

Prepared remarks of Charles Davidson, March 16, 2 p.m., Valencia Room, Lodge of the Four Seasons, Lake Ozark, for Conservation Leadership Corps.

Thank You...Welcome...

?What do birdwatchers and hikers have in common with duck hunters and scuba divers? What similarities are there among archers and big game hunters, canoeists and fly fishermen? Do turkey hunters and bass fishermen have any likenesses with campers and field trialers?

You don't have to raise your hands The questions are rhetorical.

I hope though that you know enough about the Conservation Federation of Missouri (CFM) to recognize that these quite varied and diverse interest groups, and many others, have at least one thing in common – they can and should belong to CFM.

Why? Simply because they should all understand that we share a common interest – a “big picture” understanding. And, that is, without a healthy and diverse natural ecosystem, without some measure of wildness, and, without clean water and air, the quality of our lives becomes greatly diminished.

As usual, conservation's great spokesman, Aldo Leopold, stated this idea far more eloquently. In his Foreword to Sand County Almanac, Leopold wrote:

“There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot. Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them. Now we face the question whether a still higher ‘standard of living’ is worth its cost in things natural, wild, and free. For us of the minority, the opportunity to see geese is more important than television, and the chance to find a pasque-flower is a right as inalienable as free speech.”

Edward O. Wilson, in his book “The Diversity of Life”, echoes similar thoughts, “The ethical imperative should be, first of all, prudence. We should judge every scrap of biodiversity as priceless while we learn to use it and come to understand what it means to humanity. We should not knowingly allow any species or race to go extinct. And let us go beyond mere salvage to begin the restoration of natural environments, in order to enlarge wild populations and stanch the hemorrhaging of biological wealth. There can be no purpose more inspiring than to begin the age of restoration, reweaving the wondrous diversity of life that still surrounds us.”

Whether or not Federation members have ever read or are even aware of these statements, I believe that, on some level, they basically share the philosophies that are so well expressed by these eloquent conservation writers.

Realistically, one could not expect the River Bluffs Audubon to always see eye-to-eye with the Missouri Forest Products Association, or the Missouri Trout Fishermen’s Association to always be in lock-step with the Table Rock Bassmasters. There could easily be disputes between the Missouri Trappers Association and the Central Missouri Coon Hunters. But, when it comes to the ‘big picture’ issues, the broad scope, one might even say higher interest, we almost always find unity, and our diverse interests pull together.

I really believe it is this diversity of interests that makes the Federation so effective on statewide issues – and we are effective! The Federation has never lost a statewide ballot issue that made it to the ballot. Of course, being a democratic organization, with all our members having a chance for input (usually here at our annual meeting), it is sometimes rather difficult to reach an accord in the first place. When we do, watch out.

I mentioned our diversity of interests. Diversity in an organization is perhaps more often these days associated with the age, gender or racial makeup of its members than it is their interests. You will probably notice this weekend that we could be doing a better job in some of these areas. However, we are trying very, very hard to

increase diversity in all areas, and it is a frequent topic of discussion when the Federation meets. I believe you will see great strides in the near future under our current leadership and this CLC program is one we are counting on to make a big difference.

Since you are on a tight schedule here and I've been told to keep it short, I want to move quickly on to a brief review of just a few of the Federation's major accomplishments. Our biggest successes, by far, have come about through the initiative petition process. Because of this process provided for in Missouri's constitution, the citizens of the state can directly propose amendments to the constitution and/or changes in Missouri law. The Federation's use of the initiative has made our state conservation program the envy of the nation, and also the best funded state conservation program in the United States.

Okay, let me get to the specifics of a couple of our major accomplishments.

In 1935, Missouri sportsmen, upset with the decline in Missouri's wildlife resources and the state's ineffective response to these declines, established the Restoration and Conservation Federation of Missouri to embark on an initiative petition drive to establish a non-political fish, wildlife and forestry program. This organization eventually became our present-day Conservation Federation of Missouri. The story of this statewide petition drive was recounted by Charlie Callison in his book "Man and Wildlife in Missouri – the history of one state's treatment of its natural resources". It's very interesting reading and it is available in most libraries. The Federation's initiative campaign was a success, and Proposition 4, to establish in the constitution a non-political Department of Conservation, went on the November, 1936 ballot. Called "the greatest movement of our time for Missouri", it was overwhelmingly approved 879,213 for to 351,962 against.

After the strong positive vote, some Federation leaders thought their job was done and they were planning to disband the organization. However, it very quickly

became evident that there were forces, especially in the Legislature, who saw this as an usurpation of the lawmaker's powers, and several strong attempts to repeal the new conservation amendment were introduced. The Federation realized they would have to become permanent to protect their creation and in succeeding years and to this day we have had to fight many battles that sought to weaken the Department or replace it with one under the thumb of the Missouri Legislature. The Federation has always been there, and we will forever be there to beat back threats to re-politicize our state conservation program.

Another early battle for the fledgling Federation was to rally the opposition to the proposed construction of thirty large flood control dams, mostly on Ozark streams, by the United States War Department. The Federation's fight against this massive plan in 1939 was unrelenting, and CFM found allies in the National Wildlife Federation, the Izaak Walton League and farmer's organizations. Some concessions had to be made, but the dams' supporters were forced to abandon the huge original plan which would have flooded even rivers like the Current, Jacks Fork and Gasconade.

