

*Hunters, Anti-Hunters and Land Managers:*

# A Time for Unity

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## *Social and Ethical Considerations in Conservation*

I will speak to three groups of people who seem continually determined to argue with one-another, but whose objectives are in fact close to identical. These are hunters, those who would abolish hunting, and wildlife managers.

While these groups debate and in-fight over what constitutes proper use of wildlife resources, others continue the blind march of ecological suicide that must one day eliminate any choice we have in the matter of variety and numbers of wildlife.

I hope what I discuss here — the social constraints and ethical burdens of hunters, anti-hunters and wildlife managers — will contribute toward a realization of our common goal and our common enemy.

Let our common goal be the perpetuation of a variety of human expression in what is left of our natural world, and let our common enemy be those who would destroy this natural world and thereby eliminate a priceless potential for human experience.

### To The Hunter

By now it is aphorism that the hunter is an endangered "species," and that social and ethical concerns of non-hunters are the basis for your precarious position.

You have come to realize that despite the philosophical impossibility of debating "taste" or personal ethics, your actions are suddenly socially unacceptable. Your public image is low and declining,

and you are worried and perplexed. Recent essays have explored anti-hunting sentiments and have clarified how others see hunters.

Arguments against hunting have recurrent themes, but can be divided roughly into three categories: The "cruelty argument"; the "uncivilized argument"; and the "ecological argument." The first two can only be answered by personal opinion — for that is all they are themselves. There is some rational basis for the third.

*Compiled for  
Alaska's  
Hunter  
Education  
Program*



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I feel it is very important that hunters take each of these seriously however, for there are millions of people — people who vote and thereby control America's public land — who sincerely feel them. You have ridiculed and laughed them off too long.

The Cruelty Argument is straightforward — killing is cruel. Wild animals are happy and innocent until man comes on the scene with his roaring machines, traps, and big guns. The animals he kills suffer, their bereaved friends and relatives mourn their loss. Their offspring are left to starve.

The answer, you say, is simple...Ridiculous! Don't put man's feelings onto animals. They have no emotions...But as one tries to develop this counter argument the real truth becomes plain — there is no proof of either side, and "their" ideas are as true to them as yours are to you.

The Uncivilized Argument is more insidious and a little less fair, for it attacks the hunter rather than the act of hunting itself.

Hunters are culturally immature — throwbacks to the caves or at least to the dark ages. Or, worse yet, they are sexually inadequate, and their guns are merely extensions of Freud's cigar. In short, hunting is below contemporary human dignity and hunters are unfit for today's society.

Counter-arguments to this are many and fascinating. Man evolved a hunter, still retains the trait, and a healthy human personality accepts, rather than represses, its true nature.

Hunting is a better outlet for man's inherent aggressiveness than is war. Or, simply a direct reversal — a natural human being can be defined as one who hunts.

The Ecological Argument maintains that hunting endangers the ecological balance and may lead to extinctions. Look at the Passenger Pigeon, the Bison, the Great Auk. Look at how many more moose and

grizzlies one can see in McKinley Park than in other parts of Alaska, where hunting is allowed.

Look how the walrus and seals and polar bear were almost extinct before we saved them with the Marine Mammals Protection Act. Lucky we forced the Fish and Game to close that doe deer hunt — they'd have killed off all the deer. They are all the same argument.

These criticisms sometimes are at least rational, though often based on misinformation. In some cases,

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### ***'The hunter's image is low and he's wondering why'***

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they may even hold merit. We all know that since modern game management no species in North America has been severely depleted by legal sport hunting and many have benefited tremendously.

We also know that sport hunters have been the single strongest factor in preserving all kinds of wildlife and wild lands over the last few decades and in financing the work that has taught us what we know of wildlife ecology.

But hunters must also admit that the advent of the aircraft, the ATV and the snowmachine, without a simultaneous development of a new ethic for their use, has endangered the ecological balance and made proper management and preservation a struggle, at best. You must admit that indiscriminate shooting, crippling losses and illegal or unreported kills and harassment of game by hunters probably have, in fact, decreased some populations and redistributed others.

You must realize that in today's world, arguments about the ecological necessity of hunting are absurd. To save hunting, hunters will have to admit these things and do something about them — fast.

There is a recurrent theme in all the anti-hunting arguments: The hunter is a slob. He thinks only of killing. He has no respect for the rights of other humans or other animals. Can you deny this categorically? Do you like all who call themselves "hunters"? I hope not.

