The Game of Poaching: Folk Crimes in Southwest Louisiana

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This article examines the meaning and purpose of poaching from the perspectives of poachers and game wardens. Our technique was to let the responses speak for themselves, presenting the convergence of poacher and game warden in the real world, and then to offer both summarization and interpretation. This research uses data from interviews with 41 poachers and 32 game wardens. Its focus is to both describe and explain the activities of poachers. We describe the rationalizations and motivations of poachers for continuing their illegal activity. The research also considers the responses of game wardens to poachers and their activities. The article also looks at the consequences of rapid social change from the perspectives of individuals caught in that change.

Keywords Culture conflict, deviance, folk crime, game wardens, hunting, law enforcement, poaching, social change

This article examines poaching as a folk crime. Folk crime is a relatively unknown class of crime; therefore, we first explain the concept and how poaching fits into this category. The scene for the poaching in this research, the Atchafalaya River Basin, is then described. The focus then shifts to the culture conflict that exists in this area. The conceptual foundation of folk crime and culture conflict provide a sociological frame to view poaching. In the remainder of this article, the social meaning of this illegal activity for the two major actors, game wardens and poachers, is presented. We conclude by discussing the effects of social change on poachers and wardens.

Poaching as Folk Crime

Poaching has become a subject of research interest for scholars (Calkins 1971; Curcione 1992; Forsyth 1993, 1994; Forsyth and Marckese 1993; Green 1990; Palmer and Bryant 1985; Reisner 1991; Wilson 1990). Most of this literature has either implicitly or explicitly placed poaching within the criminological category of folk crime (Ross 1961, 1973). Ross (1961, 236) offered several speculative propositions concerning folk crime, some of which are descriptive of poaching.

a) Major increments to the complexity of a society . . . create a need for regulation where none was previously necessary; b) Legislation to regulate the

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conditions brought about by increasing complexity reclassifies certain prevalent non-criminal behavior as crime; c) where the harmful effect of the proscribed behavior is indirect or improbable in most instances, the novel legislation may not be related to previously existing norms; d) Criminal behavior in folk crime is rooted...in the culture of groups most affected by the...legislation.

These propositions are similar to Sellin's (1938) origins of cultural conflict.

Violations related to gambling, traffic, hunting and game laws, and woods burning are examples of folk crimes. Many law violations in any community fall in a category that is commonly called folk crime by criminologists (Bankston and Jenkins 1982). These laws have little moral restraint associated with them and, although their violation is not generally approved, such crimes are relatively numerous, differentially treated in the legal process, and unstigmatized (Ross 1961).

Woods burning, for example, like poaching, is deeply rooted in some rural cultures. Woods burning is a practice that has been grounded on the assumption that woods are either an unacceptable barrier to land use or, at best, an extraneous item ancillary in importance to other uses of the land. As a result, it became accepted as normal behavior in some cultural settings. Only in recent times has woods burning come to be interpreted in other cultural settings as deviant behavior. Some types of behavior that are tolerated, approved, or perhaps encouraged in an area of low population density with bountiful resources may be less condoned or even proscribed when the population increases or the competition for resources accelerates and broadens (Bankston and Jenkins 1982).

Thus, increased demand for wood products has led to legal restrictions on and disapproval of woods burning. We might well anticipate that the problems associated with reducing woods burning and dealing with the cultural and structural apparatus that sustains this behavior would very likely be reiterated in attempts to deal with other folk-type crimes, such as trespassing, water rights, and access to places to fish and hunt (Bankston and Jenkins 1982).

