

# Wild Heritage

By Todd Tanner



Aldo Leopold called it “a state of harmony between men and land.” John F. Kennedy touched on it when he said, “It is our task in our time and in our generation, to hand down undiminished to those who come after us, as was handed down to us by those who went before, the natural wealth and beauty which is ours.” Theodore Roosevelt took a similar approach all the way back in 1900. “I recognize the right and duty of this generation to develop and use our natural resources, but I do not recognize the right to waste them, or to rob by wasteful use, the generations that come after us.”

I’m not sure that “Conservation” has an exact definition, at least not one that we’d all agree on, but I like to think that most of us know it when we run across it. The other night I sat down at the TRCP Media Summit with wildlife photographer Dusan Smetana and Sid Evans, editor-in-chief of *Field & Stream*, and we talked about the fact that we each had young sons at home.

My personal concept of conservation starts right there, with the belief that we’re intimately connected to the future by our children. Those three little boys, one back in New York and two here in Montana, deserve the same type of sporting opportunities that we take

for granted today, even if that’s twenty or thirty years down the road. Anything less, any break in our country’s century-old conservation legacy, would be an indictment of our resolve and commitment.

As conservationists, we hope to turn our passion for hunting and fishing into a unique form of virtue; the twin gifts of a healthy resource and a strong stewardship ethic. Given the serious nature of the current threats to fish and wildlife habitat, we each

have a responsibility to make sure that we pass down not only our outdoor traditions but also healthy lands and clean waters.

Not that this effort will be easy, especially in an age where the news of the day generally has two flavors – bad and worse. But if our lives are going to flirt with some sort of purpose, as opposed to the banal existence we’re spoon fed by advertisers and politicians – excuse me for being blunt, but “consumers” my ass; we’re sportsmen and citizens – then we should look at our responsibilities as a real honor and do our very best to hold up our end of things.

Which seems to be the same basic approach that the TRCP is taking. (That’s the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, for those of you who haven’t run across the organization before.) The TRCP is

*A new conference focuses on the urgent need for hunters and fishermen to exert more influence on politicians and bureaucrats.*

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*The hunting we enjoy now will be enjoyed by future generations only if we can offset the threats to fish and wildlife habitat.*



our answer to the officials in our nation's capital who don't take hunters and fishermen seriously. It's an umbrella organization that's working to bring all the power and influence of sportsmen to bear on politicians and bureaucrats. Of course, those exact same politicians

and bureaucrats have spent the last thirty years promising us the moon and then, when they saw that there was no heavy political price to pay for betrayal, sticking a knife in our back.

*Et tu, Brute?*

But not any more.

No, the TRCP, under the guidance of Chairman Jim Range, President and CEO Matt Connolly, and Vice President George Cooper, is building the kind of strong national coalition enjoyed by business interests and labor unions. Think about that for a second.



PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE BARLOW

What could we accomplish if our full weight shifted to the political process? How much land could be saved, how many fisheries restored, how much money set aside for wildlife and conservation issues?

The answer, and I'm sure it's obvious to everyone who's reading this, is a hell of a lot more than we're seeing right now. Which is why Jim, Matt, George and the rest of the folks at the TRCP deserve our gratitude. Their

foresight in offering hunting, fishing and conservation groups the chance to speak with one voice will change the way hunters and anglers are viewed in Washington. A change, I might add, that's long overdue.

