



## THE NORTH AMERICAN MODEL OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

**The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation** (“Model”) is the world’s most successful system of policies and laws designed to restore and protect fish, wildlife, and habitats through sound science and active management.

The Model has its roots in the conservation movement that took shape in the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Overhunting, unenforceable laws, and a lack of science had led to the demise of species like the passenger pigeon, and the near-extinction of others including the American bison. Indeed, many iconic species such as the wild turkey, wood duck, and white-tailed deer were rapidly vanishing from the landscape.

Conservation-minded leaders, including Theodore Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, and George Bird Grinnell advocated for an end to market hunting, which had decimated so many populations of fish and wildlife. These visionaries and others diligently worked to conserve land, pass laws addressing needs including species conservation, and advocate for adoption of science-based management. Their movement grew into the fish and wildlife management systems we have today.

The Model is founded upon seven basic tenets, which emerged in the mid-to-late 1800s and have been refined and modified over time. State fish and wildlife agencies, which exercise their legal authority to manage most fish and wildlife species in the United States, often refer to the Model as they carry out their vital work.

### SEVEN CORE PRINCIPLES OF THE NORTH AMERICAN MODEL

#### I. PUBLIC TRUST DOCTRINE

Since the Roman Empire, ownership of wildlife has been the subject of vigorous legal debate. An 1842 U.S. Supreme Court opinion affirmed the principle that a government holds natural resources in trust for its people and cannot be “owned”.

#### II. DEMOCRATIC RULE OF LAW

Wildlife is allocated for use by citizens through laws, regulations, and policy. The rule of law safeguards against the hazard of elites appropriating wildlife as occurred in Europe. All citizens can participate—if necessary, through the courts—in developing systems of wildlife conservation and use.

### III. OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

In Canada and the United States, every person has equal opportunity under the law to participate in hunting and fishing. No one group—hunters or non-hunters—may exclude others from access.

### IV. COMMERCIAL USE

Commerce in dead wildlife was hugely profitable yet extremely destructive in the late 1800s to early 1900s. Hunters and anglers led the effort to eliminate markets and commercial traffic in dead animals and parts to ensure sustainable wildlife populations.

### V. LEGITIMATE USE

Although laws govern access to wildlife and ensure that all citizens have a say in its protection, there must also be guidelines for appropriate use (i.e., killing for food and fur, self-defense, and property protection, broadly speaking). Laws restrict the casual killing of wildlife merely for antlers, horns, or feathers.

### VI. SCIENCE AND WILDLIFE POLICY

Interest in science and natural history is deeply ingrained in North American society. For example, nearly every major expedition charged with mapping the continent placed an emphasis on recording wildlife habitats and diversity.

Science is identified as a crucial requirement of wildlife management. Aldo Leopold in his 1930 American Game Policy credited President Theodore Roosevelt with this principle, explicitly stating that science should underpin wildlife policy.

### VII. INTERNATIONAL WILDLIFE MIGRATORY RESOURCES

The boundaries of states and nations are of little relevance to fish and wildlife, and laws and policies for conservation must address this reality. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 is an excellent example of successful international cooperation.

#### Additional Resources about the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation

Interested in learning more about the North American Model? For more information and perspectives, visit these resources from our partners in fish and wildlife conservation:

##### Arizona Game & Fish Department

[http://www.azgfd.gov/h\\_f/northamericanmodel.shtml](http://www.azgfd.gov/h_f/northamericanmodel.shtml)

##### Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

<http://fwp.mt.gov/mtoutdoors/HTML/NAModel.htm>

##### Boone & Crockett Club

[http://www.boone-crockett.org/conservation/conservation\\_NAM.asp?area=conservation](http://www.boone-crockett.org/conservation/conservation_NAM.asp?area=conservation)

##### Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

<http://www.rmef.org/Conservation/HuntingIsConservation/NorthAmericanWildlifeConservationModel.aspx>



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Founded in 1902, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies represents North America's fish and wildlife agencies in advancing science-based management and conservation of species and their habitats for the public's long-term benefit and use. **Website** <http://fishwildlife.org> **Twitter** @fishwildlife