Traditionally, sociologists have sought to explain crime mainly through socioeconomic factors such as modernization, opportunity, unemployment, relative deprivation, and culture (Cliner and Meier 1995). Poaching can be explained through several of these factors. Modernization fostered both the need for extensive laws to protect game (Palmer and Bryant 1985) and the urban mentality to preserve it (Palmer and Forsyth 1992). Economic factors created the need to hunt year around or in illegal areas. Opportunity existed for only a few rural residents to access this resource or to acquire the skills necessary to use it. Rural cultures have better supported the violation of game laws. Folk crime has combined elements of these sundry causal factors into a unique sensitizing conceptual focus (Ross 1961, 1973). Excitement or pleasure also has been shown to be a motivation for types of deviance and criminality (Katz 1988; Samenow 1984). To appreciate the factors associated with and the causes of poaching in southwest Louisiana, it is essential to first understand the physical and cultural geography of the specific area in which this research took place, the Atchafalaya River Basin.

The Atchafalaya River Basin

The Atchafalaya River flows through southcentral Louisiana in an ancient bed of the Mississippi River. It serves as a major distributary for the Mississippi, receiving up to 50% of the flow of the Mississippi and Red Rivers during flood stages. During periods of lower water stages, the Atchafalaya receives the majority of the flow of the Red River.
The Atchafalaya River Basin (or more simply "the Basin," as it is known in southern Louisiana) is the largest contiguous area of forested wetlands in the United States, extending from the control structure on the Mississippi River (near river mile 315) to the coast of Louisiana, and it includes a total basin area of approximately 1,806 square miles. The vast majority of the Basin is inaccessible by land.

Throughout its long history, many elements of the ecosystem have historically (Comeaux 1972; Gramling 1982), and to present (Brassieur 1982; Esman 1985), been harvested in both renewable and nonrenewable fashion for human use. Subsistence utilization of the Basin's resources can be traced to aboriginal Americans and the earliest European settlement of the area in the late 1700s (Comeaux 1972). Crawfish, catfish, turtles, frogs, game (deer, ducks), pelts, moss (for furniture stuffing), and cypress lumber were coming out of the Atchafalaya Basin, primarily for a New Orleans market, by the mid-1800s. This trade received a major impetus in 1857, with the construction of a rail line from Algiers on the west bank of the Mississippi, across from New Orleans, to Morgan City near the bottom of the Atchafalaya Basin. Although the old growth cypress was cut over by the late 1930s, moss is no longer harvested for furniture stuffing, and the sale of wild game is illegal, several technological developments during the early 1900s (primarily, the outboard motor and modern refrigeration) meant that many of the folk occupations (particularly, crawfishing) in the Basin have continued to present. Traditionally, those who harvested the Basin lived on the periphery or actually in the Basin, on houseboats or on the few areas of higher ground. However, with the introduction of the outboard motor, the Basin became accessible to recreational fishing and hunting, and to the subsequent state and federal regulation of those traditionally subsistence or economic activities.

The Basin has its own history and legends, many of which center on its vastness and inaccessibility to humankind. Early encounters with the Basin were described by the naturalist, William Darby (1816, 69), "To have an idea of the dead silence, the awful lonesomeness, the dreary aspects of this region, it is necessary to visit the spot." Again, in 1818 (p. 72), Darby opined, "A more astonishing transition is not conceivable than between the deep, dark, and silent gloom of the inundated lands of the Atchafalaya, and the open, light and cheerful expansion of the wide spread prairies of Opelousas and Attacapas."

Waud (1866, 769), visiting the Basin some five decades later had the same impression, "the weird and funereal aspect of the place is perfect, representing a forbidding appearance sufficient to appall a stranger. In the slimy depths of the swamp . . . numbers of alligators . . . turtles, snakes, etc."

The physical environment of the Basin is only part of its legend, with the human inhabitants adding an additional measure of mystery and danger. During the Civil War, the Basin became home for southern deserters, Union sympathizers, and outlaws (Comeaux 1972; Shugg 1939), and the rough and dangerous way of life associated with the Basin continues as legend. Even today, it is not uncommon for the locals to refer, with obvious pride, to themselves or their neighbors as "outlaws." While the Basin is traveled increasingly by sportfishermen in the summer and sport hunters in the winter, the locals continue to garner the resources of the Basin in an annual cycle of harvest that has a two-century history.

