

# **“Dilemma” and “Epilogue”**

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**Robert W. Wiley, retired  
Wyoming Game and Fish Department**



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Roger sat at his desk brooding about the past season's work and the magazine article he had been asked to write. Writing the article didn't bother him but he remained troubled by the assignment. He had difficulty defining the problem but he could feel that now familiar ache beginning deep in the pit of his stomach. It wasn't hunger, he knew, because he had breakfasted on some of his wife's best waffles just a couple of hours ago. The ache had often developed into a soul-wrenching knot lately even though visits to his doctor had given him a fit bill of health. No, the problem was much deeper and it was affecting him in a way that he didn't like.

The morning proceeded slowly, interrupted by the usual phone calls and discussions with others on the management crew. Roger knew that he would have to find a quiet place if he were going to successfully tackle the article. He sought out his favorite space in the corner of his den at home. His wife was away for a civic meeting and the kids were in school.

He thought of the many things he had experienced during the nearly two decades he had worked for the Department of Natural Resources. Times had certainly changed during those years and he had progressed from a seasonal biologist through crew assistant and on to regional manager. Life had been kind to him and he felt that he had learned a few things along the way.

Professional societies had recognized his accomplishments. These organizations had elected him to governing responsibilities and had given him an award or two. Roger didn't often think about those things, but one of the awards caught his eye and he gazed at it for awhile. He had been recognized by his peers as a competent and qualified resource scientist-at least that's what the document hanging there indicated. What did that really mean? The knot began to tighten.

Roger felt that his thoughts and ideas were not strange but at times they certainly made him feel that way. The article was progressing very slowly; in fact, it wasn't going anywhere at all. He began to reflect over the past 20 years and realized that resource management had changed through that time. Of course, that was to be expected. Perhaps the greatest change he had noted was that the public (the people he and his colleagues served) were becoming more and more interested in what was going on with the wildlife resources in the state. Roger knew that was happening all across the country but it seemed somehow different on his home ground. What was the key issue? His stomach churned, the knot tightened, and Roger reached for a tumbler of milk to help soothe the ache.

He looked again at the certificate proclaiming him a certified scientist. Should that be considered the same as or similar to the certificates his dentist and physician displayed? Roger knew that he trusted them completely and accepted their diagnoses, recommendations, and treatment almost without question. Did his certificate accord him the same professional respect among hunters, fishermen, and those who just liked nature? Should it?

Ralph and George (his dentist and doctor) liked to hunt and fish. Ralph, the hunter, had his opinions about game management and had hunted in the same areas for many years. He often asked about the game herds and wondered if things might be handled in a more effective way.

George fished every free moment with his family and with other fishing cronies. They fished their favorite waters year after year. George, too, asked the same sort of probing questions about fishing that Ralph had about hunting. The questions concerned some of the goals set for resource management and they represented sincere and logical points of view. What concerned Roger was that these points of view were very often dismissed with virtually no consideration. It seemed as though the opinion of the resource user about management goals directly affecting them was considered as something less than applicable to the resource. People weren't questioning management techniques; they had expressed confidence in how the work was done. Roger pondered that and the knot tightened still more.

Roger realized that he didn't question his dentist's recommendations and procedures other than to understand them. He did not feel qualified to do so because he was not a trained dentist or physician, and he certainly didn't look into and study peoples' mouths as a hobby. Yet, these doctors had what seemed to be sound views and suggestions about the resource. Those, Roger realized, were born of many seasons spent hunting, fishing, and observing wildlife in the same areas. He had often heard it said that everyone has an opinion about how game or fish should be managed but that they really didn't understand how natural systems worked. Roger refilled his glass and quaffed the white elixir rapidly; his guts were torturing him more than ever. He was close to the issue at hand and it bothered him exceedingly.

At that moment the front door banged open with the return of his children from school. Roger knew that his wife would not be long in arriving because they had long ago agreed that there should be someone to greet the youngsters when they came home from school. The solution to the problem would have to wait until tomorrow. He looked wistfully at the pile of papers on his table knowing that he hadn't written one word for the article that was due in the main office in three days. He cast aside the papers and rushed off to see his children.

The morning dawned cool and gray with the promise of rain, a fitting continuation of a night of only fitful sleep. Roger walked briskly towards his office through the first light sprinkles. He had arrived about 30 minutes early, hoping to get a start on the article before the office bustle began. Roger sought out the quietest corner of his office and set to work.

He thought again of the opinions his friends had about their beloved hunting and fishing experiences. He sat straight up with the realization that the problem was at last coming into focus. He remembered the conversations he had participated in with a patron saint of outdoor writers. The man had come to his area to fish for several days on one of the most important rivers in the state and one, at the time, that was jeopardized by lack of recognition that water ought to be set aside for fish populations.

