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WILD LIFE RESEARCH AND OUR WATERFOWL SITUATION

Address by Paul G. Redington, Chief, Bureau of Biological Survey,
United States Department of Agriculture, before the Annual
Meeting of the Izaak Walton League of America,
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During the past year I have had ample opportunity to appreciate the power and influence of your organization. My contacts with your officers have been many and they have been pleasant and profitable. Nothing which the Biological Survey has asked from the Izaak Walton League has been refused. On the other hand, able support has been given to its work and the help given by the officers of your organization, from the President down, has enabled the Biological Survey to more constructively handle its own part in the wild life program.

I have spoken many times within the last year on the need for research as an essentiality in wild life administration. The possession of factual information is a sine qua non to progress in administration. The Federal Government can not alone be depended upon to solve the many problems in this wild life game. It is a matter for cooperation among all those agencies--States, Federal bureaus, associations, and individuals--who are trying to work out a coordinated program. To provide reliable and specific information to guide us in evolving the long-time programs of conservation which are the cherished hope of all people who are thinking in terms of the present and future enjoyment of our splendid heritage of wild life, is a very definite obligation. I am sure we all want to think of these things not alone from the standpoint of our own generation but from that of the generations which are to follow us. To make available to a great number of people the wholesome influences of the great outdoors, including the stimulus of wild life enjoyment, we should all make it our purpose to get before the public mind the whole picture of the situation and its essential requirements, and then to proceed to make this picture a living, working reality. A few examples of what the Biological Survey has embarked upon in connection with research activities in cooperation with other organizations may be of interest.

Among the pressing problems is the completion of the projected series of reports on food habits of migratory birds which so far as published cover only the shoal water or river ducks among the waterfowl and the phalaropes, avocets and stilts among the shore birds. All other groups of waterfowl, including the deep-water ducks, the brant, geese and swans, and among the shore birds the woodcock, snipes, sandpipers, curlews, plovers, etc., as well as all of the cranes, rails, gallinules and coots, and the doves and wild pigeons among the migratory game birds remain to be reported upon.

These investigations and reports are necessary to the best development of a migratory-bird-refuge program in order to permit us to appraise the food resources of areas available for refuges and to suggest improvements in these and other areas of importance to migratory birds. We have been going ahead, however, despite our present limited information with the systematic survey of lake and marsh areas to determine their value as feeding places, particularly for wild fowl. We have completed the work in the States of Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, Minnesota, and the upper peninsular of Michigan and have done similar work in scattered localities in many other States. Our program along this line will need to be extended and intensified so long as refuges for migratory birds are insufficient either in quality, area, or number.

Research on the food habits of migratory birds, nongame as well as game in some cases, is necessitated by complaints of damage by these birds to crops and other property. As a rule such charges of damage are investigated on the ground by representatives of the Biological Survey in order to obtain information on which we can intelligently decide whether the protected status of the birds concerned shall be modified. Examples of this sort of situations are the relation of fish-eating birds to food and game fished about fish hatcheries, on protected streams and other places where constructive efforts are being made to increase the supply of fishes; relations of the bobolink or rice bird to cultivated rice in the South Atlantic States; of gulls, to blueberries in Maine; and of wild ducks to rice in Arkansas and California.

Among conditions affecting wild fowl, none has seemed more important in recent years than the epidemics which have caused the death of such large numbers of these birds in some of the Western States. The Biological Survey has done considerable work on these outbreaks in the past resulting in definite diagnosis of the trouble in the Bear River Marshes as alkali poisoning, and the Survey hopes to pursue research along these lines until the cause and possible remedies of western duck maladies in all of their phases are worked out.

The propagation of migratory wild fowl is another subject demanding research since only a very few species have thus far been propagated on a quantity basis. The Biological Survey hopes not only to keep in touch with results being obtained in this direction at game farms in this and other countries but hopes to add as a result of its own research to achievements in game-bird propagation. As time goes on it will be necessary to produce directly more and more of the game crop we expect to harvest, and this means that propagation will have to be vastly increased. At the same time in whatever degree that propagation is successful it serves a very desirable purpose in removing some of the pressure upon the wild stock of migratory game birds.