The Atchafalaya River Basin has been extensively modified by human activities. Following the disastrous 1927 flood of the Mississippi and Atchafalaya Basins, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers erected levees around the perimeter of the Atchafalaya Basin so that it would operate more effectively as a overflow valve for the Mississippi. In the late 1940s, the corps realized that, because the Atchafalaya offered a route that was 165
miles shorter to the Gulf of Mexico than did the Mississippi itself, the Atchafalaya was
beginning to capture the main flow of the Mississippi. To prevent this, the corps erected
control structures to control the flow of the Mississippi and Red Rivers into the
Atchafalaya. In spite of these modifications, the Basin remains one of the most inaccessible
and wildest regions east of the Rocky Mountains.

Culture Conflict

In order to understand the complex “problem” associated with poaching in the
Atchafalaya River Basin, it is necessary to take into account the cultural history of this re-
gion. French settlers, in what is now New Brunswick and Nova Scotia in the early 1600s,
were expelled by the British when they assumed control of the area (known as Arcadia)
in the mid-1700s. Many of these Catholic, French-speaking Arcadians (later shortened to
Acadians, and then Cajuns) settled in what is now southcentral Louisiana (Gramling,
Forsyth, and Mooney 1987). While many of the migrants settled in what is known as the
Opelousas Prairie (a flat, well-drained region west of the Atchafalaya Basin) and became
small farmers, others settled on the periphery of the Basin and harvested the renewable
resources of the swamps. There emerged an extractive economy around and within the
Basin that centered on the annual seasonal changes in the swamp, and the harvest of the
plant and animal life available during each season. Both the language and the religion of
the Acadians served to isolate them from later English-speaking protestant migrants
(“Americans”) into the region and form the basis of a current cultural conflict between
the subsistence use of the resources and their recreational harvest by the urban middle
class. It is only within the past 50 years, with the introduction of compulsory education
laws, that significant social integration of Cajuns and “Americans” began to occur
(Gilmore 1933; Gramling, Forsyth and Mooney 1987; Smith and Parenton 1938), and
French is still the language of choice among older residents of the region.

Six decades ago, Sellin (1938) noted three situations in which conflict between cul-
tures is likely to emerge: (1) when the norms of cultural groups are significantly different
and the groups occupy adjacent territories, (2) when the norms of one cultural group
are extended to cover the territory of another, and (3) when members of one cultural group
migrate to an area occupied by another cultural group. These latter two cases are the basis
of the cultural conflict that emerged as “Americans” migrated into Acadia in search of
oil starting in the 1920s, and as sport hunters increasingly used the Basin. This extended
the regulatory regime that was enacted into law following World War II to an area with
no previous history of regulation.

The enactment of game regulations made it illegal to hunt, or to hunt during certain
periods of the year, many species that traditionally had been taken for subsistence or eco-
nomic profit (e.g., waterfowl for the restaurant trade). For some species, daily, posses-
sion, and seasonal bag limits also were imposed. As a result, for some longtime residents,
there exists a deep-seated resentment toward these regulations and the “Americans” who
promulgated them. Game outlaws are, in a sense, cultural heros among some traditional
Acadians—members of a “resistance.”

That Acadian traditions have persisted well into the twentieth century in southwest
Louisiana has been convincingly demonstrated (Gilmore 1933; Smith and Parenton
1938). Meanings acquired early in the personal histories of these poachers gave rise to a
more general orientation which favorably disposed them toward certain violations of
game laws (Curcione 1992). Culture provides actors with a finite selection from which
they construct strategies of action (Mooney, Gramling, and Forsyth 1991). For many with
oral histories of generations of harvest of the Basin, personal exposure and admittance into the activity, and the socialization process pertinent to the particular violation patterns in question, poaching is a quite natural activity.

