The efforts of the Institute are frequently exercised at the national level on behalf of the Cooperative Units Program and various other programs and issues with potential for direct or indirect effects on the unit program. This function of the Institute—although less visible than annual cash donations to individual units—has been the most important benefit for the unit program from the Institute and is of greater value than any monetary contribution by the Institute for the support of the units.

Shortly after the incorporation of the American Wildlife Institute, the Institute began sponsoring on 22 July 1935 an annual meeting of biologists, administrators, politicians, and others interested in fish and wildlife conservation. The national meeting is currently referred to as the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference (the North American) and is sponsored by the Wildlife Management Institute (the American Wildlife Institute became the Wildlife Management Institute).

A unit-cooperators meeting is held annually in conjunction with the North American. Until the mid-1970’s, this meeting served to bring cooperator-representatives of the university, the state, and the unit personnel up-to-date on unit program happenings; to provide a forum for the expression of concerns or needs; and to promote esprit de corps among the unit personnel, the state, the university, and the federal representatives in the program. The meeting provided the only forum for orations by cooperators and unit personnel, collectively. Regulation of attendance of national meetings by the Service that began in the 1980’s allowed only selected attendance by unit leaders at subsequent national meetings.

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Some of the benefits for the Service from units are similar to those derived by the state—the opportunity to become familiar with the capabilities of graduate students for potential future employment, the enhanced insight into regional resource issues, and the results of research. The greatest value beyond the work of the unit scientists, however, is the access to the faculties of nearly 40 major universities. This access has inestimable value that expands the research capability of the Service and assures the Service of access to leading researchers in every segment of natural resources. Units conduct mostly applied research but, because of their location and university affiliation, have great potential for fundamental research.

Everyone Gains

Cooperators often discuss who gains the most from their unit. The working relations among the cooperators determine the net value of the unit, and truly cooperative units provide the most gain for all cooperators. Some states use units for their regular research program and some use units for occasional consultations. Because of the tripartite support, the lower cost of supporting graduate-student research than full-time researchers, and the