A commission appointed by the Chairman of the National Conference on Outdoor Recreation to report on the condition of the elk in the Jackson Hole country in Wyoming, urged that more thorough study be made of the conditions affecting them. The need has long been recognized for thoroughgoing study of herds of unrestrained elk and other big game animals to obtain information essential to their successful management and protection of big game under wild conditions in the forest, on the range, and on reservations. Within the past year the Biological Survey has detailed an experienced field biologist to undertake studies of elk in the Jackson Hole region, in which are situated the lands recently made a part of the Elk Refuge through the generosity of the Izaak Walton League. This investigation is far more comprehensive in its scope and purposes than any that has been undertaken before. It will include a survey of the condition of the animals with reference to physiographic features and vegetation, the feeding habits, and all factors governing the increase or decrease of the numbers or otherwise affecting the welfare of the animals. This study should afford information that is essential to effective management of this herd and of the successful establishment of herds in other localities where stocking might be considered desirable.

It is planned to undertake as rapidly as possible similar studies of deer, antelope, mountain sheep, and mountain goats, in order that programs may be worked out for the conservation of these animals or restocking of depleted areas or other localities where their introduction would be desirable.

Waltonians have shown very active interest in the legislation before Congress known as the McNary-McSweeney Bill. Your president and other officers appeared in Washington before the respective committees of the House and the Senate to urge the enactment of this bill. They did so because they appreciated the need for a more comprehensive program of research in forestry and biology than has heretofore been in effect. This bill includes an authorization for an appropriation of \$150,000 for biological research, the objectives of this research being the establishment of better knowledge of those relationships which exist between forests and wild life. That the efforts of your organization, taken together with the support given by many other interested bodies throughout the United States, were effective may be denoted by the fact, according to my understanding, that this bill has been given a clear list from a financial standpoint by the Budget Bureau; has been favorably reported on by the committee of the Senate; and is now under consideration by the House committee. We are all hopeful that the bill may be put on the statute books at this session of Congress.

In order that we might proceed more intelligently with those duties of regulation and administration which are imposed upon us under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, less than a year^{ago} plans were developed for the organization of a waterfowl census with a view to obtaining essential information regarding the abundance, distribution, and movement of ducks, geese, swans, and coots. Already organization work has been done by a representative of the Survey in all of the South Atlantic and Gulf States, except Mississippi, and in most of the States west of the Mississippi River. A most gratifying response has been made to the effort to enlist the support of individuals and organizations in securing this much

needed information. The Izaak Walton League of America has assisted most effectively in the organization of the work not only through its national but also through its State and local units. State agencies are cooperating to a very large extent, as well as many other bureaus of the Federal Government. The list of cooperators now numbers nearly three thousand, and the average number of monthly reports received by the Survey is in the neighborhood of fourteen hundred. There are observers in every State of the Union, in six of the Canadian provinces, and in Alaska and Mexico.

The purposes of this census are, I think, fully appreciated and the methods adopted are bringing in more complete information regarding waterfowl throughout the country than has heretofore been available. I have taken the liberty of Posting _____, where they can be seen by Waltonians, three maps which show in a graphic way important features

regarding the location and movements of waterfowl. I think I can assure the members of the League, as I have assured other organizations and many individuals, that if the information derived as a result of this census shows the need for more protection of the waterfowl of this country than is given under the present regulations such action will be unhesitatingly recommended to the Secretary of Agriculture. Having the information which we fully expect to derive from the census, we shall be in a position, I believe, to reconcile the factional differences which have heretofore presented themselves when further restrictions on those who take waterfowl for sport have been suggested.

The bird-banding work continues to be a most important factor in securing specific information on distribution and migration. Over one thousand volunteer cooperators serving without pay are actively interested in the banding work throughout the United States and in Canada. The work naturally divides itself into two fields, both of which are of interest to Waltonians, and others who are interested in the great outdoors. This includes first the marking of game birds and second the banding of nongame birds for which there is no open shooting season. Sportsmen of America are primarily concerned with the game birds, while hundreds of thousands of other people are interested in the other group.

Since the year 1920 nearly 29,000 ducks and geese have been marked with Biological Survey bands, and 5,000 of these have been subsequently killed by hunters. You can well appreciate the value of information derived by the operation of this system. It is proving exceedingly helpful in accurately defining the migration route of many species. An interesting example of this is found in return records of ducks banded by a cooperator located at Ellinwood, Kansas, in the vicinity of the justly famous Cheyenne Bottoms. Ducks banded at this point were retaken in sixteen different States, three provinces of Canada and in Alaska and Mexico.

Study thus far made indicates that there is a surprising consistency in the yearly percentage of the returns that are received, giving ground for the belief that by obtaining a reasonably accurate estimate of the total number of ducks and geese killed in North America in any one shooting season it will prove possible by a percentage computation based on the records of banded birds which have been killed to arrive at a good working estimate of the total population for that year. This should prove a helpful supplement to data now being obtained through the waterfowl census work.

