

PUBLIC RELATIONS ASPECTS OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

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The value of good public relations usually remain unrealised until it is absent. Public relations can be reflected in the morale of an organization, in the quality and quantity of goods or services produced and by public support or lack of it.

Good public relations may be likened to dental health. Too often we don't go to a dentist until pain makes it necessary, whereas a little care on a regular basis would usually have prevented the problem. Similarly, good public relations is not missed until needed. Sooner or later it is realised that good public relations could have prevented most of the catastrophies that have resulted from poor public relations.

Schoenfeld (1957) summed up the value of good public relations when he wrote- "*We must have public support, or at least sufferance, if natural resource management is to be practiced*". He pointed out that a favorable climate of public opinion must precede management. Public support or tolerance and favorable climate of public opinion are indeed the end products of good public relations. For private enterprise this means the privilege of doing business, the freedom to do it profitably, and the sales that make it worthwhile. For public agencies it provides enhanced capability to exercise professional judgement in the management of natural resources for commodity production and the provision of recreational opportunities commensurate with ecological sustainability.

The list of specific values resulting from good public relations is a large one. It includes being able to attract high caliber professionals both in the labour force and at the management or administrative levels. Within the organization, good administration is possible only through good public relations. The reward is internal harmony and lower turn over rates. Externally an important result is an understanding that allows optimal management and provides adequate budgets, personnel, and laws to do the job right. Similarly, it means good relations with governing boards and commissions so that policies are in favour of long term interests of the resources and the affected publics. Importantly, good public relations can reduce prejudice, cut away ignorance or apathy, and prevent misunderstanding. It can stir the social conscience of an organization that it can offer a way to be heard and seen.

Finally, a value of good public relations is the peace of mind or the joy of living. This seemingly simple but immeasurably important attribute is a reward to all

concerned - employees at all levels, the community and society - when the principles and practices of good public relations are incorporated in to the fibre of an organization and executed with skill and consistency.

The Need for Public Relations Work :

Some of the objectives of Wildlife Institute of India (WII) are as follows :

1. Training managers and biologists for protected area management and wildlife research.
2. Training education and extension specialist for protected areas to gain public support for wildlife conservation.
3. Providing advisory and consultancy services to central and state Govt., universities, research institutions and other official and non-official agencies.

These objectives are directed towards the well being of the organization and are carried out in number of ways. One of the ways with which the objectives can be accomplished is public relations.

In wildlife management, public relations in general terms embrace all activities intended to create greater harmony and consistency between the interests of the wildlife sectors and those of the publics. The main goal of public relations is to raise public consciousness regarding forest and wildlife or in other words to give a clear and well founded idea of the renewable natural resources and their importance for human life and for the national economy there by inculcating in the public an understanding of the need for forestry and wildlife development and for support of efforts intended to promote this development.

Public relations work is also necessary in wildlife management to increase knowledge regarding nature as a whole and of ecological relationships. Through public relations work, knowledge is spread regarding the relations between forest, wildlife, water, soil fertility and productivity, climate etc. and the long term benefits to man, thus stimulating the public thinking. It means as more information is accumulated an understanding of factors important for the welfare of the people is gained. Public relations work is also necessary in order to teach what contribution wildlife is making in national

economy, and measures taken for their conservation. The economic gain may not be directly monetary but far beyond that in terms of environmental security. It can help in enhancing the prestige of wildlife sector which should not be held in less esteem than other sectors of the economy.

GROUPS OF PEOPLE WHO CAN BE REACHED BY PUBLIC RELATIONS

1. The General Public:

It is composed of individuals with any sort of social, educational and occupational background. In this instance the main purpose of the public relations unit is to build up a favorable attitude and behaviour with regard to the wildlife sector, to gain support for the protection of natural resources and to encourage their use for recreational and educational purposes.

2. Group Of Interested Persons:

This group comprises of sports, tourist and nature lovers clubs, photographers etc. Public relations work should be slanted to the special interest of such groups and their specific request.

3. Journalists:

Newspaper writers interested in obtaining general information regarding forestry and wildlife affairs, especially of current problems should be contacted. It is very necessary to maintain contact with journalists and newspapermen not only as a means of reaching the general public, but also to dissipate false ideas and opinions circulating among the public with regard to the wildlife sector.

