

Martin

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watching masses of wild birds or animals in their natural habitat. Manning's skills at describing nature have been honed in previous "walk through the woods" books like "Afoot in the South." He can take you places with words and make you see what is going on there.

But "Islands of Hope" is not just a nature book. At each of the ten wildlife preserves Manning probes to find out what works. How big does a preserve need to be? Once the preserve is established, should man simply let nature take its course? Or should there be enough intervention to be sure that "nature" doesn't destroy the species we want to protect? Does a wildlife preserve have a responsibility to foster the preservation of other species and to promote biodiversity? How do preserves respond to changes outside their boundaries?

Manning wrestles with these questions at all ten preserves. For instance,

Lake Mattamuskeet in eastern North Carolina once served as a preserve primarily for Canada geese. But fewer geese come each year, and tundra swans have taken their places.

Why? And what, if anything, should be done about it?

The decline in geese is influenced by the new availability of grain on farms near the Chesapeake Bay - enticing the migrating geese to stop, and feed, and stay and forget about going further south to Mattamuskeet. Too much hunting of the geese as they fly back and forth from Canada may also have had an impact. Mean-

while, the swans have moved in to fill the vacancy - finding the lake and the surrounding farms to their liking.

What to do about the changes is a puzzle that neither Manning nor the managers at Mattamuskeet can solve for sure.

At the Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge in Oregon, Manning found another dilemma. The land set aside

for antelopes also contains a strong population of coyotes who feed on young antelopes. If the coyotes are unchecked, they might completely destroy the antelope population. But when the managers of the refuge began to kill some of the coyotes, groups of animal lovers protested and closed down the program.

How much should man intervene to protect one species

by killing another?

Manning leaves the question with the wildlife managers - where it remains unanswered. They just keep doing the best they can, imperfectly, but effectively.

Manning's unanswered questions are part of his book's appeal. He is patient with the people of good will who disagree about the best way to respond to man's pressures on

wildlife.

He quotes with approval the management principle of Dr. Sam Pearsall, the director of science of the North Carolina chapter of The Nature Conservancy. It is called the "science of muddling through."

"It says that the best decisions are made by people who operate on the information at hand to make decisions that seem to move them in the right

direction and that foreclose as few options as possible."

Pearsall's skepticism of inflexible comprehensive solutions to the challenges of wildlife preservation and Manning's tolerance of the competing ideas might be good lessons for us and our political leaders as we wrestle with the challenge of growth and other tough problems in our local communities.

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Decide

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reason is compounding.

Compounding also applies to government finance, where a little change can make a big difference.

Consider the debate over Social Security's future. Many forecasts show the Social Security Trust Fund bankrupt within the next 25 years. But if the inputs to these forecasts are just tweaked in a small way, for example by decreasing the average unemployment rate by a tenth of a percentage point or increasing the economic growth rate by a similar amount, Social Security can be solvent for another 100 years. How is this possible? The answer again "the power of compounding."

Sense

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need for more public works, such as sewage and water treatment facilities. These facilities, sometimes located in flood plains, have had major waste spillage during storms. After Hurricane Fran in 1996, Triangle sewage treatment plants dumped 120 million gallons of raw sewage into local streams and rivers. Two weeks after Hurricane Floyd came through the state, 14 sewage treatment plants remained under water.

Similarly, 50 hog lagoons were flooded after Hurricane Floyd. Nonpoint source pollution, caused by rainfall washing chemicals over and through the ground into waterways, accounts for 96 percent of all pollution in NC's streams and rivers. Of that total, agriculture is responsible for 67 percent. Unfortunately, the state does not have enough inspectors to guarantee that pork producers are in compliance with the regulations. Without more resources for policing hog operations, overcapacity lagoons will continue to overflow from heavy rains.