The first full-time Louisiana Wildlife Enforcement Officers (game wardens) were hired in 1953. Previously, this type of position was a part-time or seasonal job. Traditionally, rural communities in Louisiana used what are now considered game animals to supplement their diet. Increasing urbanization brought in recreational hunters and conservationists, and as wild animals became culturally redefined from a subsistence or economic commodity to a recreational resource, a conflict over game use ensued. An example is the open season with a 25 birds per day limit on Gros bec (yellow crested night heron), which was in effect during the 1920s. Gros bec hunting is now illegal, and a mandatory jail sentence is imposed on conviction of possession of a single Gros bec.

Methodology

We employed an ethnographic approach to explore the deviant or criminal practice of poaching. This article examines the meaning and purpose of poaching, through the use of descriptions from poachers and game wardens. Our technique was to let the respondents speak for themselves, presenting the poaching world in full vivid detail, and then to offer both summarization and interpretation. This method, which is called interpretative interaction (Denzin 1978), is concerned with the study and imputation of meaning, motive, emotion, intention, and feeling as life events are experienced and organized by interacting individuals. These vocabularies of motives (Mills 1940) are constructs of model vocabularies that are extant in types of situations and actions. Some of the authentic motives that have been assigned to actors were not even known to them. Motives are enclosed (bounded by) by the vocabulary of the actor. The only source for the nomenclature of motives is the vocabulary of motives actually and usually verbalized by actors in specific situations. Our purpose was to capture the convergence of poacher and game warden in the real world.

Interviews with poachers ranged from less than 1 to 4\(\frac{1}{2}\) hours. Forty-one poachers were interviewed, all of whom lived on the periphery of the Atchafalaya Basin. Nearly 93\% (\(N = 38\)) of these men had been arrested for violation of game laws. Poachers were identified through the personal contacts of one of the authors. Additional poachers were identified through a snowball method (Babbie 1995), in which each informant identified additional potential informants. Each respondent was questioned as to the reasons that he engaged in poaching, what type of game he hunted, and how he started poaching. Additional questions were intended to elicit responses regarding the rationalizations and motivations used by poachers for their continuance in these illegal activities, and for their confrontations with residents, game wardens, or other hunters. Thirty-two current and retired game wardens also were interviewed. These interviews ranged from less than 1 to 3 hours. All of these respondents were Louisiana state game wardens in the areas in which the interviewed poachers hunted, either in the past or the present. Both the game wardens and the poachers interviewed for this research are an available sample; we interviewed all persons who would allow us and who had the time. All questions were intended to be guides for gleaning information, rather than specific responses. The poachers interviewed for this project were primarily hunters of alligator, deer, and waterfowl.

All 41 poachers interviewed were white males and ranged in age from 17 to 68 years. There was an extreme range in education, from having no formal education to advanced professional degrees. Typically, however, the poachers had not finished high
school. Most of these men were unemployed or employed in occupations in which they were subject to frequent layoffs. Many were in building trades, such as carpenters or roofers. Other occupations mentioned were welder, truck driver, and automotive mechanic. Two individuals owned small businesses; a restaurant and a tourist boat. All of the poachers were lifelong residents of southwest Louisiana.

The Social Meaning of Poaching: Perspectives of Poachers and Game Wardens

Poachers

Responses from poachers, when questioned regarding their motives for illegal actions, fell into four broad categories: food, money, exhilaration, and tradition (see Muth and Bowe 1998, for a more detailed breakdown of motives). As will be evident in the quotations below, individual informants often expressed motives indicative of more than one category.

Food. Of the 41 poachers, 37 stated that one of the primary motivations for poaching was to provide food and other products for consumption by members of their households and other primary social networks.

