Game, we can conduct scientific, professional management that can benefit all species, not just game or nongame,” Weber said.



## 7. The democracy of hunting.

In the European model, wildlife was allocated by land ownership and privilege. In North America, anyone in good standing can participate.

### Hunting is the Glue

“In Germany, and much of Europe, hunting is landowner-based,” Geist said. “Areas are essentially leased for hunting, and hunters are responsible for the management of species on that piece of land. It’s an elitist system.”

What developed in North America is what Geist calls a populous system. “It appeals to everyone, blue-collar and white-collar alike” and was championed by the likes of Theodore Roosevelt.

In Africa today, efforts to stop poaching have led to programs that direct economic returns on hunting fees to rural indigenous people. Now, they have a reason to stop poachers.

The glue that holds this unique North American model of wildlife conservation together is hunting, according to Geist and his co-authors.

Wildlife should be a publicly owned resource not only as a food source, but also to help foster the American “pioneer spirit,” Geist and his co-authors write. “The ability for all North Americans to be able to cultivate these pioneer skills through sport hunting meant that there could be no private ownership outside of the public trust.”

Threatening that public trust were the markets for wildlife that were driving some species toward extinction. And the strongest proponents for eliminating market hunting were the organized sportsmen and sporting publications, according to the authors.

The Boone and Crockett Club and Forest and Stream magazine rallied against market hunting, resulting in many state and federal laws ending the practice.

Without the markets, there were game surpluses, which became allocated by law. Those allocations should not jeopardize the sustainability of wildlife for future generations. Sportsmen became the biggest advocates of maintaining sustainable numbers of wildlife.

As ranching increased as a way of getting meat to the table, hunting strictly for food became less important. Thus grew hunting’s emphasis on the chase, not the kill, while still keeping the need to use as much of the wildlife killed as possible.



---

*“The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased and not impaired in value.”*

---

*Theodore Roosevelt*

---

## Would it Survive Without Hunting?

One of the biggest threats to North America’s model of wildlife conservation are efforts to commercialize wildlife. Those efforts take many forms, notably game ranching and fee hunting, according to Geist. These efforts undermine the model’s components of public trust, elimination of markets allocation by law, science, and democracy of the sport.

And since the days when North America’s approach toward conserving wildlife was developed, populations of many wildlife species (mostly game species) have gone from seriously in trouble to abundant. Now some species, such as white-tailed deer, are seriously in trouble of becoming too abundant in places. Deer are eating suburban gardens and shrubs all over the Eastern seaboard.

“As certain species become common enough to cause conflict with humans, will humans value them less?” wonder Geist and his co-authors. “Will high levels of abundance and conflict make people less comfortable with using bears for fertilizer?”

Actually, hunters could play a key role in alleviating such conflicts, they say. They can help keep wild animals wild. As fish and wildlife agencies figure out what to do about local over-abundances of deer, they can look to the public – hunters – as part of the solution.

“This may have to be combined with other management alternatives,” say the paper’s authors, “but hunting and its advocates can again be the force that ensures sustainable wildlife resources are a priority for society.”



## Contributions of hunters By the numbers

- Total U.S. retail purchases by hunters in one year (1996) on hunting equipment, travel, license fees, etc.: \$1.725 billion. Total economic impact to U.S. of \$60.9 billion and 704,601 jobs. Put another way, if hunting was a company, it would generate sales equal to United Parcel Service and support three times more jobs than Wal-Mart.
- Total New Hampshire retail purchases by hunters in one year (1996) on hunting equipment, travel, license fees, etc.: \$69,127,448. Total economic impact to N.H. of \$123 million and 1,830 jobs.
- Total U.S. hunters' annual dues to conservation and related organizations, such as Ducks Unlimited: \$296 million.
- Total in resident and nonresident hunting license fees and permits to New Hampshire Fish and Game Department (2000): \$2.89 million.
- Total amount of Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration to New Hampshire Fish and Game in fiscal year 2002 (from excise taxes paid by hunters/manufacturers on hunting equipment and distributed to states): \$1.2 million.
- Wildlife Management Areas permanently protected for wildlife and recreation from Federal Aid dollars and hunting license revenues: ?? areas and ?? acres.
- Partial list of species restored to New Hampshire, thanks to license fees and Federal Aid dollars and good management: wild turkey, white-tailed deer, moose, black bear, beaver, many waterfowl species. Many nongame species have benefited from habitat protected via hunters' dollars.