I think perhaps another quality that unites the diverse interests of our Federation membership is that we know we cannot sit still and just hope that everything will magically turn out for the best. We know that action and effort are always required, perhaps more than once, if significant progress is to be made. This became very clear during the Federation's second major initiative petition effort – the campaign to achieve a new and greatly expanded funding source for the Department of Conservation so they could acquire more public lands and expand programs far beyond traditional hunting and fishing opportunities.

Planning for this second major Federation initiative began in the late 1960's, and, in May of 1970 the Federation formed the Citizens Committee for Conservation (CCC). The CCC's goal was to come up with a funding base for a conservation

program expansion that had been proposed by the Department and to then seek voter approval for their plan.

Utilizing a study of possible funding sources by a University of Missouri professor, the CCC settled on a penny tax on soft drinks as the revenue source. We were successful in getting the legal number of signatures but the effort failed to get on the ballot when the Supreme Court ruled the petition was improperly drafted – it did not contain a necessary enacting clause.

Disheartened, the Federation took a long and hard look at their effort. It had become apparent during the drive that the bottling industry had millions of dollars to fight the proposal and that they were prepared to spend it. Other technical issues involving the registration of voters and who could sign a petition and where, had to be resolved. Finally, in 1974 the Federation kicked off a second initiative petition drive for expanded funding for conservation. This time, however, we went for a 1/8th percent sales tax. Of course there were some anti-tax groups that opposed this idea but their opposition wasn't as strong and they didn't have the big money of the bottling industry. Rural landowner groups, who had originally organized against scenic river proposals and the "taking" of private land were also opposed, but their opposition was lessened by our promises that land would only be acquired from willing sellers and that the Department would make payments to counties in lieu of lost property tax revenues.

Burned out by the earlier petition drive, some of our volunteer petition carriers threw in the towel, but most came back. We lined up petition drive coordinators for each and every county and for every college campus. The efforts in the metropolitan areas had to be precise to meet new stringent requirements as to the voting address and congressional district of the signers. On May 27, 1976, we turned in over 200,000 signatures on petitions requesting the Secretary of State place on the ballot our proposal for a 1/8 of one percent sales tax to fund, indefinitely, a greatly expanded conservation program. We had made sure the funds were earmarked for conservation and could be used for no other purpose.

The petitions were soon certified and an intense election campaign began utilizing many “poor-man” techniques. Since we didn’t have a big war chest for television advertising, which all public relations firms told us we’d have to have, we relied on what we could do - news releases, radio spots, letter writing campaigns, speaker’s bureaus, posters, bumper stickers, yard signs and telephone banks. We tried everything we could afford and took advantage of any opportunity to spread the word about the Department’s “Design for Conservation” and our plan to fund it. It worked. On November 2, 1976, Amendment #1 passed 901,500 to 873,400, a slim victory to be sure, but in a time when no tax increases were being approved, it was huge.

After its implementation, Missouri became the nation’s leader in per capita spending for conservation. This was a Federation-led effort from the outset. The Federation’s Executive Director served as the chief campaign manager and the entire Federation staff worked day and night and headed up the petition and election campaign out of the Federation office.

(If you are interested in learning more about this effort, one source is an article entitled “Amendment#1 – A Conservation Victory. It appears in Environmental Education in Action – III: Case Studies of Public Involvement in Environmental Policy)

Since my allotted time is nearly up and since I’ve just scratched the surface on the Federation’s many accomplishments, I’m going to switch gears and very quickly give you some examples of the many programs and activities in which the Federation has taken the lead, or which are entirely Federation programs. I want to do this, not just to brag about the Federation, but because you may hear something that is of particular interest to you and in which you want to become more involved. That’s what we’d like to see happen.

Among other accomplishments the Federation has:

1. Lobbied through Missouri's first water pollution laws with grassroots support
2. Secured federal protection for scenic rivers
3. Proposed and secured state mined land reclamation legislation
4. Helped get areas designated as wilderness and wild lands
5. Often gained expanded hunting and fishing opportunities starting with resolutions passed at our annual convention, etc.
6. Supported and helped lead the petition and election campaigns for the amendment providing 1/10th % sales tax for state parks and soil conservation – several times
7. In cooperation with the Department we initiated the Stream Team Program (The Federation called the first Rivers and Streams Conference twenty years ago last month leading to the Stream Team program we have today. There are now over 3200 stream teams throughout the state.)
8. We championed the Katy Trail and through our Foundation financed it's purchase and construction, and we have a continuing interest in seeing this completed across Missouri and more trailside amenities developed.
9. We've been a strong supporter of the Ozark Trail and have had full-time staff assigned to this project.
10. We initiated Operation Game Thief and Operation Forest Arson. (We pay out about \$15,000 per year in rewards to people who report illegal poaching and game violations)
11. We started the Share the Harvest program. (The Federation paid processing fees to over 5500 deer hunters last fall who donated venison for the needy.)
12. We proudly sponsor Conservation Awards to recognize individual and group achievement in conservation in Missouri and we give Scholarships to continue Missouri's conservation legacy.
13. Finally, the Federation gets involved in many national and international issues, most often through our national affiliate, the National Wildlife Federation.

There are many more ways to get involved. One thing you can do this weekend is to pick a Federation committee whose subject matter interests you and see for yourself. You'll be welcomed I'm sure. This is the place to start. In closing I'd just say that I hope above all else you continue your interest and enthusiasm for Missouri's outdoor world. To us in the Federation, nothing is any more important than the conservation of our precious natural resources.