

Letter from the Editor

Cooperative conservation to enhance human–wildlife interactions



IN AUGUST 2004, then President George W. Bush signed Executive Order (EO) 13352, titled “Facilitation of Cooperative Conservation.” The EO directed the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, and Defense and the Environmental Protection Agency to implement laws in a manner that promotes cooperative conservation. The emphasis was placed on increasing local participation in federal decision-making in accordance with agency missions, policies, and regulations.

The order directed the Chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality to convene a White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation. The Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, and the Environmental Protection Agency co-hosted the event.

On August 29–31, 2005, invited representatives from the public and private sectors convened in St. Louis, Missouri to discuss the advancement of this cooperative conservation vision. The intent of this process was to institutionalize cooperative conservation to enhance on-the-ground conservation results and progress.

I attended the event along a few thousand other folks and actually rubbed shoulders with Cabinet members. The entire event reminded me of a huge pep rally—all who attended left feeling energized and in anticipation of the next steps. It has now been 13 years since the conference, and I, as well as the other 2,000-plus who attended, are still waiting for the next steps.

In many ways, this effort was the embodiment of the overused adage, “I am the government and I am here to help.” The event created a false expectation that someone else would step in—in this case the “White House”—and solve all of

the conservation problems in the country.

When it comes to managing human–wildlife conflicts with the end goal of improving human–wildlife interactions, the best results are achieved through cooperation. Interestingly, pairing the word cooperation with conservation to create the phrase “cooperative conservation” is an oxymoron. Conservation alone means to “work together,” which is cooperation. So, by engaging in “cooperative conservation,” you are working together to work together.

In this issue of Human–Wildlife Interactions, we are featuring efforts from around the globe of “cooperative conservation” to better manage human–wildlife conflicts with the goal of improving human–wildlife interactions. The manuscripts cover a range of topics that include the effect of TASERS on wildlife to assessing public perceptions of human–wildlife interactions using social media. We take to Africa to learn about the “Kgotla” in Botswana to resolve conflicts between humans and elephants (*Loxodonta africana*), to India to explore the issues affecting the conservation of Bengal tigers (*Panthera tigris*), to Mexico to save the endangered vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*), and to the sagebrush (*Artemisia* spp.) rangeland of Utah. All of these articles share a central theme: “cooperative conservation.” Regardless of what definition is used, successful management of human–wildlife conflicts will ultimately require the people most affected to work together as one community to create the desired environments that blend species management with economic sustainability.

Terry A. Messmer, Editor-in-Chief
