

THE CHALLENGE OF MANAGING FISH AND WILDLIFE FOR QUALITY RECREATION

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The assignment given me by your program committee is a pretty broad one. All of us here today could strike off in several directions in developing a meaningful thesis as to both the "challenge" and the definition of "quality" as it relates to the management of fish and wildlife.

Two years ago the Committee on North American Wildlife Policy observed "The future of wildlife is entangled in the total complexity of man's relationship to nature." This is the context in which the subject must be addressed.

To most of us fish and wildlife management is an important and substantial activity. However, when cast in the total spectrum of our country's activities in resource affairs, it is in fact a rather small part of the total resource effort. By and large the resources involved are secondary by-products which spring from land and water being used for other primary purposes. The exceptions of course being that relatively small part set aside expressly for fish and wildlife.

For this discussion I've chosen to abbreviate my remarks with regard to the "quality" aspect. It means different things to different people and it is nigh impossible to categorize the term "quality" in a mutually acceptable mould, which meets the concepts of all people.

Volumes have been written, surveys by the score have been conducted and regulations are replete with special stipulations purported to expressly meet the objective of quality recreation.

Suffice it to say that "quality", in my view at least, is a personal thing singular to each individual or group of individuals. Hunting may be a few hours escape from the job to one person; angling may be a chance for exercise and solitude to another; bird watching may fulfill still another desire to enjoy a particular study of nature. To others anyone of these three activities may fulfill a wide range of economic, social or emotional needs.

I believe we have all been guilty at times of fostering a regulation or an activity under the guise of seeking a quality recreation experience, when in fact we have been searching for a means of maintaining a resource under burgeoning pressures of use. It seems to me that the idea of quality has often been a response to excesses in human conduct which have either been repulsive to some or damaging to a resource. The term has been loosely used and often in a meaningless way to the other guy.

Quality recreation in today's world must relate to a set of social restraints and ethical standards which are acceptable to a majority of society. Thus, many of the so-called qualitative aspects of resource use have had their genesis with citizen movements, rather than government fiat. They have often been a response to organized effort on the part of various groups wanting to use a resource in a specific way in a particular environment.

So long as the various resource components are used within the biological resilience of each species, I see nothing wrong with this arrangement. I question whether we can gain much in an endless philosophical discussion. Rather, to the extent that society can enjoy a maximum number of choices will the individual find what he wants,

Because of the array of meanings, it seems to me that, whatever quality is to a multitude of interests, there is a means of accommodation. That accommodation will be found in assuring the integrity of fish and wildlife under a program that assures maximum abundance and diversity consistent with requisite habitat. For without a viable supply, there is little purpose in talking about quality. If we can maintain the resource, the so-called quality recreation will evolve according to society's desires and the ethics and mores of our times.

Given a resource supply the freedom of choice becomes the cornerstone of quality.

Maintenance of the resource is the subject that I believe brings us face to face with the realities of your mission in life as professional fish and wildlife managers.

Central to any other aspect of fish and wildlife management is the integrity of the resource itself. Central to the integrity of that resource is the necessary habitats upon which that resource's survival depends. Here is where the rub comes and here is where the "challenge" lies.

It is a complicated question and I'm not sure that our priorities are properly aligned. Let's look first at some recent historical events.

A good deal of the non-technical literature in both the aquatic and terrestrial fields have dealt in reflection. Many writers have eloquently reviewed historical efforts of man in managing or mismanaging terrestrial wildlife. Others have dealt with aquatic resources, particularly the fin-fishes and shell fish. Marine mammals and birds have received increasing attention in recent years.

As many students of resource management have pointed out, a good deal of man's effort with wildlife and fisheries has been preoccupied with a specific creature or population. This has produced an essential body of knowledge which provides the data base important to insuring the integrity of these resources. It will not, however, in and of itself do the job. It does not embrace the full dimension of forces at play which will determine the destiny of these resources and in turn the opportunity to enjoy them as a part of our environment. Nor does it always identify the reactions triggered on other species or other elements of an ecosystem, if we

manage for a single species. One of our problems has been the disposition to deal unilaterally with each resource component. While we all know this, it has been because of the governmental, economic and social system in which we live, that it has been most difficult to do otherwise.

You and I have had the privilege or maybe the burden of living in an era of the greatest change in the history of man. The accumulation of knowledge alone has caught many of us short and this spiral of knowledge is ascending at an accelerating pace. Toffler, in his book "Future Shock" has observed that "The entire knowledge system in society is undergoing violent upheaval. The very concepts and codes in terms of which we think are turning over at a furious and accelerating pace."

