

A New Forum Is Born

CANADA'S VISIONARY WILDLIFE CONGRESS

By Lisa Moore

Anyone who knows Canadian conservationist Shane Mahoney knows that he possesses two great gifts: a passion for wildlife conservation and a formidable power of persuasion. He recently brought both to bear by working with the Ontario

Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) to create a North American continental congress for wildlife conservation—the first ever held on Canadian soil. Culmination of a four-year quest, the National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Congress convened in Ottawa in May 2012—and launched a promising new chapter in collaborative wildlife stewardship.

“I was interested in moving the conservation agenda forward,” says Mahoney, “and to do so in a high-profile way that could not be ignored.” That vision was realized beyond all expectations. The congress drew more than 400 delegates from across Canada and the United States, and earned broad-based support from public and private sporting and conservation groups in both nations. High-level speakers included Canada’s Minister of the Environment Peter Kent, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe, and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who gave the keynote address.

“The atmosphere was similar to what I imagine the first North American Wildlife Conference was like in 1936,” says Paul Krausman, president of The Wildlife Society (TWS), one of many conference sponsors. “It was impressive to see so much biological and political action in one place that will influence wildlife management in all of North America for years to come.”

Action is exactly what conference organizers hoped for—and achieved. During his speech, Prime Minister Harper announced the creation of a National Hunting and Angling Advisory Panel,

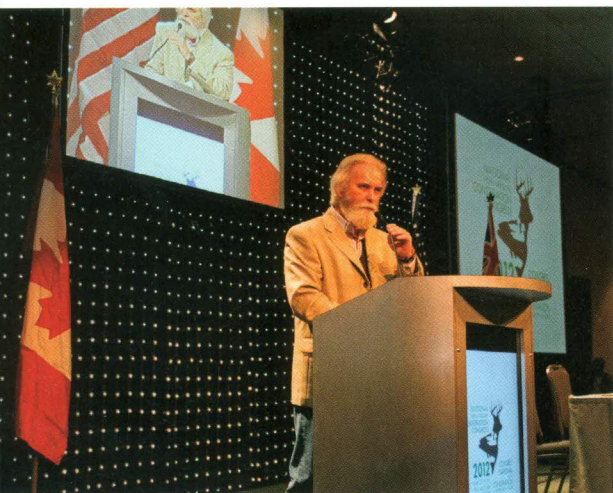
which will give sportsmen-conservationists input on policy affecting wildlife resources. The panel will report to the nation’s environment minister to help ensure that policies “are based on sound science and balanced advice” (*The Province* 2012).

Further action occurred when attendees rolled up their sleeves at five workshops designed to accomplish real work. During the all-day sessions, attendees produced specific recommendations on how to:

- Expand interest and public participation in fish and wildlife conservation, including outreach to youth, the media, and policymakers.
- Improve programs and partnerships that promote conservation, including trans-boundary efforts among governments, NGOs, universities, and the private sector.
- Incorporate the best biological and social science to benefit wildlife resources, specifically in adaptive management, landscape planning, monitoring, and investment.
- Promote laws and policies that benefit natural resources, looking at legal barriers to conservation, trans-boundary issues, and new policy models.
- Encourage funding and incentives to restore and protect fish and wildlife resources, engaging government, industry, and the private sector.

Workshop participants then presented their recommendations at the closing plenary session, where attendees voted on the top priorities for fish and wildlife conservation in North America. “We now have a roadmap,” says Greg Farrant, manager of government affairs and policy for OFAH and conference general manager.

That roadmap sets the Canadian conference apart. “I believe this was a historic meeting,” says Mahoney, who hopes to see it repeated every two to three years. Not only did it enable Canada and the U.S. to learn from each other’s successes, but it sparked “big picture” thinking about how science, sustainable use, and citizen engagement can be woven together for the sake of sustaining natural resources. “I hope to incite in the citizenry the vague notion that conservation matters,” says Mahoney. “That is the only hope for conservation.” ■



Credit: OFAH

Canadian conservationist Shane Mahoney addresses his nation’s first-ever international wildlife conservation congress in May 2012.

Lisa Moore is Director of Publishing and Communications for The Wildlife Society and Editor-in-Chief of *The Wildlife Professional*.



To learn more about the conference and workshop recommendations, go to nfwcc.com.