He had read many of Lee Wulff's stories and about the importance of wild trout, fly fishing, the need to release fish, and to limit kill. Like his counterparts, Roger had always believed in the production aspect of fishery management. That is, fish were there to be caught and as many as possible within the legal limit ought to be taken. It was easy to think that those espousing something else were akin to wolves in sheep's clothing. After all, weren't the goals set for resource management what was best for the resource and the public?

Roger shared conversations with Mr. Wulff about Atlantic salmon, trout fishing, and the river. Roger found his opinions made sense and that the things he believed in were sincere opinions born of a half-century of angling experience in virtually every corner of the world. Mr. Wulff had asked about the river fishery, the regulations, number of people fishing, and how the fish population compared with past years. His questions were probing and responsible as though he were talking with a fellow resource manager. Roger was surprised and amused—here was a non-professional who appeared to understand quite a bit about the very thing that Roger was paid to do. The answer was obvious, Mr. Wulff had an understanding of the resource that rivaled that of many scientists. That understanding had come from paying close attention to fish and where they could be caught during a lifetime of angling experience. Roger valued those discussions and the opinions received. Here was a man who understood the resource and yet was not paid to do so. Of course, part of his livelihood depended upon writing about fish, catching fish, and the philosophy of fishing.

As he prepared to leave the river after the third day, Mr. Wulff indicated to Roger that it was one of the best streams he had fished and that he would be back. Roger had explained how it was managed—with fingerling hatchery-reared rainbow trout. That didn't bother Mr. Wulff one bit; in fact he supported management that could produce such a fishery. They did discuss different strategies that might be implemented.

Different strategies, different ways of doing the same thing, but suggested by people who were not professional resource managers. What was it about this that appeared to so upset resource management agencies? His stomach began to tighten again. Where were his antacid tablets? Roger fumbled through his desk and found half a pack of old stomach pills, gulped four, and his mind began racing again.

Roger realized that he had identified part of the problem. The experience with Lee Wulff had taught him that dealing with reasonable people who had an understanding of the resource was really not difficult. What about the others who had strong opinions that, though they might be sincere, were based on little or no understanding of how natural systems were assembled?

He gazed across the room for several minutes looking at nothing in particular. At length, he remembered how he and a colleague had talked about how to more effectively address an issue of vital importance to fishery management in the future. Water left in streams for benefit of fish wasn't legally recognized as a valid use of water in his state. One or two people in the legislature had repeatedly killed all consideration of the issue. Roger and his friend had suggested that they contact the two legislators (among other key people) to explain the Department of Natural Resources' point of view. It had been difficult to convince anyone in the organization that this was a good approach—always the response seemed to be that these legislators would not listen, didn't want to understand, and, furthermore, it was a waste of time to talk with them.

The appointments were completed and the visits made. The result was that Roger and Fred had been well received and thanked on each occasion. One of the two so-called unyielding legislators had arranged for further presentations to his constituents. The other, from a more

provincial area of the state, continued in opposition to the issue. Roger noticed, though, that the old arguments had been replaced by other concerns-the man had listened, after all, even though he still spoke against the issue.

That was the second part of the issue. What was the next piece of the puzzle? Roger realized that the missing piece might be those who could be considered unreasonable. What was beyond reason? That was a tricky issue. Maybe that was an area where there could be no agreement because each side was unwilling to consider opposing points of view. Roger had experienced it once, and it was not pleasant. Still, Roger thought, those people deserved their day in the sun just like everybody else. He felt that agencies and professionals might be justifiably defensive when dealing with unreasonables -- as long as they were not being unreasonable as well. To be reasonable, one had to be willing to at least listen, and listen with an open mind.

Suddenly, he had the solution. It seemed that people or agencies tended to ignore ideas offered by outsiders that would produce the same or better results. This appeared especially true when ideas were offered by non-professionals. Roger remembered years earlier when one of the seasonal technicians had suggested contacting reporters to accompany them on field programs. He had thought that strange but tried it and the new program reaped a bountiful harvest; understanding on both sides (reporter and scientist) had developed.

Programs suggested by the public had also been implemented and benefited the resource just as all conservation agency programs were supposed to do. Certainly some ideas were not the best, but the point was that some cooperation had been achieved and the results were almost always positive. What had happened was that an exchange had resulted that educated the professional resource manager and the non-professional (the resource user). Maybe, Roger thought, resource management agency ideas weren't always the only way to produce the same result. The key, it seemed to him, was to listen more and react less. Would it be possible?

Roger glanced at the plaque again. He was recognized by his peers as a competent and qualified resource scientist. At last that, too, was coming into focus. The people he served probably wouldn't put a lot of stock in that certificate unless he had demonstrated that he was competent (knew the difference between right and wrong), qualified (by experience and accomplishments), and credible (people could believe in what he said). That, Roger realized, was exactly how the public judged conservation agencies.