It has been said that "America is the only nation that has gone from barbarism to decadence without creating a civilization in between." I wonder if that does not all-too-truly describe the development of our hunting culture in this country?

The days of non-regulated market hunting may have merely faded into the days of mechanized, no sweat, kill 'em and take 'em home hunting, and it is hard to discern any culture or set of ethics that developed in between. I know it is there, somewhere, but it is difficult for a non-hunter to see.

Stating a civilized set of ethics loud and clear — by deed much more than by words — is in mind the only salvation for the sport of hunting.

Psychologists tell us, "people don't like what they fear, and they fear what they do not understand." So what we are talking about, you say, is education. Maybe so, but what I'm not talking about is news releases saying "The National Wildlife Federation explained today that they have ethics and love animals."





As one who has “explained” cow moose hunting before more than one town meeting, well I know that in the real world the quickest way to alienate someone is to give him a lucid, hard-hitting rational explanation he never asked for.

### Respect Principles

How do we educate people to believe in hunting, then? The best way I can summarize it is by educating them to believe in hunters. Let me list several specific suggestions.

**First** — Sit down alone with yourself sometime soon and decide, “what are my own personal ethics regarding hunting and conservation?” That question is more difficult to answer than you might think, but the answer will come.

**Then** — consciously stick to these ethics, whether in a crowd or in the wilderness 100 miles from the nearest human.

How many of us have — just once — chased an animal with a snowmachine? Hazed one with an aircraft? Failed to kill cleanly and humanely? Left just a bit of edible meat in the field? Hunted a species we knew little about?

Forgotten for a moment that hunting is much more than killing something and getting home fast? Ethics have a way of eroding very quickly at the tiniest breach.

Once you know your principles and follow them yourself, talk about them. Don’t ignore acts by other “hunters” that are wrong in your eyes. You can’t make that fellow who just shot from the road share your

ethics, but you can let him know you find his behavior offensive. Have an opinion; anti-hunters certainly do.

**Second** — Don’t be defensive about hunting. Don’t say “it isn’t any worse than letting animals starve”, or “the game can take it.” Hunting is not merely the lesser of two evils.

With the pride you have in your principles and in the fact you follow them without exception, and with the biological knowledge you have, you need not be ashamed of hunting. In fact, if you are ashamed of it, why do you do it?

As a corollary, never get into a position where you defend all hunting. Admit there are some slobs who hunt (there are also slobs who belong to anti-hunting groups), and make it plain that you disapprove of them

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### ***‘Stop bickering long enough to try and understand each other’s views’***

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as much as anyone does. Many practices lumped in the public’s mind under “sport hunting” are despicable.

**Third** — Accept the fact that anti-hunters are sincere, that many people are actually made ill by the sight or even the thought of a dead wild animal. They don’t deserve to be written off as “kooks” any more than do hunters.

So have some concern for the sensibilities of others. Take them seriously and try to understand them.

Practically translated this means asking what do I gain by leaving a gut-pile in view of the road, by tying a bloody deer carcass on the hood of my car, by carrying an easy rider gun rack full of loaded firearms in plain view in my pickup? These acts are nothing less than gross disrespect for the sincere feelings of others.

**Fourth — Acknowledge —** personally and as a group — that there are other legitimate uses of wildlife than hunting, and support them where appropriate. Never forget that wildlife belongs to all the people, not just to hunters.

Be as sure that viewing areas and study areas are established as you are sure that hunting is preserved. No one who really understands the natural world is against hunting, and the more chances we provide for people to learn about ecology the better off we'll all be.

So support a suitable number of closed areas, walk-in areas, and parks, where other important uses might be severely degraded by hunting. (Don't, though, make the mistake of thinking hunting is always incompatible with non-consumptive uses. With proper management and seasonal zoning they are compatible in a vast majority of cases.)

**Finally — Become a naturalist.** Learn all you can about wildlife and ecology. I guarantee it will enhance the pleasure you get from hunting.

It can do nothing but good for the average hunter's image when he can intelligently talk about "healthy ecosystems" instead of "more shootable game", and when he knows as much about the fantastic migrations of the arctic tern as he does about the relative merits of a lung shot and a shoulder shot.

Try some of these things and you may even respect hunting more yourself. You'll certainly earn the respect of non-hunters, and maybe even of an anti-hunter or two.

### For The Anti-Hunter

**You** are a new phenomenon: new in American history and new in the evolutionary history of mankind. According to studies you tend to be more educated,

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***'Learn to distinguish between  
hunters, hooligans and exploiters'***

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wealthier and more urban, and to include a higher proportion of women than do hunters.

