

Ken Babcock Opening Comments – Wetlands Summit

Over the past 85-90 years, Missouri has enjoyed many conservation successes. Wetlands, and associated flora and fauna, have been the beneficiaries of many of these successes, resulting in substantial recreational, and other societal, benefits. Many factors have contributed to these successes, but the most important factor, in my mind, has been strong and long-standing citizen support for natural resource conservation. Citizen initiative and support form the very core of what is referred to as “The Missouri Model”. Fortunately, Missouri’s Constitution provides the opportunity for citizens to express such support, outside the din of politics, through the initiative petition process. Examples of how Missouri citizen conservationists have utilized this tool to establish processes and ensure funding to conserve our natural resources and, the resulting benefits of these efforts, are well documented.

Identifying conservation needs, and establishing the authority and financial resources for addressing those needs, are just the beginning of achieving desired outcomes. The conservation renaissance in the 1930s was not confined to Missouri. It was a continental phenomenon. Fortunately, leaders of that movement recognized that decisions for addressing the problems encountered should be based on science. But, they also recognized that in many instances, information was lacking. Steps were taken on many levels to address these shortcomings. In Missouri, in November, 1937, as one of its first actions, the newly formed Conservation Commission approved an agreement with the University of Missouri and The Bureau of Biological Survey (later to be the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) to form a Wildlife Cooperative Research Station to compile available information about fish and wildlife, identify routine research needs, and serve

as a center for training biologists to guide the growing natural resources conservation profession. This important partnership remains intact today.

Drought gripped much of North America in the 1930s, therefore, wetlands and associated fish and wildlife were major focal points of the aforementioned conservation renaissance. The history of this movement documents that private landowners, particularly those concerned about the decline in waterfowl numbers and associated hunting opportunities, often led early efforts to elevate the priority for wetland conservation. That certainly was the case in Missouri. On the national/international scene, the founding of Ducks Unlimited, also in 1937, clearly illustrates the vital role of citizen landowners in the elevation of priority and subsequent successes of wetland conservation efforts. While these efforts may have begun with a narrow focus, this summit is designed to illustrate how that focus has evolved to consider and integrate all components of wetlands systems and the various associated recreational priorities. The summit also is designed to magnify the importance of dialogue and coordination among various wetland stakeholders even when their views are conflicting. In my opinion, the best example of the importance of these partnerships is the one between fish and wildlife conservationists and agriculture. You will hear more about this from others.

In preparing my remarks for today, I was reminded of a quote from Sir Isaac Newton in a letter to a fellow scientist in 1675 when he said "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants." During my career, which began nearly 56 years ago, I have stood on the shoulders of many giants, If I listed all of them, it would put us way behind schedule. But, I would be remiss if I

didn't mention a few of them. Bill Crawford, Dick Vaught, Mike Milonski, Ted Shanks, Jim Gritman, Harold Burgess, Frank Belrose, and Leigh Fredrickson are examples, in my mind, of giants who helped lay the foundation for wetland conservation in Missouri and beyond. As we celebrate the past accomplishments in wetland conservation over the next three days, I encourage you to think about the giants in your minds. But, more importantly, I challenge each of us to think of how our individual roles as giants can be enhanced today in order to increase and improve wetland conservation in the future. The giants of today and tomorrow are here today.

The primary intent of this summit is to strengthen the foundation that will ensure an expanded and more progressive wetland conservation effort going forward. This responsibility is shared among all of us here today and many of our other colleagues. Let's ask:

- ** What needs to be done?
- ** What do we need to do differently?
- ** What is my role?

Thanks to each of you for being here today!!