

by Bernard Lozé, President, International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation CIC

Hunters Care For Wildlife

Editor's Note: The Dallas Safari Club held its annual Convention and Sporting Expo, "Conservation" in Dallas in January. The DSC Convention unites annually policy makers, international organizations, sporting enthusiasts, entrepreneurs, and industry representatives.

Dubbed the "Greatest Hunting Show on the Planet", the four day event included a packed exhibition hall and exhilarating auctions. Conservationists and hunters from all over the world met for broad-based dialogues on hunting advocacy initiatives and diverse workshops on wildlife conservation and sustainable hunting.

During the exclusive Saturday night Dallas Safari Club Gala Dinner, the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation was awarded the prestigious 2015 Peter Hathaway Capstick Hunting Heritage Award. The award recognizes individuals and organizations whose achievements demonstrate a sustained and active contribution to the conservation of wildlife and its habitat. Mrs. Fiona Claire Capstick narrated the key objectives and accomplishments of the CIC in a video show. To the rising sounds of trompes de chasse playing the CIC hymn, DSC legend Tommy Caruthers, Capstick Award Committee Chairman Richard Cheatham and Fiona Capstick called CIC President Bernard Lozé to receive the Capstick bronze statue amidst the thundering applause of the audience. Bernard Lozé delivered a notable acceptance speech to a banquet hall packed with guests from around the globe. Here is Bernard's speech:

This is the first time that the CIC has been publicly recognized on North American soil for our global work to promote wildlife conservation and sustain the diverse hunting heritage. I am proud to note that four of the nine individuals previously recognized with this award are CIC members! The CIC must be doing something right in its mission to promote sustainable hunting to conserve wildlife and wild lands, support communities and preserve our hunting heritage across the globe. In order to achieve these fundamental goals, we need to work together! We also need to include the non-hunting conservationists to conquer the impossible.

Why is the very act of hunting in the crosshairs on the international media stage today? Why does hunting come under fire over moral objections? Why are the contributions of hunting to landscape and wildlife conservation not recognized? This may be our own fault, at least in parts. If we don't face the present attacks on sustainable hunting together and as a unified group, if we don't win our case in the court of public opinion, wildlife and habitats will disappear much quicker than anyone has yet predicted. Nobody wants this.

If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that we struggle to find truly persuasive messages. Our messages focus on species conservation, hunter motivations, hunting systems and methods. We highlight the conservation contributions of hunting on a narrower or wider scale. We dish out a cocktail of ecological, social, and economic facts and beliefs.

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These messages are imperative! But the presentation of these messages lacks emotion and fascination, and sometimes clear and hard data. And on occasion, the visual impressions we present are counterproductive! Rarely does our true, but complex message reach the public and policy makers in a concise and understandable form! Especially the urban youth of the 21st century! These young urban people have a resounding voice. Their social media accounts wield tremendous power. Every second, Facebook, twitter hashtags, and Instagram are at their fingertips. They use them to great effect!

What about us? Around the globe are millions of young hunters and millions who are young at heart. We can also create influential information and networking platforms to spread the word about the amazing connection between hunting and landscape conservation. Amongst us and our allies are also skilled and professional communicators who can simplify conservation complexities into a tweet!

The connection between hunting and conservation must come vibrantly alive. Short and concise messages that explain conservation and sustainable use through hunting must flood the net. Our quest is to develop innovative approaches that encourage non-hunters to see us in a positive light! Bottom line: we need to mobilize our ranks, change our approach and meet people on the digital turf.

Let's follow President Teddy Roosevelt's advice: "There can be no life without change, and to be afraid of what is different or unfamiliar is to be afraid of life".

With the prospect of change comes the opportunity to 'brand' hunting' ... we must disassociate hunting from negativity and social disapproval! Our logos, mission and vision statements show the direction, but we need to step it up. We must promote coherent sets of values and promises which the non-hunter understands and accepts.

There was a time, when hunters were the leaders of broad-based conservation coalitions! Teddy Roosevelt is a proud and shining example of such leadership! Today, like in the times of Roosevelt, we need to cross the aisle and enter into constructive dialogues with non-hunters and develop together win-win outcomes for landscapes, biodiversity and people!

In doing so we don't sacrifice hunting, we don't compromise on our values! Using 21st Century communication tools and branding hunting help us to explain, engage and inspire! It's time that we take up Roosevelt's challenge! It's time that we once again lead a broad-based conservation coalition!

Lead with integrity and empathy ...

Lead with transparency in our actions ...

Welcome all those who care for wildlife and help them understand hunting ...

Help them accept its contribution to conservation, even while they may remain less than totally comfortable about it!

The results will be provocative and intriguing. It will be a powerful new hunting message. After all, what will be more inspiring than the hunting brand that embodies conservation of biodiversity on incredibly vast tracts of land outside protected areas?

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I repeat - we need professional help and guidance. We must recruit first class PR advisors and seasoned campaign managers. Let's fire up the enthusiasm of millions of young hunters and use social media to our advantage. Let's brand hunting, and let's engage with the non-hunter.

It always seems impossible until it's done, said Nelson Mandela, and he achieved the impossible. We hunters also never back down from a challenge. We thrive when things get tough. We are a resilient bunch. We selflessly charge to the forefront to preserve the wild landscapes we love.

Let's rise to the present challenge in the best traditions of President Teddy Roosevelt, who once said ... "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care".

Hunters do care for wild landscapes and biodiversity. Let's prove this to the world!

Editor's Postscript: The DSC Conservation Convention was an ideal setting for a cocktail reception of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation at the Omni Hotel. The CIC was represented by President Bernard Lozé, President of Honor Dieter Schramm, Vice-President Dr. Kaush Arha, the President of the CIC Applied Science Division Gerhard Damm, and his wife Conny. In front of an illustrious audience of leaders from major US hunting associations the CIC speakers highlighted the four global initiatives of the CIC and showcased CIC achievements. The well attended event offered opportunities to explore cooperation between sustainable use advocacy organizations from both sides of the Atlantic and to introduce the work of the CIC to our North American friends.

Intensive individual discussions concentrated on landscape preservation and wildlife conservation. Gerhard Damm highlighted the need for new alliances and a persuasive new hunting message. A measure of the success of this CIC event is the request of many participants that the CIC presence at the DSC Convention and the North American Conference on Wildlife & Natural Resources is made into regular annual event! This enthusiastic reception of CIC in the United States calls for sustained engagement and follow up.