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Sustainability Communicator is a quarterly publication about population, consumption, and conservation issues. Its purpose is to promote dialogue and action among League members and others interested in building a sustainable future.

SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATOR

Izaak Walton League of America Sustainability Education Program News

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Special Issue: Population in the Outdoor Media

In recent years, the Izaak Walton League has teamed up with outdoor writers and broadcasters throughout the nation to raise awareness about how human population growth affects wildlife and outdoor recreation. Many outdoor writers understand that the major underlying threats to wildlife and wild places stem from how human needs and numbers affect the resource base. This special edition of the Sustainability Communicator honors the efforts of writers who have spoken out on this issue with two examples of previously published articles on the population-outdoors connection.

The Ethics of Beavers and the Future of Humans

By Scott Stouder

Cottonwood trees lining the river breaks slashed the September high country of Alberta like wildfire with their autumn colors, and the green timbered hills were quilted with fluorescent jigsaw splashes of aspen.

It was the mid-1970s, only a few years before timber and oil companies swept through Canada's then-wild country south of Grande Prairie leaving a mangled web of clear-cuts and roads in their wake. And a decade before a paved highway sliced this wild home of wolves, grizzlies, elk and moose.

At the time, beavers were the only industrialists at work here.

Below my panoramic view from an aspen ridge, an unnamed valley curved toward the Cutbank River where the water flowed north to the Big Smokey and Peace Rivers, then on to the McKenzie and the Arctic Ocean.

The valley floor spread out like an engineering project sectioned with layered stick and mud beaver dams surrounded by willow and grass meadows.

It was prime home sites for moose and song-birds, but watching the morning sunlight wash across the valley I felt I like I'd arrived late to a party. The feeling nagged as I balanced my rifle



in my hand and started downhill.

Breaking out of spruce trees a few hundred yards above the windless valley floor, the land seemed to hold its breath. Water lay in the tiered dams like blue, molten glass. Nothing moved ... nothing.

I paused in shadows watching for dark shapes of large animals, but the feeling that something was missing returned. I watched the silent valley. It was treeless and abandoned.

At one time poplars had lined the creek and blanketed the surrounding hills. But no bright autumn colors lit this little valley now. The further I walked, skirting beaver dams and stepping over layers of felled trees, the more I felt I was touring the remnants of a lost civilization.

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Wildlife Problems Start With Us

By Harry Harju

I'm constantly amazed at how excited some people get about a hunter killing a deer or elk, but how little they care about the killing they do.

Every human on the planet is responsible for wildlife dying and disappearing. That includes the animal rights folks, the animal lovers, the vegetarians, the hunters and people who hate and fear animals.

Our polarized, politically correct society seems to be made up of people in favor of wildlife because they just love their cute little fuzzy faces, but breed and pave them out of existence every day.

There are those who don't like killing, but who would kill me because I hunt. There are crazies who bomb laboratories that use animals in research, but then they take advantage of the results of that research.

There are men who only hunt to get horns or antlers to display, and those who hunt for meat, and also those who could care less. The latter outnumber all of the other groups, but the former are much more vocal.

I spend lots of money on wildlife every year, and if I didn't hunt, I'd still spend some, but considerably less. I plead guilty to the accusation that I like to have wildlife around because I hunt. But, like all hunters, I spend more time watching wildlife of all kinds than other groups, too, and probably appreciate, value, and understand wildlife a lot better than those who don't hunt.

Hunters are the folks who banded together at the turn of the century to get wildlife management started, to stop market hunting, to close hunting seasons during much of the year, to get bag limits implemented and to preserve the big game animals they wanted to hunt.

All of this also was a benefit to animals that weren't hunted.

Meanwhile, the rest of society was busy eliminating wildlife through market and illegal hunting and converting wildlife habitat into cities, farms, roads, mines, polluted streams, pastures, clear-cuts and prairies where forests once existed.

Except for market hunting, what the rest of society once did pretty much continues today, while hunters have created organizations like the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the National Wild Turkey



Federation, Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever to try and preserve habitat for one species or another in the face of the rapidly increasing human population.

Each fall, the Game and Fish Department urges hunters not to display the animals they killed in the backs of pickups or on top of cars or trailers, for fear of offending a non-hunter.