You have been very successful, in an increasingly urbanized environment, in achieving your goals over the past several years. You have made important contributions to the welfare of rare and endangered species, and have forced the hunter to undertake a re-examination of his behavior. You have often inserted humanity where only demography previously ruled.

It may surprise you to hear me say that you are in danger of losing what you strive to protect. Extremism



has a way of catching up to one in the fickle public arena.

Flushed with success, you have often become unreasonable and oppressive, and have forgotten human social rights and ethical constraints in your rush to protect the rights of other animals.

At your worst, you are blindly intent on eliminating an important aspect of human diversity, and foreclosing any future for an important and long-satisfying human experience. You would prohibit something that is culturally and genetically based, and is emotionally fulfilling to many of your fellow human beings. You would prohibit something that is ecologically sound, and that most ecosystems have evolved alongside.

You would, in the special case of the north, destroy a multitude of cultures and force hundreds of thousands of human beings presently living within the natural world of renewable resources into "cash economies".

The life-styles you would force them into are incredibly profligate in their use of energy and non-renewable resources and could ultimately result in the destruction of our last great wild lands.

Most important, by focusing your considerable energies against fellow conservationists — hunters who share your perception of man's relationship to nature — you give free rein to others who don't give a damn whether wildlife survives another day.

As Dr. Raymond Dasmann put it:

"...The nature lover who can weep over baby whales while turning a blind eye to other marine utilization



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**COMBINED  
EFFORTS**



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## COMBINED SPORTS



## CONSERVATION

schemes that would destroy the food supply of all whales, certainly lacks understanding. Those who would protect all animals from hunters, but leave them to starve on a depleted habitat, have some strange kink in their humanitarianism. Those who would eat meat, but oppose all killing of animals, live at best in a peculiarly sheltered world."

By misdirecting your efforts against those who in reality share your most basic concerns, you are in danger of losing it all.

### Learn Ecosystems

As a thoughtful conservationist you should consider several suggestions before expending your energies to fight against all hunting.

**First —** Learn more about ecology. Learn that the real danger to ecosystems is not limited killing of consumer species, but rather wholesale destruction of substrate and producing species and injection of pollutants.

Learn the principles of compensation. Learn that once an ecosystem is altered by man (and few remain unaltered), further manipulation is often necessary to preserve it. And learn more of the "natural" lives of wild animals and the conditions they have evolved to cope with.

When you understand these things, I predict that you will have a much deeper love of natural things than you have now, and will be able to relate to them more than

you ever dreamed. Love based on knowledge transcends any emotional attachment based on fantasy and misinformation.

**Second —** Learn more of human evolution and of man's primordial relationships to natural systems. You will discover that man has long been at or near the top of the food chain, and that he has long been intertwined with many prey species as a predator.

You will discover how many of man's behavioral and cultural attributes — attributes as basic as family structure — evolved because of his hunting heritage. You will learn that hunter-gatherer societies are the least destructive of natural systems, and that agricultural societies have been responsible for atrocious environmental degradations.

You will learn that hunting man has always felt the greatest reverence for wild things, and has always mourned their disappearance (and strived for their protection) more than has urban man.

Most important, you will discover that true hunting is not an aberration, but is an integral part of evolved mankind. The closer man returns to the natural world, the more he returns to hunting.

**Third —** Learn to distinguish between hunters, hooligans and exploiters. The true hunter sincerely enjoys what he does and finds himself fulfilled and brought closer to nature by it. He could no more face a world without wildlife than he could face one without oxygen.

He cherishes the intimacy and respect inherent in the hunter-hunted relationship, and understands wild things better than anyone else. He is no more a bloodthirsty "kook" than you are.

These things distinguish the true hunter, and he shares your disgust for those who kill and destroy thoughtlessly, wastefully, or cruelly.

**Fourth —** Learn what hunters have done for wildlife. It may be a difficult thing to face, but you are a Johnny-come-lately to conservation: the hunter was talking about ecology, pollution, habitat destruction and the "balance of nature" before you ever heard the words.

Hunter's dollars have paid for the research that has taught us almost all we know about wildlife. Hunter's

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### *'Anti-hunters are sincere about their convictions'*

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dollars have paid for preserving millions of acres of land that support millions of wild animals.

It is frightening to imagine what would be left of wild systems on the earth had not hunters fought for decades to preserve them when nobody else cared. These are facts which you cannot ignore.