---

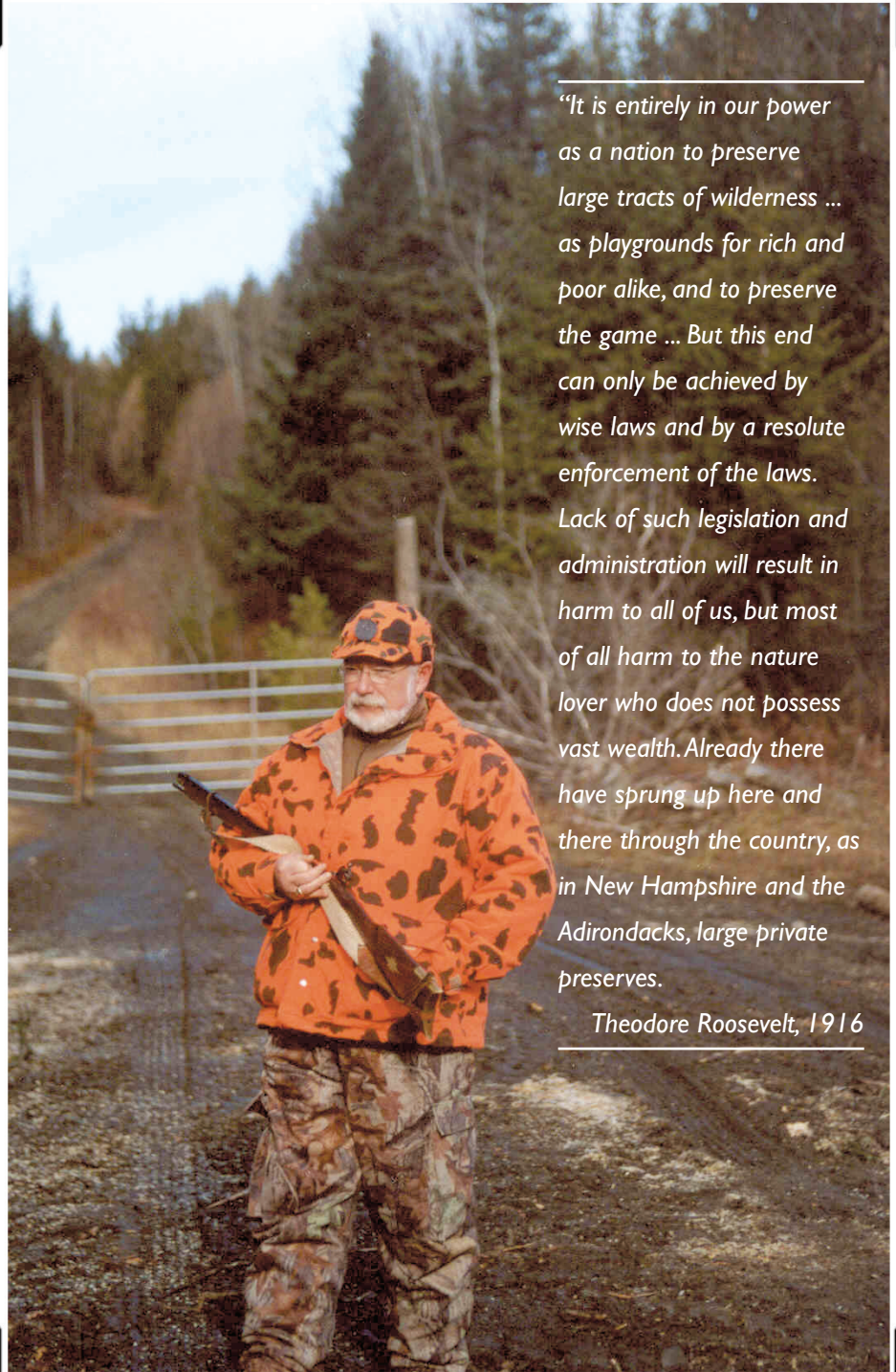
*“Our duty to the whole, including the unborn generations, bids us to restrain an unprincipled present-day minority from wasting the heritage of these unborn generations. The movement for the conservation of wild life and the larger movement for the conservation of all our natural resources are essentially democratic in spirit, purpose, and method.”*

*Theodore Roosevelt, 1916*

---



*Linda Morse, Morrisville, VT*



*“It is entirely in our power as a nation to preserve large tracts of wilderness ... as playgrounds for rich and poor alike, and to preserve the game ... But this end can only be achieved by wise laws and by a resolute enforcement of the laws. Lack of such legislation and administration will result in harm to all of us, but most of all harm to the nature lover who does not possess vast wealth. Already there have sprung up here and there through the country, as in New Hampshire and the Adirondacks, large private preserves.*

*Theodore Roosevelt, 1916*

*Vermont is a special place.  
Its more than just the wildlife and the hunting;  
it's the people that make Vermont special.*

Mark Scott, Education Manager, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department