

THE MEMBERSHIP CYCLE OF OUR *MARTES* WORKING GROUP

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Only two years ago, we were sitting together in Seattle, reviewing what we knew about martens, sables and fishers, and discussing what we wanted to do as researchers and managers. During the last two years, the Symposium Organizing Committee, under the chairmanship of Keith Aubry, was busy putting together a synthesis book on the biology and conservation of *Martes* species, which will be published next year by Cornell University Press. Some of our members are now busy discussing the fate of marten or fisher conservation programs in their part of the world, meeting in colloquiums to discuss pressing issues, or getting ready for their winter field work. Working on *Martes* species, their populations and their habitats, is a sustained effort shared by hundreds of researchers and their “acolytes”. I am glad to announce that all these people will have the opportunity to present and discuss their findings at the 6th International Symposium that will be held in 2014 at Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland, under the leadership of Izabela Wierzbowska and Andrzej Zalewski.

Of course, there is much to be done to get prepared for such a gathering, and we have an imperative need to maintain our *Martes* Working Group membership. The MWG membership is known to be cyclic. As we get closer to a symposium, old members remember that they must join the gang once again. Graduate students join eagerly with the hope of presenting their

findings and the promise that they will change the world for the good of their *Martes* species. At this point in our MWG membership cycle, we experience a peak. At the symposium, everybody is high with emotions. Everybody enjoys the camaraderie and is thrilled to belong to such a great group of scientists. Then, everybody goes back home – suddenly, many of our members get amnesia and forget to stay with MWG for the next few years. MWG then experiences a low in its membership curve. Even though MWG has repeatedly demonstrated that it was a productive and reliable scientific organization, it must continuously re-invent its membership every 4-5 years. Fighting this membership cycle is not easy because MWG does not publish proceedings and syntheses on a yearly basis, it does not constantly bother its membership for scientific contributions, and it has a relatively low profile due to its specialized focus.

However, in spite of these membership cycles, MWG is still active on a yearly basis. This Newsletter is our lifeline – it keeps us connected. The MWG Executive is always busy answering members' inquiries, thinking about ways to improve our website, discussing possible activities and projects (even though we are limited by a lack of funding), and looking into the preparation of the next symposium. All these activities cost nothing other than time. So, why do we need to maintain a membership?

Without a membership, we cannot develop an effective network of resources. When students or government agencies contact us to find people who know something on the genus *Martes*, we can refer them to the right people to deal with the right subjects. We know these people and what they do (or can do) because they belong to MWG. We all want to discuss a research idea or seek local support from a colleague; and we all know that we can contact the colleagues that we met at the last symposium. Being an MWG member means being part of an

active network of contacts, and having the opportunity to work with others, outside our small world.

So, if this entire network of contacts and exchanges is maintained at no cost, why do we need membership dues? We need money to organize our symposia and pave the way for the publication of our proceedings. With money, we can initiate talks with academic institutions, secure facilities, cover expenses associated with organization meetings, and help some of our members travel and participate in our symposia. With money, we can contribute to the publication of our proceedings and syntheses, and secure the involvement of publishers. We are thinking about developing a library where manuscripts would be accessible to members only. We are in the process of refurbishing our website, and we are investigating ways for our members to become involved at different levels in international research projects involved with *Martes* species. These new services will likely bring new expenses.

Think about it, our annual membership dues are lower than the cost of a case of beer! Yet, from a professional point of view, you will get much more in return by belonging to MWG. As you will see in this issue, members now have the choice of renewing for 1 year (\$ 18), 2 years (\$ 30) or 3 years (\$ 40). Some of the new services that we wish to offer to our membership will not happen overnight because we are doing those changes while trying to make a living, but they will happen faster with your support and involvement. What else can we do to secure your support, and further improve MWG? What publication, meeting, project or service should we offer to meet your needs? We are there to help; just let us know how we can do a better job. In the meantime, we need you all to be members in good standing.