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## Conservation And The Dying Hunter

Conservation, noun, con-ser-va-tion?kän(t)-s?r-?v?-sh?n : a careful preservation and protection of something, especially : planned management of a natural resource to prevent exploitation, destruction, or neglect (Merriam-Webster). This definition embodies the wildlife conservation efforts of America. When many people think of wildlife conservation, it does not immediately come to mind how much money and efforts are needed to sustain wildlife conservation. Conservation efforts are largely funded by hunters and most recently, hunter numbers have been on the decline for the past 20 or so years. Our 26th president, Theodore Roosevelt, went great lengths to combine hunting and conservation which resulted in scientific game management and conservation (Dray). Roosevelt was a long-time sportsman hunter, and, in his lifetime, he first-hand experienced the decimation of the American Bison along with the eradication of Elk, bighorn sheep, deer, and other game species (US NPS). This is what ultimately led Roosevelt to “establish a precedent at an important time in our nation’s history” states the NPS. Roosevelt truly rallied for the conservation of America’s wildlife, habitats, and natural monuments.

Roosevelt was an avid hunter himself, conquering game big and small, from a 1,200 pound grizzly bear to numerous quantities of birds. After publishing his book *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*, Roosevelt formed a connection with the then editor of *Forest and Stream*, George Bird Grinnell (Dray). The pair had an idea of founding the 1887 Boone and Crockett Club which main purposes was to bring together hunter-naturalists, promote the sport, create an exchange of information in regards to game and where it could be found, and “to spread the ideals of ethical hunting and an interest in natural science and advocate for wildlife preservation and related legislation,” (Dray). At this time in history there was a plethora of sportsmen’s associations that shared these common purposes. As time went on, species continued to dwindle, and large game continued to disappear. Grinnell states “it became apparent that large game was disappearing so rapidly that unless measures were taken...there was danger many specimens would be exterminated.” Grinnell continues to state this is what pushed the club to grow, “to be a club more interested in conservation than killing.”

With Teddy Roosevelt taking office in 1901, he took this turbulence to create the United States Forest Service, establish 150 national forests, 5 national parks, numerous preserves and monuments. Largely, protecting approximately 230 million acres of public land. But why is all of this so important? Teddy saw the importance of the natural world around us and a need to protect the animals, the land, the plants, and wonderful national monuments. With licenses already in existence Roosevelt helped spread the practice that licensing fees would become a source of revenue also. He knew that hunters were a great proponent of protecting all wildlife and recreation areas.

If you look at the numbers on what hunters really bring to the table, it is quite surprising. The following numbers are supplied by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation: “Through state licenses and fees, hunters pay \$796 million a year for conservation programs...Through donations to groups like RMEF, hunters graciously add \$440 million a year to conservation efforts...In 1937, hunters actually requested an 11% tax on guns, ammo, bows and arrows to help fund conservation...That tax generates \$371 million a year for conservation. So far, the tax has raised

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more than \$8 billion for wildlife conservation. All-together, hunters pay more than \$1.6 billion a year for conservation programs.”

So, what does this mean? It means that wildlife agencies, both statewide and nationwide, rely heavily on funding supported by hunting sportsmen. “Money generated from license fees and excise taxes on guns, ammunition, and angling equipment provide about 60 percent of the funding for state wildlife agencies, which manage most of the wildlife in the U.S.” (Rott). The recent cause for concern is that the number of people hunting seems to continue to decrease each year, thus meaning, the monies directly available for conservation are also dwindling.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife services conducts a national survey every 5 years to assess how many adults are hunting. Per this survey, from 1991-2016 there has been a decrease of 2.6 million hunters. The current percentage of adults that hunt is about 5%, just half of what it was 50 years ago. The number of hunters is expected to get even smaller as baby boomers age out of the sport. Baby boomers make up the largest percentage of hunters and are expected to discontinue buying licenses within the next 15 years (Krebs). Nathan Rott, from National Public Radio, states the following: “A panel on sustaining America’s fish and wildlife resources recently warned: ‘Without a change in the way we finance fish and wildlife conservation, we can expect the list of federally threatened and endangered species to grow from nearly 1,600 species today to perhaps thousands more in the future.’”

This is causing hunters and conservationists to rethink what can be done to increase funding and to regain traction to get people hunting again. Some are even questioning if there needs to be a plan in place to get canoers, hikers, bird watchers, and the like to begin contributing as well. If hunters and non-hunters can unite and ally together wildlife conservation can continue to stay strong.

According to the Pew Research Center, “nationally, 74 percent of Americans believe the country should ‘do whatever it takes to protect the environment.’” At the end of the day this isn’t adding up when it comes to contributing monies to conservation. Sure, there are plenty of non-profit groups that are contributing, and different states that are increasing their licensure fees for out of state residents, along with some other band aid attempts, but that won’t fix the problem at hand. The problem is that there are no new hunters, and recruiting new hunters takes time (Krebs)! According to the US F&W’s national survey from 2016, the ratio of hunters age 16 to 44 diminished from 71% in 1991 to 45%. Natalie Krebs suggests that to combat this that hunters dedicate time to mentoring and teaching a newbie, approximately 2 to 4 years specifically. Krebs also suggests that when recruiting another hunter, to pick someone that does not look like you. This might mean to recruit a person of color if you are Caucasian, or to recruit someone younger than you if you are older, maybe if you are a man that you recruit a woman. The people that are hunting are mostly the people that have grown up around hunting. The ones that are hunting have family members or close friends that hunt. Matt Dunfee, the director of special programs at the Wildlife Management Institute states the following: “Hipsters wants to hunt. But they don’t want to hunt the way a rural farm boy from Illinois wants to hunt. They don’t want to dress the same way, they don’t like focusing on antlers, they don’t like taking pictures of their animals. But they want local, sustainable, ecologically conscious meat. And within our efforts, there are few places to realize those values.”

In order to keep conservation alive, it is up to all of us to contribute. It is up to the current hunters to share their love of the sport with other non-hunters. If we do not restructure the way

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that the programs are currently funded or increase our hunter numbers, funding will continue to dwindle, and conservation could continue to take a huge hit. As Theodore Roosevelt once said, "We have fallen heirs to the most glorious heritage a people ever received, and each one must do his part if we wish to show that the nation is worthy of its good fortune."

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