

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY THE SYMPOSIUM ON THE ECOLOGIC AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF HUNTING

An incredible wealth of information was presented at this Symposium. Besides the sheer volume of information contained in the presentations and discussions, there is the fact that “hunting” exists within many contexts. What is accepted in one area may not be accepted in another. Therefore, local culture must be acknowledged in any decision-making process.

Despite the differences of culture and conditions, there are common themes. Many studies and first-hand experiences clearly demonstrated undeniable proof that regulated hunting is a critical part of science-based wildlife management and it provides incredible widespread economic benefits to rural communities. This economic benefit is one of the most important tools to help end poverty.

Keeping wildlife populations in balance with the ecosystem is the cornerstone of modern scientific management. Presentations proved that regulated hunting is the most effective tool to ensure that species exist in balance with nature. Even more significant is the role regulated hunting has played in the protection and reintroduction of endangered species.

The hunting experience requires clean and healthy ecosystems. To this end, presentations demonstrated hunting is the highest/best land use. Livestock and farming destroys ecosystems, and photo safaris don't provide the large and diversified distribution of wealth that hunting does. Compound this with eco-tourism's demand for a specific (and limited) type of beauty and the economic impact is even further centralized. What is important to remember is there is a role for all activities and there were great case-studies that provided a model for establishing the right balance.

Finally, we have seen the incredible economic benefits of regulated hunting. Hunting is big industry, but unlike most big business it is widely dispersed throughout rural communities. Around the world regulated hunting is a primary funding source. In developing countries we have seen the economic impact of regulated hunting is a critical tool to help end poverty.

Capitalizing on these incredible benefits requires the proper framework. This framework must ensure revenues are distributed to the local community. Since hunting is a relatively labor-intensive activity, many in the local community realize employment opportunities. But the legal frameworks must ensure revenues are focused on wildlife and local communities and not gobbled up by general treasuries. These legal frameworks must also provide a mechanism for biologically-based hunting quotas and enforcement of those quotas.

We have a great story to tell, and a great deal of time in this Symposium was spent talking about how to tell it. In today's world perception is reality. It is not enough to continue DOING what is right, we must also educate the public so they understand. It is perhaps our biggest challenge. As Aldo Leopold, father of modern science-based wildlife management, said “managing wildlife is easy...managing people is what is difficult.” While a minority of extremists opposed to regulated hunting—or any sustainable use of natural resources—are masters at getting media attention, the good news is the public as a whole sees through their misguided agenda. Studies show that throughout the world the vast majority of the public supports regulated hunting. But the message is clear: To succeed in supporting wildlife, ecosystems and economic gains for rural communities we must engage in dialogue with all stakeholders. There must be bottom-up communications in the decision-making process.

We have many challenges. The actions of international NGO's are pushing top-down, unilateral decisions that interfere with regulated hunting and eliminate the great benefits. In the process they are harming wildlife, ecosystems, and communities.

Another challenge is hurdles in transportation of firearms by hunters. If hunters can't travel with their firearms, they won't hunt and all the benefits disappear. This can result from poor business policies of transportation companies and/or well-intentioned but poorly-reasoned regulations intended to prevent the illicit trade of weapons is a threat to hunting and therefore a threat to wildlife and ecosystems.