Well, strip mines, oil fields, over-grazed pastures, sprawling subdivisions, clear cuts that used to be habitat for white-tailed deer, forests that could stand some cutting, wind farms, power lines, strip malls, over-fished oceans, dried up and polluted streams, trash along the road, highway fences impassible to big game, dried up and over-grazed rangelands and human populations increasing at exponential rates offend me, but nobody seems to be changing those things.

Ultimately, it won't be some guy with a dead deer in the back of his pickup that eliminates hunting and most wildlife; it will be growth of the human population.

The major problem for wildlife anywhere on the planet is humans. Those who profess to love wildlife are all living where wildlife once lived.

Fish and wildlife don't live on pavement, under houses and malls, beneath high-rise buildings or underneath mines and well pads.

If you drive or heat your house with electricity or natural gas, you contribute to killing wildlife in the areas where development to produce coal, oil, and natural gas is occurring.

Destroying habitat kills wildlife, whether it's temporary (if 50 years is temporary) or not.

Animal lovers wearing synthetic clothes are contributors to destruction of wildlife to produce the materials to make the clothes.

Ditto, clothing manufactured with the product of cotton fields, which aren't exactly wildlife habitat.

Diverse habitats have consistently been turned into fields of corn, wheat, cotton, soybeans, and other crops useful to man but which do not provide all of the life requirements for wildlife, especially once the crop is harvested and cattle are turned into the stubble, as often happens today. With today's clean farming methods, farmlands are much less valuable to wildlife, and the species that do well in farmlands bear little resemblance to species that inhabited those areas before farming.

Over 75 percent of the world's population lives in cities these days, and that proportion will only increase.

The population of the United States is projected to increase by another 100 million within 50 years.

Most of these people will have little exposure to wildlife and therefore will probably not care about it.

The negative effects of the human population on wildlife are amply illustrated in Europe, Asia, and Africa. With the exception of animals like white-tailed deer, Canada geese, rats, mice, pigeons, house sparrows and starlings, most of the species that inhabited North American metropolitan

areas before cities are gone.

There once were antelope all over Cheyenne, but they have been squeezed out past the suburbs, which keep squeezing them even farther away.

So, before you get too excited over a dead deer in the back of a pickup, or a kid who killed an elk, remember that more humans and bigger developments are the real reasons why fish and wildlife ultimate-

ly disappear, and the folks with the dead deer are contributing money to keep wildlife around.

That includes all wildlife, because license money also funds work done on animals that aren't hunted.

In Wyoming, those who don't hunt contribute very little or nothing toward preserving wildlife.

Those people staring back at you from

the mirror are all part of the problem for wildlife, because we continue to outbreed the rabbits and use up more of their space.

—Harry Harju, a wildlife biologist, hunter, and angler, has advised hunters and outdoor writers on Wyoming hunting for 27 years. This article was originally published in the Wyoming Tribune-Eagle on January 4, 2007, and is reprinted with permission.

The Ethics of Beavers and the Future of Humans

Continued from page 1

This had once been a busy community. Beaver—lots of them—had been in this valley for decades. But now the mounds of stick-huts sat silently in the water like vacant homesteads. Sharp stumps and corpses of skinned trees—evidence of the once-bustling beaver industry—lay weathered-gray and deteriorating.

They'd constructed dams, built lodges, fell trees and raised young. Then they'd built more dams, fell more trees and raised more young. And more, and still more. As the community prospered, they dammed the creek downstream to the river and upstream to the last trickle that flowed from the mountains. Eventually beaver had occupied the entire valley.

Once they'd cut the valley floor, they began clear-cutting the hillsides as far as they could reach. But they finally ran out of trees. Trees to beaver are like bunchgrass to elk, browse to mule deer and milkweed to swallowtail butterflies. Without trees, beaver don't live.

In the years since the oil and timber companies invaded that wild country and I quit hunting in Alberta, I've often thought about that little valley.

Castor canadensis are peculiar animals. Chewing down trees is more than learned behavior. Beavers have to chew because their large incisor teeth, which are self-sharpened with a hard enamel front and soft dentine back, never stop growing and must be constantly ground back to a manageable length. If a beaver doesn't chew wood, its teeth will elongate, force open its mouth permanently, and cause it to starve to death.

Beavers have been shaped by evolution to chew to live. This natural compulsion can literally drive them to eat themselves out of existence.