Providing game meat through poaching contributed to dietary diversity, augmented household food budgets, and was a means of procuring protein that respondents would be hard-pressed to purchase through the cash economy due to limited resources. Providing for household subsistence was the most frequently mentioned reason that poachers offered as justification for their illegal harvests. The following comments were from four men who poached to supply food for themselves and their families: “I hunt game out of season in times of need.” “If I’m low on my funds. I hunt just enough to make a dinner. I never sell game. You can’t eat wild game everyday because it will give you the gout.” “When you’re hungry, you got to have some food, so [you] outlaw and that’s the truth.” “I am not a poacher but I have resorted to hunting game out of season occasionally in times of need. I did get caught once.” Another poacher indicated special circumstances forced him into illegal hunting: “I never violated any game laws until I was disabled in an accident.”

Three others indicated their preference for wild game: “I like to eat Gros becs.” “If it’s good to eat, I shoot it, anytime.” “I hunt whenever I get a chance so I can eat.”

Many poachers gave more complex explanations:

It seems that everything that is illegal is good to eat and everything good to eat is illegal. So I hunt whatever is illegal and I will shoot anything that is good to eat. I like deer year round.

Sometimes we ran out of everything so we were forced to eat anything. We would shoot Gros becs for meat. I hate Gros becs now. But when I go hunting I do not pay attention to all that stuff that tells you to kill three of this and none of that. I’ll shoot what I need to.

Gros becs, . . . Bec croche [white ibis], Flamons [wood stork], and blue herons . . . deer on the river at night. I hunt what is there at the time.

My partners get deer year round and it never hits the freezer, his freezer that is. He keeps me stocked up and I go when I get a chance. I like wood ducks
but there was not too many this year. I'm not proud to outlaw and I don't advise anyone to do it but when you're hungry and you got to have some meat, I outlaw and that's a fact.

Man they almost caught us in the back of the park today, somebody must have called on us when they saw us go in; but we had stashed our birds in a cooler. We only had our guns but we saw the game wardens before they saw us. So we back tracked and stashed our guns in the bushes and we walked out. The game wardens jumped us and asked what we were doing; so we said that we were taking a little pleasure walk in the woods. They don't believe us so they back tracked back through the woods but they never found our guns. We killed about 15 Gros becs, 5 Flamons, 20 Bec croches, 3 heron bleus [blue herons]. We stashed the icebox where we can get to it with a boat. We played like we were boat riding and then we picked up the ice chest later on, drove up to the landing and rode back to the house. I sell the Bec croches and Gros becs but not too many people eat Flamons. But they are good if you stuff them with garlic and marinade them in vinegar. Blue herons are damn good eating and they are as big as a goose.

The following poacher is representative of individuals expressing motives obviously indicative of more than one category: "I outlaw because I like to eat Gros becs and I like the money."

Money. Nine of the poachers declared that one of their primary motivations for poaching was to earn money. The sale of the game was used to support their families. One poacher indicated that he would do anything to support his family: "The money I make hunting is used to support my family. Whatever it takes to support them I do it, which includes being an outlaw."

For others, it enabled them to make money indirectly, such as giving game to or feeding customers in their business: "Why hell yes I outlaw . . . Me and one of my buddies we get a lot of ducks and geese. Well, I entertain a lot of people in my business and it's nice to have game for dinners." For most of the men in this category, their monetary impetus for poaching was more blunt. The following five poachers offered very candid responses: "I outlaw alligator for the money. I sell quite a few hides on the black market." "[I] make side change." "I never killed an animal that I didn't have a customer waiting for the meat." "I like to make $100 dollars a day cash." "When money is scarce [I poach]."

Tradition. Eleven of the poachers stated that one of their primary motivations for poaching was that it was part of their personal or cultural history. In giving this as a motivation, individuals either recounted specific events or generalized about their hunting activities in the past. Although most poachers in this category had elaborate responses, one elderly poacher had a very rudimentary answer: "To outlaw reminds me of days when life was simpler."

When I was a little kid in the 1940s, we would hunt for all our meat. My brothers and I would hunt deer, robins, and ducks. I don't believe that there was an open season on them, except does.

