

Society for Conservation Biology
26th International Congress for Conservation Biology
“Connecting Systems, Disciplines, and Stakeholders”
July 21-25, 2013 Baltimore, MD

Secretary Gill Speech: Sunday, July 22, 2013
7:00 – 9:30pm
Location: Baltimore Convention Center, Exhibit Hall
www.bccenter.org

Complete Program can be found here:
http://www.conbio.org/images/content_conferences/ICCB2013_Program_July10_2013WEB.pdf

Speech

Good evening! On behalf of Governor Martin O'Malley, welcome to Maryland - home to the Chesapeake Bay, blue crabs, oysters and striped bass. Home also to hundreds of birds, including the world champion Baltimore Ravens and the Baltimore Orioles.

Many thanks to John Fitzgerald and the Society for the invitation. Let me begin by giving you a sense of where you are.

Maryland's nickname is "America in Miniature." As a state we span the Alleghany Mountains in the West and the Atlantic Ocean on the East. In between is the world's most productive estuary, the Chesapeake Bay. We are steeped in beauty and history. I recently visited a 700-acre property on the Potomac River that we purchased from the Society of Jesuits. The Society

acquired the property in 1668 - in exchange for 40,000 pounds of tobacco. Sixteen sixty-eight. The tidal shorelines, forest hedgerows, meadows and agricultural fields are nearly just as they were 300 years ago.

There are a lot of you here! My guess is that one day something inspired you to step forward toward a career in conservation biology. It may have been a shoreline, a forest, a vista, a landscape. Or, on a smaller scale, a plant, animal or insect. That something produced a passion in you, a desire to study life on this amazing planet. Tonight I want to urge you to build on your passion with advocacy and engagement to protect the resources you study. Let me explain.

I came to more deeply appreciate the beauty and importance of our landscapes, waterways and ecosystems later in life. As a boy growing up in Buffalo, I spent most of the year outside, playing in local parks, swimming at public beaches, running and cycling. It was what we did. It was certainly not something we thought about. We didn't worry about water quality, landscape fragmentation or loss or rare species. We were mostly just trying to get people to stop throwing trash out of their car windows.

But along the way something changed. I began to see the natural world for what it was -- and what it still is today: a beautiful, grace-filled fragile and finite

place that will not survive without the care and respect of its human inhabitants. And on this journey, I discovered a voice: a voice to speak on behalf of the natural world, and the habitat or species or ecosystem that we seek to conserve. It is a voice of advocacy and engagement that is shared by many people on the planet. It is a voice of advocacy and engagement. In today's increasingly complex world, all of us - especially you, our conservation biologists - are called to speak on behalf of the resources you study, the resources you love. Advocacy and engagement to policymakers to protect these resources, with practical solutions they can implement, is needed now more than ever.

Here are a few examples of how advocacy and engagement has worked in Maryland.

Bay Restoration. Since 1983, through various agreements with other states, Maryland has tried to restore the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay. In his first term, Governor O'Malley raised the stakes of the game by injecting a new word into it. The word is "accelerate," and the goal is, "Accelerate Bay Restoration." Under the Governor's leadership, the State adopted 2-year milestones to hold public officials accountable for progress in reducing nitrogen, phosphorous, and sediment levels. Bay scientists were part and

parcel of this effort. Since 1984, guidance from the Chesapeake Bay Program's Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) has formed the basis of policy decisions and implementation measures to reduce pollution loadings into the Bay. Because of the advocacy of acceleration and the engagement of science, the Chesapeake Bay is getting better.

Blue Crabs. We worked with the Commonwealth of Virginia to adopt conservation measures to protect the blue crab population. We did so based upon the recommendations of a Bi-State Blue Crab Advisory Committee consisting of scientists from both jurisdictions. Working over several years, the scientists recommended and policymakers adopted fall restrictions on the harvest of female crabs. The female crab population has rebounded.