4. The Educational System:

The promotion of awareness in students about the wildlife sector in the long run will promote better understanding among the public and the future builders of the nation. Education has a multiplier effect, that is students transmit ideas to the families and associated groups of persons. In order to prepare and channel this type of public relations, it is essential to earn the collaboration of professors and teachers by offering them detailed information and information materials, so also to provide every opportunity to students to satisfy their queries and exposure to the outdoors.

5. Politicians:

Finally also very important is the target group of politicians, which has to be supplied with all necessary information and interpretation in the correct perspective of public welfare and benefit to society so that political will for making appropriate natural resource management decisions can be built.

INFORMATION MEDIA

The main media at the disposal of public relations services are :

1. Bulletins
2. Lectures
3. Press Releases
4. Films
5. Exhibition
6. Open house
7. Special archives

1. Bulletins : Bulletins reach a large number of people. The text should be very clear and presentation attractive.

2. Lectures : Talks offer two advantages : personal contact and opportunity for asking questions. They are therefore very suitable for most target groups.

3. Press Releases or Press Conferences : It is advisable that written material be distributed ahead of time in order to prevent inaccurate reporting. Contact with members of the press is vital and should be made at regular intervals. A very attractive form of dissemination of information is a group study tour, during which direct information is obtainable and provides first hand experience. It is also advisable for experts to prepare original press releases from time to time.

4. Films : They are directed primarily to the general public and to school and collage students in particular. They can therefore deal with issues of general interest. For school curricula it is advisable that written information be distributed so that the teachers can give additional explanation.

5. Exhibitions : It offers the possibility of bringing a great many people interested in the subject into contact. Samples, explanatory models, photographs, films and some times short talks offered from time to time can be used.

6. Open House ; An open house is a staged event of sorts which can take place any time. A natural resource agency simply gives the public a chance to see the internal operation of some phase of the organization's activities.

It also affords families of employees an excellent chance to see where the breadwinner works and to meet the boss. The advantage of personal contact is quite evident. An open house should be well planned with all arrangements made in advance so that visitors can see and learn as much as possible in the time available. A definite itinerary should be developed and each person on the tour should have a written copy of the itinerary to aid in explanations. An interested and capable aide must be present to explain things and answer questions. It is a good idea to give some small souvenir and refreshments generally appreciated by everyone.

7. Special Archives : Teaching materials for interested persons (publications, models etc.) are kept in archives where all kinds of other material of public relations work are stored. The Wildlife Institute of India has a Library and Documentation Centre in which all the necessary information pertaining to wildlife is available.

Whatever the media used by the public relations units, the following ethical practices must be observed - frankness, truthfulness and self criticism, observance of ethical principles is not only essential per se but is a prerequisite for the success of the work of public relations units for enlightening the public.

One methodological rule is that public relations work has to be pursued regularly and continuously. The success of public relations work hinges to a large extent on reaching those persons or groups of persons who influence public opinions. Influencing public opinion makers such as politicians, high public officials, representatives of peoples, media personnel has an important multiplying effect.

PROGRAMMING OF PUBLIC RELATIONS WORK

Public relations work also requires appropriate planning based on analysis of requirements.

The process involves:

Research : Probing the opinions and attitude regarding wildlife. The best sources for such analysis are public opinion polls among representative sampling of the population.

Planning : To see the effect of research and analysis on shaping the policy and programmes of the institute.

Communication : Communication is the very heart of public relations. Communication may be defined as the successful transmission of thoughts and ideas, without significant distortions, so that a proper understanding is reached. In most public relations work, not only must the thoughts or idea be transmitted clearly with minimum distortion, it also must help in the task of influencing public opinion, so in most cases it will involve persuasive communication.

Evaluation : Evaluation should be an integral process while the programming is taking place. The last process in programming is a final analysis of the efforts of the completed operation and a follow up in order to see if the desired results were attained.

In short, resource management today operates in a highly charged political and social milieu. More than ever before the actions of managers are dependent upon the efforts of sympathetic individuals and groups. All professionals in the natural resources area require a working knowledge of public relations if they are to develop and maintain the necessary support to meet today challenges.

*For me, trees have always been the most penetrating teachers.
I revere them when they live in tribes and families, in forests and groves...
They struggle with all the forces of their lives for one thing only: to fulfill themselves
according to their own laws, to build up their own forms, to represent themselves.
Nothing is holier, nothing is more exemplary, than a beautiful, strong tree.*

- Herman Hesse