



**The Wildlife Society  
Western Section  
Michael Morrison, President  
Department of Biological Sciences  
6000 J Street  
California State University  
Sacramento, CA 95819**

3 May, 2000

Michael Spear, Manager  
California-Nevada Operations Office  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
2800 Cottage Way, Rm W-2605  
Sacramento, CA 95825-1846

Re: USFWS Personnel Attendance at Professional Conferences

Dear Mr. Spear;

The Western Section of The Wildlife Society wishes to thank you for addressing conference attendees at our annual conference in Riverside, California. Points you made in your address are well taken. Of particular relevance are your remarks regarding the need to be able to communicate outside our realm of expertise. We agree that the ability to talk with people from other walks of life, whether landowners, developers, agency personnel, or interested stakeholders, is absolutely necessary, and you elucidated this message clearly. Additional kudos are in order regarding the noticeable increase in pace regarding sensitive species decisions in the first two months of this year, and the increased ease with which information is being shared with interested parties via the Pacific Region's website.

However, we wish to address a topic that was raised in the question-and-answer period following your address. One of our delegates asked you to comment on the obvious lack of representation by USFWS personnel at our conference. Your reply was that 1) you did not notice the lack of representation 2) you did not know why USFWS personnel were not present but it may be because these workers had a large work-load and 3) their lack of attendance was not because personnel were being dissuaded from attending. Indeed, there were USFWS personnel participating with our Annual Meeting, which is invaluable to us. Given the importance of the USFWS to the goals of The Wildlife Society, we would like to collaborate with even more USFWS personnel at our Annual Meeting.

We feel that attendance by professional workers at society-sanctioned symposia and conferences offers many benefits, both obvious and obscure. The most obvious reason is that this allows a worker to develop professionally by attending talks and hearing results of new research. Most papers presented at conferences are "cutting edge" and have not been submitted to journals for publication. Indeed, most of these presentations will not be developed into papers, and thus, attending talks is the only way to gather information being presented. Much specific information can be gathered in a short time at conferences, and those that don't attend may find themselves quickly "out of the loop."

The argument can be made, however, that informal networking is as important as the talks and papers presented. This applies to the professional development of the individual as well as the representation of the individual's affiliation. Contacts made, and topics discussed at informal gatherings may serve to invigorate one in his profession, and may serve to mend fences when a rift develops through day-to-day professional life. Professional representation of one's affiliation at these meetings may heighten that company or agency's standing among a group of professionals. Conversely, an organization whose personnel are too busy to attend and participate may be looked upon as aloof, and not willing to participate informally with other professionals.

To help counter these potential problems, we ask you to issue a clear directive to our colleagues employed with USFWS to consider professional conferences of utmost importance to attend. We ask you to recommend to your biologists that they include our annual conference in their employee annual training plan. We are concerned that USFWS personnel are being "boxed out" by their workload and are not being allowed the freedom, whether expressed or implied, to attend meetings and participate in the activities from which a professional wildlife biologist and his affiliation can benefit.

We make this request with the utmost respect, and wish you would consider our points carefully. Please call me at 916-683-0464 if you wish to further discuss this issue.

Sincerely,

Michael Morrison, President

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