Maryland and Virginia scientists did not always agree then, nor do they always agree now. But they were willing to engage the problem and develop practical solutions to address it.

Climate Change. With our extensive coastline, Maryland is taking the threats of climate change and associated sea level rise very seriously. Governor O'Malley established a Maryland Commission on Climate Change which developed adaptation strategies that are currently being used to guide state-level planning efforts. We now have state investment criteria for land acquisition

programs that consider the future impact of sea level rise and coastal storms.

We also have siting criteria for state structures - set backs and increased elevations. While others are talking about climate change, our scientists are developing adaptation strategies for policymakers.

Marcellus Shale. Several years ago and by Executive Order, Governor O'Malley charged my Department and the Department of the Environment, in consultation with a citizen Advisory Commission, to conduct a three year study on developing best practices for Marcellus Shale drilling. The Marcellus Shale formation is located more than a mile below the surface and requires a combination of drilling and use of a cocktail of toxic chemicals, sand and water at high pressure to release the gas from the rock formation. The practice is controversial, involving among other things risks to water resources and large-scale landscape impacts.

The University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, under the leadership of Dr. Keith Eshleman, developed a set of best practices which are now part of a draft report that is out for public comment. The practices include a requirement that drilling companies conduct two-years of baseline water quality monitoring and submit a five-year comprehensive gas drilling plan showing how siting of well pads and other structures avoids, minimizes or

mitigates landscape impacts. I worked directly with Dr. Eshleman and saw firsthand his seriousness of purpose - not simply carrying out a research project, but using his best scientific judgment on evaluating and recommending sound practices. For his work Dr. Eshleman received the Center's Award for Excellence in Application of Science - an award that honors scientists who have a positive impact on environmental protection and management.

Advocacy and engagement. Advocacy is having a stake in the game, of caring about the outcome, of aligning your own personal and professional interests with the resources that you study, watch over, and seek to protect.

Engagement is not only doing the research, it is discussing the findings, sitting at the table with scientists who may disagree, and -- most important of all -- developing practical and workable solutions with and for policymakers to protect our natural resources. While publications, journal writing and research are parts of many of your professions, remember: decision-makers typically do not read scientific journals. Remember also that just developing the science won't guarantee that it will be heard or applied. It is up to you and your scientific societies to make sure to reach out to policymakers, regulators and law makers to advocate and engage for the resources you study and wish to protect.

Finally, I'd like to take a few minutes to talk about something known as the Genuine Progress Indicator, which by its terms seeks to measure the values that are really at stake. Most of us are familiar with Gross Domestic Product, which measures progress by how much we spend, even if the spending is on police, prisons or increased health care costs. The more we spend, GDP says, the more progress we are making. Yet gross domestic product, Robert Kennedy famously said in 1968, "measures everything . . . except that which makes life worthwhile."

The Genuine Progress Indicator, or GPI, as an alternative way of looking at our progress. GPI considers not only economic indicators in measuring progress, but environmental and social factors. It considers the cost of water pollution, air pollution and noise pollution, the loss of forest cover, and the impact of climate change. It considers the loss of leisure time - remember leisure time? - the cost of commuting and the value of volunteer work. It is a far more comprehensive look at assessing whether we, as a society, are genuinely making progress.

My colleague Sean McGuire and others will be making a presentation on GPI on Thursday morning - check it out. Whether GPI will become an alternative to GDP remains to be seen. What GPI has done, in simple words that people understand, is to ask the question: are we really making "genuine progress" as

a society? Are we really making genuine progress in honoring, conserving, and protecting our natural resources?

And if we are not, what can you, our conservation biologists, do about it? This conference -- on connecting disciplines, systems, and stakeholders -- is a good place to ask, and begin to answer, this question. Are you prepared to use our own voices of advocacy and engagement? Are you prepared to speak to policymakers with practical solutions that they can implement, to help protect the species and habitats you study, that you love, and that comprise our last, best natural communities?

Think on these questions, welcome to Maryland, and have a great conference.

Thank you.