

# **TWS MB Chapter History**

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## **Creation and Membership composition**

The Wildlife Society, Manitoba Chapter, Inc. was officially established January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1974. Although three student chapters existed in Canada prior to this date, the Manitoba Chapter became the first professional and practicing Canadian chapter of The Wildlife Society. It was incorporated in 1991 and holds the status of a provincial non-profit organization.

Twenty-seven persons were enrolled during the initial charter meeting. A majority (52%) of the Charter members were provincial government employees. Over time, membership composition has changed and expanded. A lower proportion of members work for the province, while the number of university affiliated researchers, students, and employees of consulting companies and non-profit organizations has increased.

Many of the Charter members have been recognized for their dedication to wildlife in Manitoba. For example, Merlin Shoesmith was inducted as a Fellow in 2012. Larry Bidlake received the TWS Distinguished Service Award in 2013, at the Milwaukee conference. The Richard C. Goulden Award, which highlights the work of a deserving wildlife-related graduate student at the University of Manitoba, is named after another charter member. Several Charter members continue to remain active in the Chapter.

## **Chapter objectives and activities**

From the start, the Chapter's main objectives were to provide wildlife-related activities at a local level, but also to make members aware of the impact of some cultural activities on wildlife management.

The first actions of the Chapter were centered on communication, programming, and Chapter representation within policy and legislation.

### **- *Communication***

A newsletter was developed to enhance communication among professional wildlife biologists in Manitoba. The first edition of the newsletter, with Bob Oetting as the editor, was published in February 1974. The newsletter provided information about activities, wildlife issues, and wildlife policies primarily in Manitoba. It was also a means for the Chapter to communicate the vision of TWS Parent Society to the membership, and to provide information on professional opportunities and chapter events.

### **- *Programming***

Chapter programs provide social and educational opportunities among wildlife biologists. Specifically, a winter program was first organized in March 1974 and held at Canadian Forces Base Shilo. The event focused on the environmental consulting process in the area before the land was used for military tank training. This consultation was conducted by the Shilo Environmental Advisory Committee (SEAC), which included a few members from the Manitoba Chapter. The involvement of the SEAC helped protect a fragile environment composed of sand and prairie vegetation from the projected impacts of military training programs, and is still

considered a success story today. In addition to the winter program, the Chapter held a spring event (field trip) and a summer event (the Chapter co-hosted the Central Mountains and Plains Section conference).

- ***Chapter representation within policy and legislation***

When the Chapter began, members were able to learn and discuss policies of interest through the newsletter, and through panel discussions that were organized as part of the Chapter activities. To keep current on wildlife topics, Chapter representatives were also appointed to attend out-of-province meetings, as well as to sit on boards of specific TWS sections or working groups.

## **Chapter's role**

In 1977, the Chapter formalized a stance on upholding TWS's mission to prevent human-induced environmental degradation. The goal was to take on a more active role around wildlife by advising government officials, environmental groups, politicians, and the public. The objective was for the Chapter to become the go-to organization for science and management of wildlife in Manitoba. As the years went by, this became a recurring theme for the Chapter, whose members often reflected on how the Chapter's role around wildlife decisions should be articulated.

In the mid-1970s, the Chapter voiced a collective opinion on the deer hunting season closure to the Manitoba Minister of Natural Resources. The Chapter also sponsored a round table discussion, during which several political candidates vying for election presented their position regarding natural resource and wildlife issues. Open forums between Chapter members and the Minister of Natural Resources were also held during luncheons at the Viscount Gort hotel in Winnipeg. This was a means of highlighting issues and concerns to decision makers without jeopardizing the professional position of government employees. Generally, this process met with success, and although no one was fired following these forums, it was a stressful time for some members who were uncomfortable taking this approach. In the late 1970s-early 1980s, the Chapter focused on other important issues such as polar bear management in Manitoba and elk hunting around Spruce Woods Provincial Park.

Allowing members to provide expert opinions on important issues while not being accountable to an employer is now an important function of the Parent Society. This was formalized with the creation of the Conservation Affairs Committee Network, which is composed of several local expert committees. The Manitoba Chapter has an active Conservation Affairs Committee as of December 2014, which regularly releases position statements, and provides scientifically-based advice to government officials.

## **Chapter development as the first Canadian Chapter of TWS**

Right from the start, the Manitoba Chapter was in a unique position to provide a Canadian perspective on wildlife issues. However, how tight the link between the Chapter and the Parent Society should be was unclear. In December 1977, the Chapter drafted a letter titled "Canadian Concerns in The Wildlife Society" to TWS Council. One particular limitation was identified, which was that Canadian members were not fully aware of wildlife issues in the United States. At the time, the Chapter suggested that it should not necessarily be involved on topics that were mainly US based. The Chapter also noted that the development of TWS as an important organization in Canada would mainly succeed through cooperation between Canadian members

and the Parent Society. This letter concluded by putting forward the possibility of changing the administrative structure of TWS to include a Canadian Section, a Canadian office, and to hire Canadian staff.

As a follow up, the Canadian Concerns Committee was formed to gather input from interested parties, and to formulate a vision on how to develop as a strong organization of wildlife professionals. Canadian members also started to become more influential in TWS affairs, as in 1979, two charter members of the Manitoba chapter (Merlin Shoesmith and Barry Briscoe) were elected to serve on the Central Mountain and Plains Section. The involvement of Charter members in this Section continued, as several of them served on the board in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g., Larry Bidlake served as president from 1988 to 1990). Although this section was largely U.S. based, Canadian issues in the central and plain regions were an integral part of the content discussed. In March 2006, Merlin Shoesmith sent a Final Report to TWS Council from a Global Involvement Task Force. This report assessed the opportunities and challenges of TWS moving into six new regions of the world. The main result of this report was the formation of the Canadian Section of TWS in 2007. Two members of the Chapter, Merlin Shoesmith and Rick Baydack, along with Shane Mahoney, another TWS member from Newfoundland/Labrador, developed the by-laws and charter. Today, Chapter members are still influential at the Parent Society level: several Canadians serve on TWS Council, and a few have served as President of TWS. The Canadian Section of TWS is also very active, and new Canadian Student Chapters are regularly formed including the University of Winnipeg Student Chapter established in January 2015.