The same can be said with regard to technological capability, transportation, communication, social attitudes, population shifts and life styles. The ability of Americans to manipulate our natural environment has reached a magnitude and velocity that exceeds anything visualized by our forefathers.

In large measure this enormous thrust has been largely based upon resource exploitation. Translating raw materials from our land and water base into the products either demanded by or imposed upon society by persuasive pitchmen at an ever increasing rate and volume. We have evolved an economic system which, in order to thrive, depends upon a doctrine of endless growth which at times has seemed almost mindless of the limits to our resource base or of natural values as indigenous components of that resource base.

Inevitably, fish and wildlife has been impacted by this system. In spite of efforts to forestall negative responses of fish and wildlife to habitat manipulation to fulfill the needs of other objectives, the net result has been a lessening of the space for these resources. There are exceptions, to be sure, but by and large we have been on a descending scale of providing for fish and wildlife.

There are many events of the last half century which have had profound influences on the destiny of fish and wildlife. You are all familiar with them but for purposes of making my point I'd like to review a few.

In a former day, farm land provided a place for a variety of resources of which fish and wildlife was a significant part. In a 1972 preliminary report of the Task Force on the Land Grant College Complex, Hightower, writing for the Agribusiness Accountability Project spoke to the character of agriculture research. It was his contention in a report he entitled "Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times" that "The primary beneficiaries of land grant research are agribusiness corporations. These interests envision rural America solely as a factory that will produce food, fiber and profits on a corporate assembly line extending from the fields through the supermarket checkout counters."

Whether one subscribes to this thesis, and I have some reservations about it because of other factors, it is a provocative suggestion which needs public discussion. At least the evidence with regard to fewer and larger farms, the use of agricultural chemicals in enormous quantities, mechanization, irrigation and a disposition to monocultures has demonstrably influenced natural habitats of a former era. Overall, this net result has been an irresistible decline in many farm game species, particularly in the western states.

The recently released report (June 1974 - Executive Summary) "Opportunities To Increase Red Meat Production From Ranges of the United States" by the U. S. Department of Agriculture indicates " . . . an anticipated increase

in range grazing requirements of 18% by 1980 and of 24% by year 1985." In view of the conditions reported on some of our western public range lands, this indicated trend becomes significant.

With regard to water dependent creatures as well, both state and federal policies and programs of water development have been massive and brutal to many species. The monumental impact of dams, channelization, diversion, land development, phreatophyte removal and pollution have relentlessly destroyed natural environments in which indigenous creatures evolved over periods of time. The findings and recommendations of the National Water Commission of a couple years ago comprehensively examined the structure and complexion of the myriad of laws, programs and policies having to do with our water resource. Implicit in their recommendations, albeit provocative to many traditional interests, were perceptions which held much of value to the welfare of fish and wildlife. The late Ken Hampton of the National Wildlife Federation in an article examining existing national water programs from the standpoint of environmental values observed some three years ago that "many authorities, both inside and outside of government ranks, have long recognized the need to completely revamp our national policy and procedures concerning development and use of water resources."

The recent joy ride on which we've all been participating through the profligate use of fossil-fueled energy has at long last reached the concern of the general public. Rather suddenly he sees he is faced with an environmental truth--he must recognize the inevitable trade-offs of such an orgy. Water requirements, thermal discharges, land disturbance, marine encroachments and other immediate on-site impacts have been going on apace. While they have been of deep concern to the professional wildlife manager throughout his career, the last decade has been witness to a broadened base of involvement by the average citizen.

Whether it be an oil pipeline in the Arctic or strip mining of western coal; the demolition of a residium of a free-flowing stream or the dumping of over 1,000,000 tons of industrial wastes off-shore every month, we are witness to a growing concern about business as usual.

The thrust of what to many of us has seemed blind exploitation of our environment has spawned an extreme in the other direction with the espousment of a "no-growth" principle, extreme preservation concepts and a host of ecologically questionable doctrines by sincere disciples of wildlife.

Now we seem to be searching for some middle ground which more nearly approaches reality. It is within this shifting of priorities and our method of doing things that the place of wildlife will in part be determined. The swing of the pendulum from one extreme to the other is crying out for rational input from those who bear the cloak of a fisheries or wildlife professional.

The citizen environmental movement itself is currently spawning some problems which do not bode well for the very resources to which some allege devotion.

