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Sport Hunters and Fishermen before the Civil War-Precursors of Conservation

In my *American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation* (1975 and 1986), I argue that the first conservation movement was spearheaded in the 1870s by self-styled 'sportsmen', individuals of the upper classes who hunted and fished primarily for recreation, rather than for commerce or necessity. These sportsmen-conservationists differentiated themselves from the countless other American males who hunted and/or fished by their class consciousness and world view, both of which led them to found national newspapers emphasizing conservation issues; to establish organizations for protecting wildlife, including fish; and to lobby state legislatures, and finally Congress, for the passage of laws that would force all other hunters and fishermen to accept the code of the sportsman as the only correct way to pursue game.

Among the topics worth examining further is the fact that some sport hunters and fishermen advocated both aesthetic and utilization conservation at least as early as the 1840s and 50s. Although not nearly as numerous nor as organized as their later comrades, men like Henry William Herbert, William Elliott, and Elisha Lewis helped to provide the philosophical foundations for the movement originated by sportsmen in the 1870s.