Humans seem compelled to an equal dichotomy. We continually strive to find more ways to provide more food and shelter for more humans. This compulsive act has many consequences, but the inescapable one is that it increases our own numbers. Human habitat spreads over a wider scale of time and space than beaver, but the principle is the same: If a species's population continues to increase, resources will eventually be exhausted.

Author Daniel Quinn, who wrote *Ishmael*, the groundbreaking book on the genesis of modern civilization, makes the case that humans evolved for millions of years as hunters and gathers, but about 10,000 years ago became totalitarian agriculturalists. In *Ishmael's* sequel, *The Story of B*, Quinn says this shift, which began in the area now known as Iraq, was the turning point in civilization that set humans on a path of unsustainability.

"What these founders of our culture fundamentally invented for us was the notion of work. They developed a hard way to live," he writes in *The Story of B*.

Quinn theorizes that humans transformed from foraging natural foods to harnessing themselves to fields and factories not because of a need for food, but to gain power over other cultures and the natural world.

Today, after centuries of power struggles, we are faced with the byproduct of that thrust. With 6.5 billion humans propa-

gating geometrically on this planet, we are manipulating genetics, spraying chemicals and wildly wringing life from the natural world to increase power and food production in an ultimately futile effort to feed, clothe and shelter more and more people.

There are differences (besides dental) between humans and beavers. When beavers overpopulate and eat their way out of a home in one place, they are limited in expansion by suitable habitat, so their cycles of boom and bust occur in confined areas. In contrast, we extend our consumption to other regions and continents until none of the Earth escapes our voracious habits.

But as we congratulate ourselves on our technological cleverness, we might keep in mind the simple lessons nature gives us. Beavers don't have a choice. They must chew to live. We have a choice. We don't have to accept the continued expansion of our own numbers or unsustainable consumption. We can change both.

I was young when I hunted that beaver valley in Alberta. At the time I simply wondered at its largeness and emptiness. I wasn't yet thinking of the bigger implications of the story it held. But I've kept that memory close. It reminds me that the Earth has undeniable natural limits. It's also a reminder that all creatures, including humans, must live within those limits.

—Scott Stouder, an avid hunter and angler, is a freelance writer and the Idaho field coordinator for Trout Unlimited. He has also worked as a newspaper columnist in Corvallis, Oregon, and as the editor of Mule Deer magazine.

E-Communicator

SC reader Jeff Deschamps on E-Communicating: I just got the latest "Sustainability Communicator". My issue was not printed on recycled paper with soy based ink... it was printed with 100% re-cycled electrons. Isn't that even more environmentally friendly than the recycled paper? Keep up the good work. —Jeff

If you would like to receive your Communicator on re-cycled electrons, contact us at sustain@iwla.org or call 800-453-5463.

A Fond Farewell

By Michelle Orzech, director, IWLA
Sustainability Education Program

This issue of the Sustainability Communicator is the last overseen by Jim Baird. Jim served as director of the League's Sustainability Education Program for eight years. He moves on to the figurative and literal green pastures of the American Farmland Trust to be their Mid-Atlantic director.

Jim's optimism and dedication have been a

hallmark of the Sustainability Communicator and the League's work on sustainability. So, we take a moment to acknowledge the energy and spirit Jim gave to creating a more sustainable future for us all. We know that Jim will continue to do good work for wildlife and wild places in his new venture.

In my role as the program's new director, I look forward to continuing the dialog with you on creating a sustainable future.

New Database for Outdoor Writers

Check out the League's new Population and Outdoor Media database, where you can learn more about how outdoor writers are examining human population growth and its effects on wildlife and outdoor recreation. The database includes summaries of articles drawn from small-town papers, metro dailies, magazines, specialty newsletters, and academic journals.

We hope the resource will be useful for

writers, students, teachers, wildlife managers, and community activists who study the relationship between people and wildlife. The database is available on the League's Web site at <http://www.iwla.org/index.php?id=498>.

Please submit new articles for consideration to sustain@iwla.org or by writing to IWLA Sustainability Education Program, 707 Conservation Lane, Gaithersburg, MD 20878.

Founded in 1922, the Izaak Walton League of America is dedicated to common sense conservation that protects America's hunting, fishing, and outdoor heritage relying on solution-oriented conservation, education, and the promotion of outdoor recreation for the benefit of our citizens. The League has more than 40,000 members and supporters in 21 state divisions and more than 300 local chapters in 32 states.

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