**Fifth —** Recognize the fact that subsistence economies will continue to be the most ecologically-sane means of support for people living in the north. This support comes at no cost to the ecosystems it derives from and allows one the most satisfying lifestyles left on the earth.

To preserve the future opportunity for such life-styles is the best way to preserve our last great natural

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systems in North America — and the best way to insure that your children might one day have the opportunity to understand wild things as only the self-sufficient subsistence user can.

The alternative is grim: an increased load on our energy/resource wasteful economy, an immense area of "wild" land-supporting ecosystems deprived of a natural predator, and in turn burdened by thousands of industrial consumption-oriented visitors, and another deeply satisfying dimension of human life forever lost.

All these suggestions boil down to this: You owe it to your fellow human beings to consider each case on its merits, to really consider all the ramifications of hunting or the abolition of hunting, and to never summarily prohibit something you do not understand.

Most importantly, put your efforts where they will do the most good — toward stopping the developer, the energy salesman, the polluter, and their ilk. Don't squander them on your closest ally, the hunter.

## To The Wildlife Manager

You, the professional wildlife manager, are caught in the middle of an apocalyptic struggle that will decide the future of the things you believe make life worth living.

You are beset on one side by hunters, on another by anti-hunters, and from all around by drillers, ditchers, cutters, builders, burners and polluters.

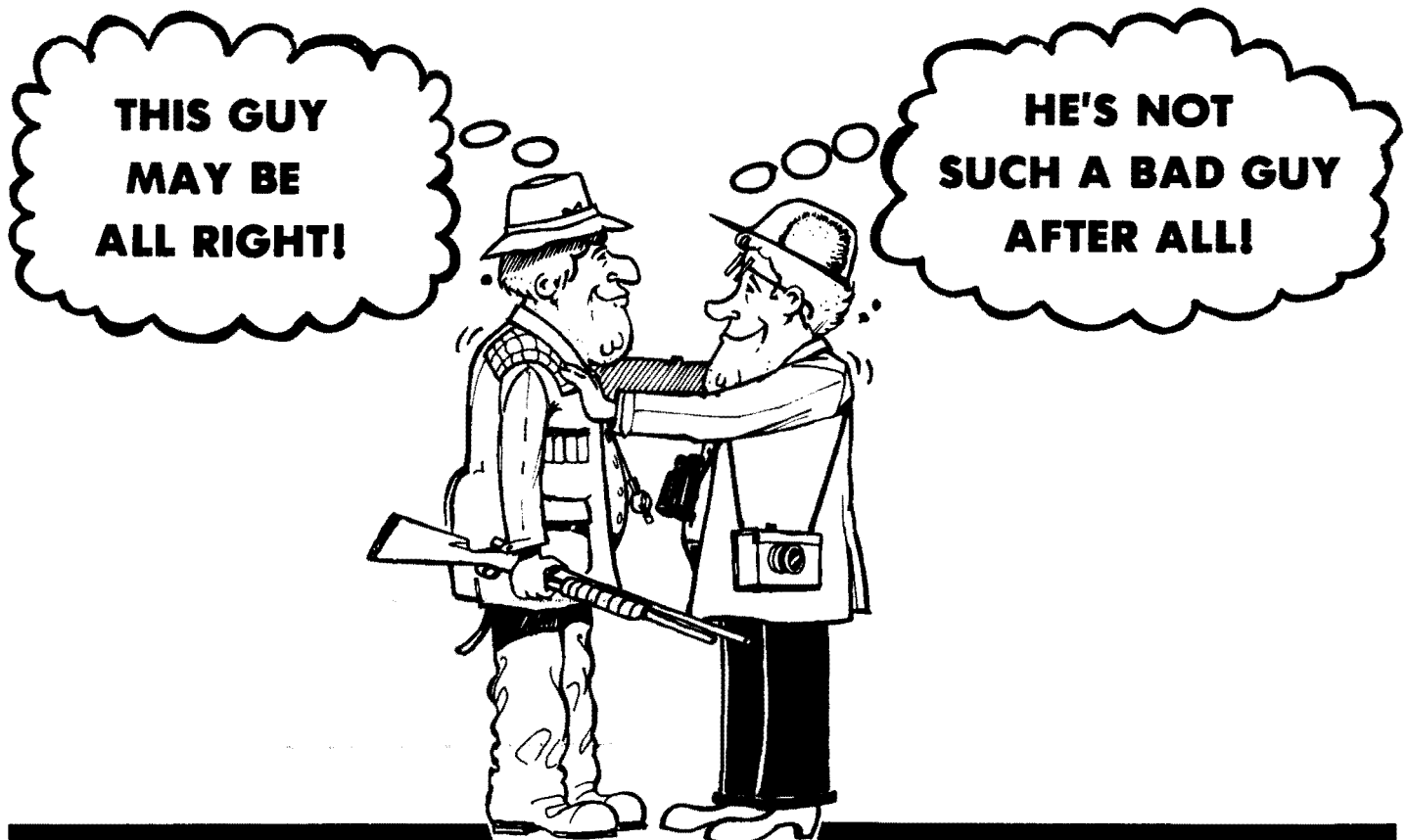
You have watched hunting, which likely directed you into your profession in the first place, degenerate into gadgeteering, and tarnish because of it. You have welcomed a new "ecological awareness" in the general public in hopes that someone finally might understand the multitude of threats to wildlife — and more often than not have been rewarded only with counter-productive emotion.

