



# DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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### SECOND LARGEST REFUGE IN U.S. MAY AGAIN HAVE ABUNDANCE OF WILDLIFE

When Horace Greeley told the young man which way to go and river steamers were carrying cargoes up and down the Missouri River, the rolling prairies of Montana had so much wildlife that even Baron Munchausen wouldn't believe it.

But pioneer guns turned the prairie into a wildlife graveyard, and wildlife disappeared. Now, thanks to a group of U. S. and State agencies, scores of species of wild birds and mammals again may live on an area that formerly teemed with denizens of forest, field, and stream.

Early settlers living near the junction of the Musselshell and Missouri Rivers thought nothing of taking their muzzle-loading rifles and going out to bag buffalo, elk, grizzly bear, and antelope.

For diversion, they might bring down a wolf, a fox, or perhaps a mule or white-tailed deer. The better shots rode through the Billie Creek or Hell Creek areas to stalk an Audubon bighorn sheep.

Those were the days of plenty—game and fur animals, sharp-tailed grouse, and sage hens. These animals were there for any man who could draw a bead and hit his mark. And then the old story of depletion repeated itself on the Montana prairie as it did elsewhere.

The river steamers disappeared from the Missouri above the junction of Musselshell River, and the buffalo, bear, elk, wolf, and mountain sheep moved on to areas where hunting pressure was less. Except the Audubon mountain sheep. That animal became a paragraph in history, on the page of extinct animals.

Now outdoor enthusiasts are watching what they hopefully expect will be another Twentieth Century "miracle" in wildlife conservation. Within the next decade, wildlife on the rolling prairies may be abundant once more. Things will be like they were in the "old days," except that the extinct Audubon sheep will be replaced by other species of mountain sheep, and hunters' guns will be used judiciously.

The rejuvenation of the Montana prairies above and below the Missouri-Musselshell Rivers junction began when the Engineers Corps of the U. S. Army impounded the Missouri River waters with a huge earthdam.

The waters of the Missouri and even the Musselshell backed up to form a huge reservoir. The Fort Peck Dam in northeastern Montana started a conservation boom.

#### Second Largest Refuge in U. S.

Federal agencies moved in and the cooperative conservation movement began. Today, the Fort Peck area is administered cooperatively by the U. S. Army Engineers, who manage the flood-control and navigation problems; the Grazing Service, which attends to grazing lands; and the Fish and Wildlife Service, of the United States Department of the Interior, which, with the cooperation of the Montana Fish and Game Commission, administers the area as a game refuge.

The wildlife restoration project is now underway with the setting aside of some 970,000 acres of the Fort Peck Dam area as a national wildlife refuge, the Fort Peck Game Range.

Second largest national wildlife refuge in the United States, the Fort Peck Game Range is 62 miles long and 4 to 22 miles wide. It goes through six counties: Valley, Fergus, Garfield, Petroleum, Phillips, and McCone. The largest refuge in the United States is the Desert Game Range, a 2,000,000-acre area in Nevada.

"This place has great possibilities," declares Albert Van S. Pulling, manager of the Fort Peck Game Range, "Wildlife once flourished here, and we hope to make it as abundant as it once was. We will have to reintroduce some of the species that have been extirpated and then manage the area on a scientific basis. But it can be done."

Mr. Pulling believes the Fort Peck Game Range will soon abound with wildlife. Mule deer already are abundant throughout the more rugged portions of the area. Plains white-tailed deer, however, are limited to the bottom lands in the upper stretches of the refuge.

Though elk no longer are found on the game range, suitable habitat for these big-game animals is found on the western end of the area.

The last mountain sheep was taken out of this country about 20 years ago, but it is still good mountain sheep country, the refuge manager declared, recommending that mountain sheep be introduced into some sections of the wildlife refuge.

The Hungarian partridge, an exotic game bird introduced into Montana years ago, is abundant and increasing rapidly.

Another popular game bird that will be benefited by the management of the area as a wildlife refuge will be the prairie sharp-tailed grouse. There are not many grouse on the Fort Peck Game Range now but, since this is in the true range of that prairie game bird, the population can be built up.

Sage hens already are plentiful. "All we have to do is increase the present population and see that only the surplus is harvested," he said.

#### Ample Game for all Outdoor Enthusiasts

When the Fort Peck ~~Game~~ Range was established, some individuals were apprehensive about hunting privileges. Service officials explained that while hunting depleted the area, the establishment of the range as a wildlife sanctuary did not mean that all the wildlife in northeastern Montana would be herded into the range boundaries.

On the contrary things would be the other way round. For those who enjoy hunting, the range is actually an insurance for future hunting seasons.

"This in reality is a wildlife reservoir administered for the people by the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Montana Fish and Game Commission," Mr. Pulling explained. "Here are maintained the breeding stocks. Certain portions of the area will be opened to the public where the removal of surplus populations through controlled shooting will be permitted. If one wants to hunt them, the animals are there. If one wants to photograph them, that can be done too. The important point is that however one enjoys wildlife, a range operated along sound principles of game management will maintain an abundant supply of all species of animals for all citizens to enjoy today, tomorrow, and for as long as the wildlife and the land are managed intelligently."