The anti-hunting movement, the coyote controversy, the competitive exploitation of western public range lands and forests and the explosive impact of off-road vehicles are merely manifestations of an urbanized society whose fractured philosophies suggest challenges to the professional resource manager which are perplexing and frustrating.

One could of course go on ad infinitum. Suffice it to say that the foregoing simply exemplify the occurrence of events which have triggered a re-evaluation of our industrial system, our economic priorities and our governmental structures.

You are all familiar with the spate of recent environmental legislation at both the federal and state level. Of equal importance has been the increasing disposition of our judicial system to speak to environmental issues. Many of our new statutes and court decisions have occurred during the past five years. They have broadened the dimension of support for environmental protection and thus the protection of fish and wildlife.

More recently however, a so-called backlash to this trend has developed. Coming at a time of economic and resource distress, it carries more leverage than it normally would. Such essential needs as land use planning, water and air quality standards with schedules of control and the updating of the organic acts under which important resource agencies operate are under attack. In short, fundamental policies for resource stewardship are in a state of flux.

You could properly ask--what does this have to do with the challenge of managing fish and wildlife? I believe it will largely determine the future destiny of these resources. I believe further that the professional fish and wildlife manager must, with his knowledge and experience involve himself in many of those affairs which fall outside of the direct and traditional areas of participation which demand his attention.

Because of our system of government and our method of decision making, the professional has not generally become too involved in the policies and issues beyond his own shop. There are exceptions however, and where he has--he has made contributions to the resources equal to those in his day to day work.

As a former government employee myself, I find this reluctance difficult to understand. In my experience I can tell you that I know of few important resource objectives achieved unless it was done through the tenacious and informed involvement of one or more citizen groups.

There is a need, I believe, for a much broader approach to all resource questions by those who have a devotion and dedication to the welfare of fish and wildlife. This does not mean just the layman environmentalist. It means concern by the professional with all land and water based programs. It means that a proposed sub-division or a range allotment, a timber sale or irrigation practice will receive the same attention as a winter waterfowl count or the length of trout season. In short it means that the professional must publicly foster with enthusiasm a doctrine of ecosystem management of all values of our land and water base.

Having made the foregoing remarks how do we assess the future, because this is where the challenge will be.

There are important events occurring with which we should all be concerning ourselves. I believe many of them hold values for the future of fish and wildlife.

The subject of land use planning has become a fashionable subject of both public and private concern. We are hearing about it from all levels of government and from every segment of society. Inherent in this current exercise are numerous opportunities for establishing a place for fish and wildlife. For example, most competent planning now going on is developing baseline data which includes at least some recognition of indigenous flora and fauna. Recognition is being given to environmental values and concerns are being noted for critical environmental areas.

A concept of "land banking" or the stockpiling of land, to be used only under a system of restraints to serve the public good is beginning to emerge.

The recognition of the importance of wildlife in urban areas for non-consumptive use is now an active element in numerous areas of the country. The U. S. Senate has been soliciting views on this same subject. Here and there states are adopting programs of assessing the economic, social and environmental impacts of public and private land-use decisions so that both costs and benefits can be determined before the fact.

We have new agencies of government and new citizen organizations who are now approaching the question of land and water use on a much more comprehensive basis than heretofore.

My own organization has extensively broadened its base of involvement both functionally and issue-wise. In addition to strengthening our primary mission of conservation education for example, we maintain a legal section which is currently involved in a number of actions dealing with corporate activities or executive decision in the resource area. Within the limits of our capability and time, we offer extensive input in a host of environmental issues. We often proceed in concert with kindred organizations on an issue of common concern. While most of these involvements do not deal directly with fish and wildlife, we are convinced that decisions made with regard to other objectives will in large measure determine where we go with fish and wildlife.

The current era is an exciting and challenging time. Our job is far more difficult than in any former era. It requires the highest order of technical excellence. It asks the best in judgmental responsibilities. It demands the most in devotion and dedication to the welfare of an important resource. It presents an array of opportunities to bring your knowledge and convictions to bear in important and fundamental resource decisions which will have a lasting influence on the resources with which you work.

The challenge objective is to awaken an apathetic public to the resource affairs of this country in a manner that embraces fish and wildlife as an integral part of every land and water area.

If we earnestly believe in our professional mission we have an obligation that transcends any disposition for detachment from that extra effort so urgently needed in today's world. I'm convinced that opportunity exists through the many citizen environmental groups in every state. I would suggest the opportunity is one of becoming a prominent part of any one of your choice. The personal challenge is to become an evangelist for a cause in which you believe.