The establishment of sanctuaries for birds will do more for their welfare than any other/thing. While restrictions are necessary, I feel that I am safe in saying that they take second place to a carefully worked out system of refuges, and I am glad to say that progress has been made in this respect within the last year. In the first place, I am glad to tell you that because of the unanimity of interest and support behind the proposed reflooding program on the Bear River Marshes in Utah, legislation looking to this end has been passed by both Houses of Congress and a fund of \$350,000 has been authorized to be appropriated to provide additional areas of fresh water for the waterfowl in that famous concentration area. It is expected that this amount of money will furnish new fresh-water areas 45,000 acres in extent. Notable among the backers of this program has been the Izaak Walton League. Your officers and your chapters have worked indefatigably in support of this legislation, and you most all feel a thrill of satisfaction over the progress made.

Again, your officers have worked closely with the Biological Survey and with officers of the State of Kansas in bringing before Congress the need for the establishment of a Federal migratory bird refuge on the Cheyenne Bottoms in Kansas. Legislation to provide a fund of \$350,000 to make the Cheyenne Bottoms a permanent refuge for waterfowl is pending in Congress.

It will be of interest to you to know also that there is certain legislation pending in Congress which if enacted will permit us to proceed more rapidly toward the completion of the purchase of land within the limits of the Upper Mississippi River Wild Life and Fish Refuge, which was conceived and made possible by the influence of the Izaak Walton League of America.

I want to express my personal regret that it was found necessary, after careful investigation of all the elements on the ground, to put away from further consideration the reflooding of Lower Klamath Lake, in Oregon and California. I believe the reasons for this are so well known as not to need comment here. The fact was that the water necessary for reflooding was not available because of prior appropriation for agricultural and power use. We are investigating in that general vicinity other areas which we believe lend themselves well to refuge purposes and are hopeful of securing some concrete results in providing larger

areas for feeding, breeding and resting grounds for waterfowl there.

One action of the League which was appreciated by the Biological Survey to the full was the quick response made by your officers when we called upon them to aid us in abating a bad situation which existed in one of the Central States where violations of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act were numerous and where our enforcement officers needed additional help. Attempts had been made to do away with our game warden in this territory and to demolish his new power boat. Letters were sent out by the Izaak Walton League to all of the chapters in the State in question pointing out the situation that faced the game warden and urging the members of the various chapters as a part of their duty to put the strength of their organizations and their moral support behind the Federal game warden, and I want to assure you at this time of our very deep appreciation of the action of the League in this respect. You will be glad to know that our warden reported within the past two weeks that there have been fewer violations of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act this spring than heretofore in his recollection, and that his way has been made much easier by the support given him by the Izaak Walton League. Incidentally he reports more waterfowl in this region during the spring flight than he had seen during his period of service in the State.

I should like to enlist the interest of the Izaak Walton League in problems confronting the Alaska Game Commission in its comparatively new work in the Territory of Alaska. The Alaska Game Law, which is administered under the direction of the Secretary of Agriculture through a commission consisting of five men, four of whom are Alaskans and appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture and the fifth a member of the Biological Survey who acts as executive officer of the commission, has now been operating for three years.

The Alaskan people have taken kindly to the idea of more adequate protection for the notable array of big game animals and fur bearers in the Territory because they appreciate that under the proper handling of these resources good results will be returned to the Territory, both from the economic and the esthetic points of view; and because they realize that some of the species of big game, notably the caribou, must constitute for years the principal source of food supply in many portions of the Territory. I have said before other organizations, and I repeat it now, that seldom has such an opportunity been given to those interested in the perpetuation of our big game animals to unite their efforts in the establishment of a well-balanced and effective game administration program as can be done in the Territory of Alaska, where such species as the Alaskan brown bear, the moose, the mountain sheep, the goat, and the caribou are present still in comparatively large numbers and if properly protected will furnish food and enjoyment forever not alone to the people of Alaska but to those from the United States and other countries who are constantly going to the Territory in larger numbers every year. I bespeak for the Alaska Game Commission the active aid of the Izaak Walton League in the work the Commission is doing in Alaska.

In closing I want to record my feeling that if I can judge from the happenings of the last year, having been in intimate touch with the officers of the Izaak Walton League in connection with many matters of large import to the wild life of the country and having seen concrete results obtained through the coordinated action of the officers of the League with the chapters, I would say that the future for the League as a power in the councils of the Nation in the affairs in which it is primarily interested is secure. The record of this last year is, in my opinion, a very notable one and the members of the League have a right to feel proud of its achievements.

It is hardly necessary to assure you finally that the Biological Survey welcomes the opportunity to work with the League in the cause of wild-life conservation.