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PROTECT WILD FOWL FROM RAVAGES OF FUTURE DROUGHTS, REDINGTON URGES

America's wild fowl are in the most precarious situation in their history, Paul G. Redington, chief of the Bureau of Biological Survey, U. S. Department of Agriculture, told the International Association of Game, Fish, and Conservation Commissioners at their annual convention at Hot Springs, Ark., September 25. He said that droughts which deplete the numbers of game may be expected from time to time, and he advocated reduction of the annual kill as a means of maintaining a sufficient number of birds to withstand periodic droughts.

Mr. Redington discussed the recent order restricting the hunting season to one month and gave some of the reasons for this. He recalled the warnings of a year ago by the Canadian game authorities, who predicted poor hunting for the 1930 season, a prediction which proved true. He declared that, although the birds appeared plentiful in certain places, this was because a lack of water in their normal ranges compelled them to concentrate during the flight and on their wintering grounds where food and water were still available.

The chief of the Biological Survey made a plea for more control in shooting wild fowl. If they are to withstand recurring droughts, it is necessary that they be maintained in sufficient numbers.

This can be controlled only by effective regulation and limitation of the kill of birds, which, Mr. Redington said has been between 12 and 15 million ducks annually. "Laws to control the annual kill are as vitally necessary as laws to protect the habitat of wild creatures," he said.

Reasons for twice shortening the 1931 hunting season were explained by the speaker. He said that competent representatives of the Biological Survey were in the field during the hunting season last year, following the drought. Their findings indicated a shortage in game and were the basis for the recommendation for shortening the open season by two weeks, which was adopted as an amendment to the regulations in March, 1931.

This year, there was no relief from the drought in the Prairie Provinces of Canada and in the Northwestern United States west to the Cascades. Through courtesy of Canadian officials a representative of the Biological Survey investigated the breeding range of the ducks and other waterfowl in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta as far north as Lake Athabaska. This showed that the grounds were still dry and there were almost no evidences of young birds over thousands of square miles in a region that in normal years is the nursery of a large part of the wild fowl that have been accustomed to winter in the United States. "In this vast region the breeding season of 1931 was almost a complete failure," Mr. Redington said. Conditions in the Northwestern United States were similar to those in Western Canada.

Mr. Redington dismissed the belief that the wild fowl have moved to different breeding grounds. He said, "Assumptions more or less freely indulged in of late that the ducks have repaired to substitute nesting places are without foundation in fact, and nothing to support these assumptions has been found by the Canadian Government. A suitable substitute region would have to be nearly equal in size to the abandoned district and no region comparable to the affected areas of Manitoba,

Saskatchewan, Alberta, Montana, North and South Dakota and eastern Washington and Oregon is likely to be carelessly neglected or wholly overlooked."

The drought is only one of the factors that have diminished our wild fowl, Mr. Redington said. Two other important factors are the great numbers killed by gunners each season and the extensive areas of marsh and water destroyed by human occupation, drainage, and similar industrial activities. The effect of these influences has been gradual over many years and not noticeable from year to year. It required the drought to focus the attention upon the present critical plight of the wild fowl and the need for immediate and drastic action on their behalf.

Although man is obviously to blame for the loss of game through killing and the reduction of marsh and water areas, he is not to blame for the drought, Mr. Redington said. He declared that droughts are unavoidable, and said, "In our plan for the future administration of the wild-fowl problem we must apparently charge off as unavoidable the losses that from time to time will be caused by the cyclic recurrences of dry periods. The effect of great droughts on the wild fowl can be greatly minimized, however, by persistent operations intelligently conducted to restore or to improve the local water areas, which implies a continuation of the acquisition of refuges, begun under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act. It also implies the extension of such work far beyond the limitations of that particular law."

During the last two years contracts have been made for the acquisition of more than 111,000 acres of refuges for migratory wild fowl in California, Colorado, Florida, Nebraska, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Through Executive order approximately 65,000 acres have been set aside in public lands for similar purposes. These lands are in California, Montana, Nevada, and Oklahoma. This gives a total refuge area of more than 176,000 acres in nine States.