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**John D. Hoskins, AMFWA President and Director, Missouri Dept. of Conservation**

**I am new to my position, and many of you have also had the experience of taking responsibility for agency leadership so you understand how it feels. However, none of you know much about me or my approach to the daunting task of following Jerry Conley to the helm. I am sharing this speech to provide some insight into my view of the conservation landscape in Missouri which, I think, has many similarities with your states and your conservation agencies.**

**Quite simply, I am excited and humbled to be the director of the Missouri Department of Conservation!**

**It must be a lot like being given opportunity to climb Mount Everest. After the initial shock of realizing you're privileged to do what few ever have opportunity to do, there's the awareness that careful planning must be weighed with the right measures of willingness to risk and willingness to fail—and of course, the driving desire to succeed. You realize that you should never be so consumed with detail and intensity that you forget to relax and cast an eye toward the immense, but beautiful, view of the mountain peak. And perhaps most important, you trust beyond a doubt the experience, commitment, drive, and good advice of your climbing team. And here, I take great comfort in knowing I'm undertaking the job as Director supported by the best conservation climbing team in the world. For almost 70 years, the professionals of the Missouri Department of Conservation have shown that there's no conservation peak that they can't summit.**

**We understand that the Department's mission is to protect and manage the fish, forest, and wildlife resources of the state, to serve the public and facilitate their participation in resource management; and to provide opportunity for all citizens to use, enjoy and learn about fish, forest, and wildlife resources. To me, this says conservation of natural resources is fundamental to the health of our communities.**

**But life today isn't much like the life of our mothers and fathers, and we don't dare take the health of our communities for granted. There have always been pressures of work, making ends meet, raising families, and planning for the future. Today, though, our American society struggles with a crisis in cultural and perhaps spiritual character, evidenced by substance abuse, drug crimes and family break-ups. And rural society is every bit at threat from these as is urban society. We face the huge social challenge of providing health-care for our aging parents as well as aging baby boomers. We face the social and economic complexities of an increasingly urbanized and multi-cultural citizenry. And now we have the gnawing concern that terror is a part of daily life and news in our country; in fact, we must not forget that we're at war with terror.**

Our improved technologies often don't seem to help us cope with these pressures, but instead seem to accelerate our lives and events into an ever-tightening spin.

One social commentator has suggested that a small indicator of just how much Americans find themselves on edge is the slow disappearance of civility in our everyday lives—that the never-ending push-and-pull of everyday life is turning us into America the Rude.

Where does conservation fit in this context of social challenge and churn?

I think that conservation is at the heart of keeping our nation, state, and communities healthy in body, mind, and spirit. Conservation is an important job, an essential job, around which most of our citizens and communities are willing to unite.

But that's assuming that we don't grow isolated from conservation; more specifically, that we're able to avoid three types of isolation—that

first, the threat of Missourians growing isolated from conservation, second, the threat of our mission becoming remote from conservation, and third, and perhaps the greatest threat of all—that the chance that our staff would grow isolated from conservation. Let me briefly explain each.

First, isolation of our citizenry from conservation concerns.

Some years ago, a public poll by the Department revealed that over 40 percent of our urban and suburban Missourians had backgrounds that were rural or small town. In other words, many of our urban dwellers were only one generation removed from the country. We know that the original Design for Conservation vote carried on the strength of majority urban support—not that every rural "yes" vote wasn't important, but the reality is, the Design for Conservation owes its history to Missouri city-folk. These people, perhaps better than anyone else, knew the importance of our outdoor world to the health of the soul and body, and that despite the reality that our centers of urban activity are where many of us choose to make our homes. How terrible it would be if we were unable to keep that conservation connection going for future generations of city-dwellers.

As the generational linkage to the land grows longer and longer and as the proportion of Missourians living in the city grows larger, as it will, this Department must work harder and harder to be sure that we keep conservation in the hearts and minds of our urban and suburban citizens.

Second, the threat of our mission growing isolated from conservation.

The findings in the recent report of the Department's *ad hoc* Public Use Committee practically made us yearn for simpler times when we had only to balance requests for hunting, fishing, bird-watching, camping, horse-back riding, field trials—and balancing these, certainly not a walk in the park, or conservation area, by any stretch.

But now add requests for concerts, contests, festivals, photo shoots, weddings, balloon races, paint-ball battles, battle re-enactments, car shows, military training,

model rocketry clubs, alternative life-stylers, geo-caching[] and the list goes on, with these requests being just the tip of the 21<sup>st</sup> century culturally-diverse iceberg.

And all of these publics strongly think their activities are legitimate uses of public lands[] and I readily recognize that some of the requesters are the very urban and suburban supporters I just emphasized we need to serve. But somewhere amongst all these activities, did you sense we were starting to talk about something other than conservation? That is, we were moving away--growing more remote-- from conservation. So the question becomes, how do we as a public service organization embrace cultural change, without changing who we are? (which I think would be a mistake)

I was pleased that the Public Use committee proposed that primary uses of Department areas are fishing, hunting, nature observation, and conservation education. Obviously, other uses of Department areas may be appropriate, and the Public Use Committee proposed a set of statewide guidelines to evaluate these other uses.

This approach tells the public that this Department's mission allows us to be many things to many people, but likely we will never be all things to all people; we do, after all, have a conservation mission.

And third, the threat that our staff might grow isolated from conservation?

Impossible, you say.

The department is a relatively small public agency. Earlier, I emphasized the staff is truly dedicated to their work and to each other. There is a family relationship among us.

