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# People save the day: the influence of public activism on the history of conservation biology and why it remains important today

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## Abstract

While conservation biology has continued to become more scientific and focused on the economics of nature, I propose that public advocacy is equally important. Origins of conservation biology in North America date to the 19th century with the publication of George P. Marsh's *Man and Nature* in 1864. Organizations initiated by concerned citizens, such as the American Forestry Association established in 1875 by Dr. John A. Warder, allowed the public to voice their concerns to government about the nation's forests and other natural resources. Government was not the motivating force; 'conservation through wise use' wasn't politically acknowledged until 1909 when Theodore Roosevelt established conservation as a public responsibility. Today, conservation biology continues to need public advocacy. Political decision-making uses economic models and conservation biology is predominantly considered through monetary value. Although this may be the most comprehensible way for political decisions to be made, reducing conservation to a loss/gain economic system has many shortfalls, including not considering sustainable yield. Moving away from conservation biology's game management history of consumptive value, public organizations can influence the field by demonstrating the many ways humans value nature. Environmental activist groups have varying motivations (e.g. Audubon Society, Ducks Unlimited), and yet can have better support and success by operating outside politics and bureaucracy. The goal of conservation biology is to prevent, mitigate and possibly reverse human influences on ecosystems. Conservation biology is not only an ecological and scientific problem; it is also a social problem, where public interest and activism are crucial.

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