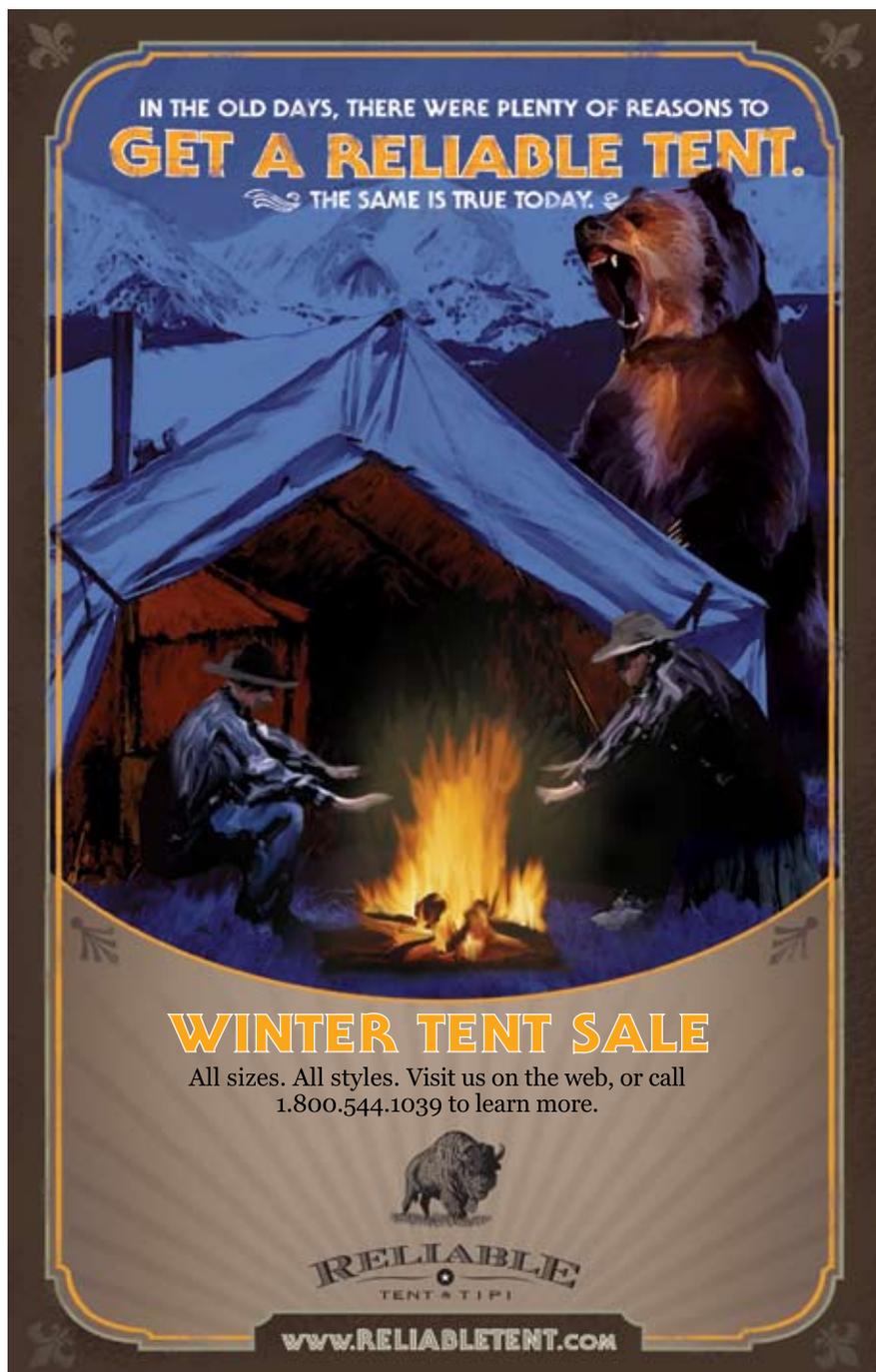
Yet just because an organization like TRCP has entered the fray doesn't mean that we can forego our personal responsibilities. We still need to do our part as individuals.

Ethical behavior in the field

is obviously a good start, but it doesn't end there. We have to stay informed about the many, many issues that impact the outdoors, and then put that knowledge to work. How? We can start by contacting our Congressmen and Senators and telling them to support wildlife and fisheries conservation every chance they get. The same thing applies to our local newspapers – we can ask for more coverage of local conservation stories and write the occasional letter to the editor when it's necessary or appropriate. We can also get involved with hunting and fishing groups who share our interests and, if they're not already partnering with TRCP, suggest that they do so. The more we work together, the more power we'll ultimately wield on a national level.

Oh, and let's not forget the concept of individual stewardship. Whether it translates into planting willows on the banks of a western trout stream or eradicating invasive plants from an eastern wetland, getting our hands dirty is still one of the most important aspects of conservation.

I'd like to close with an interesting idea that came up at the TRCP Media Summit. It sounds like the World Trade Organization (WTO) is making it more and more difficult for the Federal Government to provide financial aid to our farmers. After all, farm subsidies can seem at odds with our current free trade policies. So why not change our approach and tie a substantial part of our Federal aid for farmers to strong, effective conservation practices? If the next Farm Bill, which is due out in 2007, rewards farmers and ranchers for habitat and water quality enhancement, then hunters and anglers will reap almost unimaginable rewards. And that, my friends, is some serious food for thought. 



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