I outlaw because no one will tell me what to hunt when and where to hunt. Both my father and grandfather hunted like that. Any species coming within scope of my gun and it's good to eat, that is an endangered species.
I am 83 years old now but when I was very young there were times when the only meal we had was something we would hunt. We would hunt Gros becs and Bec croches during the summer. In winter we would hunt Grives [robins] and Tchoqs [red-winged blackbirds] during the winter in the roosts, especially the roost by Millers Lake. We would use sarracanes [blowguns] and place them right on their breasts, we would kill a good mess and then clean them by the fireplace, and cook a gumbo. We would salt and dry game also, making jerky and such for the summer . . . I don’t feel a bit bad about what I did then I’m proud of it. We had to work hard to make it . . . if someone gives me a mess of birds I will cook them up and have an old time supper reminiscing les vieux temps [the good times]. If I get a chance I will get me a mess of birds if I think the coast is clear.

I hunt so I can eat fresh meat. If I obeyed the game laws I could only eat fresh meat once in a while. I’ve been doing this for over 50 years and I’m not going to stop.

When the Acadians were in Nova Scotia they socialized with the Indians; some even mixed. They learned a lot from the Indians. The same thing took place when the Acadians got here in Louisiana, it was survival. We feel because of our history that we have an inherent right to hunt.

Exhilaration. Eight of the poachers stated that one of their primary motivations for poaching was the excitement and exhilaration that they felt. The contest of getting away from the game wardens is the apparent cause of these thrills. Some poachers made general remarks regarding this challenge: “[I]t gets to be exciting sometimes when the wardens chase you.” “[I]t’s more fun to outlaw than to hunt legal . . . it tastes better too.” “I hunt whatever is illegal . . . is good to eat and for the challenge of getting caught.” But, most poachers gave more unique reflections regarding this contest:

If it were not for the game wardens I would not outlaw, . . . they make it fun. . . . I got pictures of boat loads of ducks, three deer in a night, and alligators . . . I like to eat fresh meat, but it’s a real rush knowing that the game wardens are out there trying to hunt you. They never have caught me yet and I kill a deer whenever I want some meat or whenever someone wants some meat.

We kill Gros becs, Flamons, Bec croches, heron bleus. They are not going to catch me and I do what it takes to get away from the game wardens.

One time I was almost caught hunting wood ducks before season. I had to sink my pirogue [canoe-like boat] and stay with just my face out of the water hidden in the water lilies for about three hours. I didn’t dare slap the mosquitoes because they were about twenty feet from me. They knew I was close. I left everything out there and swam back about 2 miles.

In addition to the motives articulated above, various rationalizations were offered for poaching, ranging from blaming other groups for diminishing game:

We are not the problem. Farmers, oil and chemical companies and sportsman do just about anything.

to maintaining that poaching is universal;
Everybody who hunts or fishes breaks the law.

I can show you leases that people . . . [are breaking the law]. People who have money can do no wrong. The law is for poor people.

to technological explanations;

Before refrigeration there was no problem. After that you needed laws. People would save game.

to management considerations;

I never hunt deer out of season. I hunt ducks, squirrels, rabbits. I always kill owls and hawks because they eat small game.

Wardens

Generally, game wardens were lenient toward poachers who were hunting for food in order to survive or who had traditionally hunted for food, and tougher in their enforcement when other motives were evident. They were almost universal in their condemnation of the taking of endangered species. Wardens were not sympathetic toward poachers who were earning a living from their illegal activities on a cash market. The lack of sympathy of the following two wardens is apparent in their responses regarding earning a living from the killing of game: “The true target of any game warden is the habitual poacher.” “The career poacher is the one who is focused on.”

In contrast, the survivors (as they were termed by some wardens) were seen in a sympathetic light by many:

People poach for money, greed. That’s their ass. Those who do it for survival I handle completely different from those who do it out of greed. I use discretion as needed.

Some do it to survive. That is a hard way to make it. They are hard working guys. You do it for survival I cut you slack.

People poach for many reasons. Sport. Money for drug habits. Those I go after. A number do it as a form of survival or for putting food on the table. Those I let go.