Roger glanced at the clock; it was 3:15 P.M. He began to write feverishly. He knew the article would meet the deadline. The knot in his stomach loosened, the churning subsided. It had all been caused by the difficult digestion of a troublesome issue over a long period of time. He had finally realized that a non-biological problem (suggestions made by the hunting and fishing public) could not be solved by scientific analysis but had to be addressed by talking with people and giving their ideas real consideration.

**Wiley, R.W. 1987. Dilemma. Fisheries (Bethesda) 12(6):30-32.**

## 2006 Epilogue from Bob Wiley

I wrote the 1987 *Fisheries* article because of three personal, career-shaping, experiences. They are worth exploring for what they taught. **First** - evolution of the AFS professional certification program sparked interest because a Society leader suggested that everyone should support the program for the accrued security from the trivial work of “quack biologists.” A *Fisheries* article - *Why Fisheries Biologists Aren't Treated Like Doctors* - caused a response piece – *Fisheries Biologists Aren't Treated Like Doctors, So What?* – plus more thought about the actual meaning and value of being certified by AFS as a competent fisheries professional.

Out of that and more than a few after-hours conversations with colleagues, I was convinced, then and now, that professional certification certificates mean most when holders have demonstrated that they are:

- Competent (know the difference between right and wrong),
- Qualified (by experience and accomplishments), and
- Credible (people can believe in what they say).

A framed certificate can *suggest* the holder to be competent, qualified, and credible, but only our actions can demonstrate or prove so. And, that is how trust is built with the people we serve.

**Next:** the first *Wild Trout Conference*, held in Yellowstone National Park (early 1970s) sparked notions about working with and listening to the public (our constituents). Mr. Bill Luch, a no-nonsense, outspoken, Pacific Northwest longshoreman, spoke about the serious decline of his favorite steelhead fishery – the Umpqua River, Oregon. He cared deeply about the Umpqua, his passion for it was clear as was his strong indictment of fisheries biologists as largely responsible for the decline. Not surprisingly, many in the audience ceased listening, dismissing him as a fiery speaker who knew next to nothing about fisheries. He deserved his time in the sun for there were nuggets of wisdom in what he said - - - for those who chose to listen. Those who chose otherwise left poorer for the experience.

The same venue provided opportunity to meet and talk with Lee Wulff, a famous, innovative and outspoken angler with opinions equally as strong as Mr. Luch's. Some months later, I realized that many fisheries people considered Lee Wulff an elitist whose ideas had little application to real-world fisheries management. His championing of limited kill, catch-and-release angling for wild trout, and purported disdain for hatchery reared trout made him unpopular with many fisheries colleagues of the time.

When Lee Wulff fished the Green River downstream of Fontenelle Reservoir as a guest of *Trout Unlimited*, I was invited to share part of their two-day trout fishing experience. My discovery: the man certainly harbored strong opinions and voiced them, but he listened as we talked about managing that river fishery. Even though he kept no fish, he enjoyed catching many fishes, some wild, and some stocked as hatchery-reared fingerlings. His ideas about the Green River fishery were intriguing and, at least, worth my ear. Why? Because I learned - if I had

dismissed him as an elitist, as many did, I would have missed information born of a lifetime of angling experience.

**Finally**, a crowning experience - - - ideas about working with and listening to the public came together in the mid 1980s when the Wyoming legislature was wrestling the knotty proposition of recognizing instream uses of water as beneficial. Some legislators and many landowners were passionately opposed to any use of water not requiring diversion. Two of us proposed meeting with problem legislators – those who always voted against instream use of water for fish – to talk fisheries. Agency administrators thought little of the idea but, fortunately (maybe hesitantly), approved it.

One adversary legislator arranged a town meeting in the east-central Wyoming community of Douglas. People, most of them landowners, gathered in a high school auditorium to learn from a fifteen-minute, slide-illustrated talk why their Game and Fish Department supported the concept of instream use of water for fish. An hour long question-answer session – much like a cross examination – followed. At the end, several landowner-water users said they appreciated the information and discussion. And, significantly, at least two of them were grateful that someone from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department had, at last, said what they really thought about instream flow, *instead of telling people what the agency thought they wanted to hear*.

The lesson – always speak truthfully, honestly and directly about fisheries resource issues, regardless of topic sensitivity. While many may not agree with your point of view, frank, forthright discussion is appreciated. At the time, almost no other issue was as publicly and politically sensitive (at times nearly incendiary) as instream use of water. Those who spoke similarly about it at other public meetings were rewarded with thanks, respect and appreciation. Instream flow is now recognized as a beneficial use of Wyoming’s water and that was the ultimate reward.

**About the Author:** Bob Wiley served as both the Fisheries Research Supervisor and then the Fisheries Management Coordinator for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. He is a Past-President of the Fisheries Management Section, and spends part of his time in retirement writing articles for the Section newsletter.