Our staff brings a wide range of skills to bear on conservation problems. Can you believe the department has 350 occupational titles, and they're all important! The list includes botanists, business system managers, carpenters, computer techs, endangered species specialists, foresters, hatchery managers, magazine editors, mechanical engineers, wildlife biologists-and did we mention attorneys? These dedicated and talented people have forsaken the financial advancement they could have garnered in the private sector to serve Missourians and Conservation's mission.

Our success is due, in large part, to the high commitment of our staff. I have heard many times that intelligence, talent, and experience bring success, but the most important things that consistently lead to success are the persistence and determination of the person or the group to succeed.

Where's the threat in all of this? you ask. Sounds pretty peachy.

The concerns are several. First is the possibility that job specialization is narrowing our focus; for example, rather than knowing that our job is conservation, we may see our job more narrowly as a computer repair person, or an office manager, or a law enforcement professional, rather than a public servant with a conservation mission. Simply, the threat is that our staff might lose the conservation identity.

Second, retirements now and over the next 5 years will claim a huge piece of this

agency's institutional memory. The baby-boomers are in their 50's, and they're heading toward retirement. Demographers told us it was coming, but it's tough to prepare for.

In our agency's case, a few of these staff were here before the Design for Conservation vote, but many of these retirees were products of Design; what some refer to as Design babies. They came aboard in the earliest days of Design for Conservation, some of them in positions and job titles that had never before existed in a conservation agency. And they worked hard to bring the Design for Conservation to reality.

But now, their careers in a proud agency are coming to a close. We must be sure that we fill these positions with staff who have both an excitement for innovation and eye toward the future, as the Design babies did, but also an appreciation of what the past brought in terms of solid funding and citizen sacrifice to achieve that funding. It will be at great peril to the future of the Department that we allow staff to forget our conservation roots and the citizen sacrifice that brought this organization to what Field and Stream magazine recently characterized as the model fish and wildlife agency.

And what of our Department today?

Let me carry on the tradition of telling a part of the proud story. The Department of Conservation is a blessed agency. This month marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Conservation Sales Tax and the program it underwrites, called Design for Conservation. That tax passed on the strength of a majority vote greater than that by which our nation has elected many of its presidents. And that conservation funding came to fruition on the backs, sweat, hard work, and sacrifice of people who had little more than a dim hope for bright vision of what additional funding could do to bring conservation home in new, better, and more ways to millions of Missourians.

The tax has provided the funding for large-scale land acquisition for recreation and habitat, better access to streams, lake construction projects, protection of unique natural areas and endangered species, nature centers, and conservation education programs.

Without this funding, the department would not have the means to plan and develop partnerships for the services we offer to many diverse constituencies. These services are provided to farmers, families (both rural and urban), hunters, anglers, kids, schools, outdoor enthusiasts and for our state's natural resources.

In 1929, Aldo Leopold authored the publication, American Game Policy, emphasizing that the disciplines of fish, forest, and wildlife management needed a broad base of public funding; not just the good intentions and limited dollars of our original conservationists, hunters and anglers. But today, 70 years later, most fish and wildlife agencies operate solely on sales of hunting and fishing permits. Only Missouri and Arkansas have shown the political and social will to ask all state residents to contribute to healthy fish, wildlife, water, forests, and land — just like we expect everybody to pitch in to support roads, schools, and national security.

But here's an interesting twist with fish and wildlife financing. In Missouri, anglers, hunters, and wildlife watchers spend about \$2 billion each year pursuing their hobbies, generating sales tax about equal to the amount the Department of Conservation receives from the one-eighth percent Conservation Sales Tax — that's right; in Missouri, fish, forests, and wildlife actually pay their own way.

The leaders of this department made certain promises to the citizens 25 years ago, and they have kept those promises.

Today, our Department faces many of the same challenges as other states — fish and game agencies — a weak economy and a decline in the number of sportsmen and women. We remain extremely proud of earning the sales tax from Missouri citizens 25 years ago. We spend more per capita on conservation than any other state — in the year 2000 that amounted to \$26 per citizen, that same year a Gallup poll showed that sixty-eight percent of Missourians characterized our services as excellent or good. We do much with what funding we have, but we can improve — and we still have work to do.

We need to improve management of the lands we own and also do a better job of managing Missouri's precious and diverse landscapes and watersheds; we need to do more conservation education and training for private land owners. We must keep our urban citizens tied to the outdoors in a meaningful way — to help them break away from the hectic pace of city life and make a connection to the natural world.

We have difficult resource challenges to face and problems to solve — the potential spread of Chronic Wasting Disease to our deer herd, red oak decline in our forests, black bass virus in our lakes, the continuing decline of quail populations, and challenges to water quality to name just a few.

We must clearly define our objectives and priorities and set the course to achieve them. Changes in the needs of the natural resources, technology and the needs of citizens will require us to examine our values, strategies, and priorities.

In conclusion, our continued success is dependent on our ability to engage citizens in conservation programs and activities and to sustain public support. It is vital that we communicate to the people--our customers--in a positive and forthright manner. Our work must inspire citizens and communities to become engaged in conservation, and we must build a generation of conservation leaders for the new century. Capturing the imagination and support of a young and diverse constituency is perhaps the greatest of our conservation challenges.

A director . . . should have a practical view of the agency and its mission, but still be able to communicate a vision that stimulates learning and creativity. My objective is to lead others toward this vision of conservation at the very heart of community health, and to create an environment in which all of our constituencies feel heard, valued and appreciated.

**I will do my best. Thank you.**