They may kill a deer between seasons. They are good people, I am not concerned with them.

Although, as indicated above, wardens gave assorted responses regarding those who poach to survive, the ensuing comment is a synopsis: “We do not mess with the survivors, they are not really hurting anyone and without this they could not make it.” Another warden offered an even more concise response: “I give the working guy a break.”

Poachers who do it to survive are selectively overlooked by many game wardens. Consequently, they are likely to be avoided all together. The notion of a provider poacher may explain why certain old-timers poach with privilege, as two wardens indicated:

That old man in the swamp. We are not worried. He only kills deer to eat. Without it I don’t think he could make it. Also it is part of his life and culture.

I don’t really go after old timers who are doing it for survival.
Other wardens used no discretion, and dealt with poachers in absolute terms. Some wardens gave short succinct replies: "Rules are there to be followed." "I follow strict guidelines." "If poachers are breaking the law, they should be punished." "I follow the same principles that all state law enforcement officers must follow." Other game wardens gave more extended answers, which had corresponding meanings:

If you are poaching you are breaking the law. I give no slack. Some wardens do, not me.

Poachers are breaking the law, period. When they break the rules they should do time and pay fines.

A poacher is a law breaker. There is no need for a discussion. They are all trying to get something for nothing. When I get them. I am a bad dream.

Discriminating between the poacher who is earning money and the poacher who is hunting for his family's food usually was not a consideration in the case of endangered species. Game wardens indicated the severity of this offense in several ways: "Endangered species is something that is not taken lightly." "Poachers are treated completely different if they mess around with an endangered species." "Endangered species are taken very serious." The attitudes of wardens in applying penalties for the poaching of an endangered species was indicated in the following two comments: "Endangered species is when we hit you with everything we can find." "You kill an endangered species, you should be punished." Another warden was more specific when he described the penalties given one poacher: "He killed five brown pelicans; $40,000 in fines and five years in jail. We feel great about that."

Like poachers, wardens differed widely, including those who offered support for the excitement hypothesis;

Poachers normally don't do it as a form of survival. They do it for excitement.

and those who attempted to diminish the offense of poaching by saying that other things are more devastating to game:

Activities which destroy habitat are more detrimental to wildlife than hunting. Logging and farming are two examples.

Game wardens also were in agreement regarding the difficulty in apprehending poachers and the extent of the problem. The subsequent responses from three wardens were typical: "You usually get fines based on what you killed and your past criminal history." "Experienced poachers will not be caught. If they decide to move around every once and a while forget it." "As long as the rewards of poaching remain high, individuals will come."

Poachers, like other career criminals, may at some point become dissatisfied with the lifestyle associated with their illegal activities. The poacher may find that the the lifestyle necessary to be successful is too difficult to manage. Apathy replaces motivation, and arrest becomes imminent. According to one game warden, poachers of this type may have grown tired of the criminal life:

[T]his old man had been poaching alligators for years. He called up one day and told us he wanted to go out big time. . . . he was going to blast some alligators in a Federal wildlife refuge. [But he did not tell the exact location
within the refuge.] He also gave us the day. I happened to be at the right spot at the right time. [A pond where many alligators were known to be located.] I saw him hit the button and I watched about 35 alligators go flying up in the air . . . he killed none but injured ten of them. It was a sight to see.

Game wardens continually expressed the notion that other poachers may exit their criminality in much the same manner:

These old experienced guys will not get caught in my lifetime . . . unless they want to.

Discussion

Table 1 provides a typology of poaching and law enforcement motivations. In general, the motivations of poachers and game wardens can be summarized along several dimensions (but, see Muth and Bowe 1998, for a more detailed breakdown). Poachers have both instrumental (money and survival) and affective (excitement and tradition) reasons for poaching, and their motivations may be reinforced by cultural conflict (survival and tradition) or they may not be so reinforced (money and excitement). For at least some wardens, the cultural conflict aspect is the most important, with greater enforcement effort being targeted toward the money and excitement oriented and less effort targeted toward those who poach because of financial need or who come from a cultural tradition of game taking.