Most frightening, you have watched industrial society, which took a hundred years to merely sprout, suddenly mushroom into a monster before which nothing is sacred.

These things have called for a reassessment of your values, and a re-definition of your goals. If you are to ultimately save wildlife and the human satisfactions natural things provide, you must consider several things.

First — You must re-examine the entire concept of "wildlife management". "Management" is a young concept, with its roots in husbandry and agriculture.

Managers have traditionally dealt with the demographic principles of production and mortality, and with preserving (and often improving) habitats.





You have largely dealt with how many individuals might be taken from a given population, and have strived to increase this allowable "take" by manipulation of population structure and habitat.

However, the more we learn of natural systems the more we realize that omnipotent manipulation is seldom, if ever, possible without a significant loss of diversity and stability.

More important, we learn that the "crop" itself is nearly always far less important than the variety of human experiences the resource can provide. And we learn that maximum "production" of experiences requires unmanipulated as well as manipulated communities.

It is crucial that you, as "wildlife" managers, recognize that what you are truly managing for is a diversity of human experiences with wildlife. In many cases this means you are more a "people" manager than a wildlife manager. "Producing game" is no longer enough.

**Second** — Wildlife managers must become less insular in outlook. You no longer work only for hunters, if indeed you ever did. Hunters pay the bills, it is true, but they are not buying the right to kill something. Rather they are supporting programs to preserve wildlife and wildlife habitat, and to preserve diversity of human interactions (both consumptive and non-consumptive) with wildlife.

So remember you are working for the resource, the future, and for all who come in contact with the resource, not merely for anyone who buys a firearm or a hunting license and thereby contributes money to wildlife management.

**Third**— Stress quality rather than quantity. "Hunter days afield" is one valid measure of your success as managers, but it is only a part of the picture.

The nature of the experience those hunters undergo is the real basic measure of the "product" you are providing. And do not fall into the trap of thinking that without harvesting there is no management — that non-consumptive use is no use at all. Today's overabundance of potential users and reduced number of wild systems doom any attempt to supply unlimited demands.

**Fourth** — Realize that you are managing ecosystems, not deer, cottontails or mallards. Your obligation extends to all the "non-game" creatures which are part and parcel of diverse systems. Without songbirds, insects, reptiles, rodents and all the other animals which are never harvested, the natural world would hold much less fascination for hunters and non-hunters alike. So never forget the "non-game" species.

**Fifth** — Spend more time finding out what today's public wants. Bureaucrats and technocrats tend to

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***'You are managing ecosystems,  
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dictate and manipulate rather than to ask, and many wildlife managers seem to be serving the public as they imagined it existed ten years ago.



You have often forced biologically sound "maximum sustained yield management" on a public that really did not want it, stressing the dollars and cents values involved rather than the emotional values left unrealized.

If you wonder at the adversary relationship that has developed between you and both hunters and anti-hunters, you might look here for an explanation.

**Sixth — Try a little creativity.** Learn about compatible use zoning, about flexible restrictions in time and space. Learn how some systems can accommodate a multitude of wildlife-related uses if they are properly "managed."

Learn how you can enhance each user's experience with education and regulations that transcend

traditional thinking. *Laissez faire* in people management is a luxury we can no longer afford, least of all in the lands whose wildness we most want to preserve.

**Finally — Help both the hunter and the non-hunter** toward an understanding of where the true satisfactions of hunting and other interactions with wildlife are to be found. Do not shrink from discussing — even teaching — ethics and concern for wildlife and for other human beings who love wildlife.

If you can do this one thing, you will expand the horizons of modern man tremendously, and create a concern that will never allow wild things to be forced from the earth. This is the function of a wildlife manager.

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