

Protecting Wildlife Has Never Been More Important

By COLLIN O'MARA *President & Chief Executive Officer*



America's wildlife needs our help. The species we love face unprecedented perils ranging from invasions of nonnative species and fragmentation of critical habitat to extreme weather events and accelerating climate impacts. In every part of the nation, we are seeing shifts in migratory patterns and changing ecosystems that threaten the very existence of an increasing number of species.

At the same time, fewer U.S. children and families are experiencing the great outdoors. Kids now are spending more than 50 hours a week indoors in front of a computer, video game or television screen and mere minutes a week in unstructured outdoor play enjoying wildlife.

Too many Americans are losing a connection with nature—a connection that greatly enhanced the lives of previous generations in this country. In doing so, we are moving farther away from the old adage that we will conserve only what we love, love only what we understand and understand only what we are taught.

The National Wildlife Federation is the one organization that can reinvigorate the diverse coalition of people who love wildlife and bring them together to protect native species, conserve habitat, expand environmental education and connect Americans of all ages with outdoor experiences, from hunting and fishing to natural gardening, hiking and wildlife watching.

I am humbled and ecstatic to lead NWF at this critical moment in our nation's conservation history. The threats to wildlife and the environ-

ment never have been greater, the partisan chasm on conservation issues never has been deeper, and the need to reconnect all Americans with nature never has been more essential. It has never been more important for us to be good at what we do—and I am extremely optimistic about what we can accomplish together for wildlife.

All of us in the conservation community have much to be proud of in our accomplishments, and NWF has been a leader in every step of the way. Now we must continue to do our part. Like many of you, this isn't some sort of academic exercise for me: It's personal.

Growing up in Syracuse, New York, experiencing the outdoors and NWF

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were significant parts of my childhood. My parents were NWF members and I loved reading *Ranger Rick* and *National Wildlife*. My parents filled my childhood with wildlife experiences that instilled in me a passion for nature and conservation. Now, it's time for my bride and I to pass on these values to our 2-year-old daughter Riley and as many other children as we can reach across the nation.

There's nothing more enriching for me than watching the wonder in Riley's eyes when she sees sea lions or otters in my wife's hometown of Santa Cruz, great blue herons in Syracuse, magpies in the Rockies, and shorebirds and waterfowl at home in Delaware.

A few weeks ago, Riley and I witnessed the miraculous horseshoe crab

spawning and shorebird feasting along Delaware Bay. As I taught her how to tell a red knot from a dowitcher and how to flip over distressed crabs so they can return safely to the bay, her expression turned from apprehension to pure joy. It was another reminder that protecting wildlife is a sacred obligation we must pass from one generation to the next.

I want every child to grow up loving wildlife. We all know the lifelong passion that contact with nature can inspire and the unfortunate consequences of a feeling of indifference for those who lack this exposure. With your help, we can rebuild the nation's conservation ethic and overcome the political obstacles necessary to make meaningful progress at every level of government.

Because of NWF's strong federation of state affiliates, we are the only U.S. conservation organization equipped to generate the broad base of support needed to raise above the daunting problems we face. The challenges confronting us today will not be solved in Washington, D.C. We each must do our part—block by block, community by community, state by state—and in the months ahead, NWF will be more active than ever at the local level.

But we can't do it without your continued support. Please consider getting more involved. Join your local NWF state affiliate, donate to NWF projects, let your friends and family know that you're a proud NWF member and encourage them to join and purchase a subscription to *Ranger Rick* for a child. Help us to protect the nation's native wildlife and provide millions of kids like Riley the opportunity to experience nature's spectacles for many years to come. To learn more, visit www.nwf.org. See you outdoors!

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