In many ways, the actions of at least some of the game wardens interviewed reflect an almost microsociological understanding of motivations. Sociology has a long tradition of investigating the consequences of rapid social change. Most of the theorizing, however, has been done at a structural or grand theory level, with little appreciation of the microprocesses involved in these changes. The area studied in this project is a “victim” of cultural intrusion caused by the drilling for offshore oil off the coast of Louisiana (Gramling, Forsyth and Mooney 1987). Although this was an auxiliary theme of this article, it was an essential explanatory component for the deviant behavior of these poachers. There has been recent scholarly interest in the negative consequences of rapid economic growth, particularly energy boomtowns (Freudenburg and Gramling 1992; Gramling and Freudenburg 1990). Rural areas are the most likely to be affected by such growth. Commensurate with this growth is the almost lawlike assumption that there will be an increase in deviance (Sampson and Groves 1989). Although there is little evidence with which to refute this social fact, there is some debate on who these deviants are. Are they longtime residents, newcomers, or both (Freudenburg and Jones 1991)? This research offers support for the interpretation that long-term residents have been judged as deviant for an ac-

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<td>Orientation of poachers and law enforcement</td>
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<th>Poachers</th>
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<td>Instrumental</td>
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<tr>
<td>No cultural conflict</td>
<td>Money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural conflict</td>
<td>Survival</td>
</tr>
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tivity that was once legal (Margavio and Forsyth 1996). Many of these poachers are another example of the micro-level social disruptions caused by rapid economic growth.

The future will offer these outlaws even more cultural intrusions of their once inaccessible basin. As populations have become increasingly urban and contact with rural areas has declined, for example, the notion of animal rights has arisen and, in some sense, has become a moral crusade. As this ideology continues to unfold, and gain political influence and legitimacy, the poacher will find even less support. Indeed, animals have been given a moral status by some groups in postindustrial society. The moral and political influence of the animal rights movement is evident in the increasing rejection of fur as clothing. This movement has expanded these inducements into a rejection of animals as food (Palmer and Forsyth 1992).

As postindustrial values continue to gain ascendancy in rural areas of the United States, increasing amounts of criticism of the poacher and his fading culture are sure to follow. This criticism eventually will find its way into the vocabularies of motives of the game wardens who have acted as a cultural buffer between poachers caught between the norms of tradition and survival and the encroaching modern world. Moreover, the simple demographic change that is affecting the culture as a whole should also affect the population of poachers. As increasingly urban values, as evidenced in the mass media, become the cultural tool kit available to individuals, certainly the traditional poacher and probably the survival poacher (food stamps rather than game as relief for those in poverty) will decline. With a greater percentage of younger poachers falling into the money or excitement categories, we also should see a decline in the differential enforcement by some wardens and the increasing criminalization of poaching in general.

Motives identified by this research lend empirical support for the hypothesized existence of the motives suggested by others (Muth and Bowe 1998). Given that these factors are the impetus for poaching, research should be guided toward further investigation of these motives. Research also should probe into the arena of folk crime. The idea that poaching is seen as a folk crime is an accounting for the persistence of the activity. Those who guard these resources should focus some energy on changing the local perceptions of poaching to a more serious regard for the resources. Hopefully, this research will proffer some counsel to resource managers and also encourage exploratory investigations from scholars of culture, crime, deviance, and social change into these newly mined waters.

Note

1. The two categorizations of motive are very parallel. We both found poachers who were in it for commercial gain and for household consumption. Muth and Bowe (1998) essentially broke our category of excitement into three categories (thrill, recreation, and game playing), and our concept of tradition into another three categories (traditional use, rebellion, and disbelief in or disagreement with regulations). We did not find in our respondents any examples of their categories of trophy hunting or protection of self and property, although anecdotally we are familiar with both.

References

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