Dear CBS News

I was disappointed to read and watch the segment aired September 5th regarding wild ginseng in North Carolina. It contains factual errors and shows a bias towards sensationalism that is disappointing.

Your choice to interview only one dealer, Mr. Eidus, was a poor one, since he does not represent the majority of Ginseng dealers. Indeed, his opinion that 90% of the wild ginseng he purchases has been poached is certainly not shared by the majority of other ginseng dealers. His willingness to purchase it nevertheless is a bad example that reflects poorly on the industry in general. His opinion that ginseng will be gone in 10 to 20 years is pure nonsense, as a simple “fact check” with state or federal regulatory officials would have easily revealed. Is it the policy of CBS news to quote unsubstantiated sources when legitimate sources of data are readily available?

What is even more troubling is the assumption that the major threat to ginseng is posed by poachers.

This erroneous assumption is so often repeated by the media that it is now widely accepted as fact but a recent article published in “Science” magazine by the leading Ginseng Conservation Biologist Professor James McGraw of West Virginia University, states that predation by white tailed deer is the most serious threat to the species and not poachers.

Ironically, poachers, such as Mr. Hurley, may in fact be responsible for the perpetration and preservation of the species. Most individuals who harvest wild ginseng also replant seeds and expand existing populations, often relocating them to areas that are more secure from deer or development. I can understand your ignorance regarding the population dynamics of a wild plant but published data by Professor McGraw, as well as other legitimate researchers, suggests that stewardship of wild populations by harvesters can significantly increase populations, whereas compliance to the exact letter of the regulations can result in serious declines in populations.

Finally, Charlie Rose’s, comment wondering why it is not widely grown, is a legitimate query. Suitable habitat for growing “wild simulated” ginseng is rare and increasingly threatened by development. Ginseng populations may recover from poaching events but they will never recover from being paved. The fact is that most so called “wild” ginseng is grown by people who return to the same areas each year to pick berries and replant seed.

Ms. Leopold’s comments regarding the lack of interest in conservation are accurate in the sense that it is more “newsworthy” to report the misdeeds of a few individuals while ignoring the real issues that should be addressed.

I am saddened that CBS did such a poor job in reporting this story.

Sincerely,

Bon Beyfuss

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