

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES AND WILDERNESS

Presented by Daniel H. Janzen, Director, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Washington 25, D. C., before the Eighth Biennial Wilderness Conference in San Francisco, California, March 9, 1963

Six years ago, shortly after I became Director of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, I had the pleasure of appearing before your Fifth Biennial Wilderness Conference. My subject then was "Wildlife and Wilderness." I looked over that speech several days ago and almost decided it would do for a repeat today. I said "almost," since today my assigned subject is "National Wildlife Refuges and Wilderness," and I assume you want a report that is a bit more specific than a mere expression of wildlife and wilderness philosophy, which was my subject at your meeting six years ago. If you need a refresher course on philosophy I can always furnish you a copy of that speech since most of it is still applicable today.

The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife is responsible, under the general direction of the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, for the management of migratory birds. In connection with this program it operates a nationwide National Wildlife Refuge System which now covers some 28½ million acres. These refuges fall into three somewhat distinctive groups. Over 200 are for migratory waterfowl and other water birds. Those established for other migratory birds, often including colonial nesting areas for endangered species, include nearly 50 areas. The big game animals are protected on 14 big game refuges, 5 game ranges, and 3 large Alaska wildlife ranges created in 1960.

In this latter group of refuges are contained the larger areas which qualify to a greater or lesser degree as having wilderness character. You will note I use the expression "wilderness character" rather than "wilderness area." This is because of the basic difficulty in the past several years in agreeing on a specific definition of a wilderness area.

This Bureau was confronted with this problem when the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission requested information to be used by the Wildland Research Center of the University of California in their study of wilderness for the ORRC report. In presenting our information for the Commission, we stated that none of the National Wildlife Refuges is administered as a wilderness area. We suggested that some portions of the larger, more isolated Game Ranges do have wilderness characteristics but the management of such areas for the benefit of wildlife is the paramount purpose. We pointed out that this may require the manipulation of habitat and the modification of other environmental factors.

With this qualification of management, we then reported the five Game Ranges as containing some characteristics which would warrant their being described as "roadless areas" or "wildland." We followed the same criteria as was used by the Bureau of Land Management in considering no area under 100,000 acres. The study as undertaken by the Wildland Research Center did not include Alaska.

In reporting on the Game Ranges we stated that three of them were established primarily to benefit the desert bighorn sheep. In this category we included the 660,000-acre Kofa and 860,000-acre Cabeza Prieta Game Ranges in Arizona and the 2,188,000-acre Desert Game Range in Nevada. The 578,000-acre Charles Sheldon Antelope Range in Nevada was included, as was also the 950,000-acre Fort Peck Game Range in Montana, which incidentally in the past 30 days has been renamed the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Range.

The only other area on which information was provided was the 331,000-acre Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge in Georgia. We pointed out that even here it was necessary to take drastic action in controlling fires which burned over a considerable part of the area during a period of low water levels a few years ago. The seriousness of the fire was increased because the area had been handled as a wilderness area without the usual protective measures. Since that catastrophe, a perimeter fire break of about 250 miles in length has been constructed around the refuge and a low sill has been constructed across the Suwannee River to regulate water levels and to prevent a recurrence of the dried out swamp situation which was primarily responsible for the deep organic soil burn which destroyed so much of the cypress swamp.

In the judgment of the Wildland Research Center, parts of two of the Game Ranges and part of Okefenokee Refuge measured up to their wilderness standards. We believe that each of the five Game Ranges may have wilderness potentialities, although this decision must rest upon the final definition of wilderness areas.

In addition to the five Game Ranges and Okefenokee, there are seven areas in Alaska which will need to be considered in a wilderness system. These are the Aleutian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, 2,720,235 acres; Arctic National Wildlife Range, 8,900,000 acres (which incidentally was in the proposal stage 6 years ago when I was here and the subject of much discussion); Clarence Rhode National Wildlife Range, 1,890,000 acres; Izembek National Wildlife Range, 415,000 acres; Kenai National Moose Range, 2,057,197 acres; Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge, 1,815,000 acres; and the Nunivak National Wildlife Refuge, 1,109,384 acres. We rather believe the wilderness classification consideration in the National Wildlife Refuge System will be limited to these 13 areas.

There are, of course, many acres of habitat within the National Wildlife Refuge System sufficiently unique to warrant their preservation as "natural areas." The designation of 20 or more such areas, principally unique stands of timber, was submitted in 1948 to the Society of American Foresters. The group of natural areas was reviewed by the Society of American Foresters in 1956 preparatory to their issuing a list, which included Federal, State, and local areas. Since that time, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife has designated other types of natural areas, such as grasslands on the Nebraska sandhill refuges.

We are in the process of preparing long-range development programs for many of the most important waterfowl refuges. The planners have been instructed to carefully watch for and identify unique parcels of wildland, no matter how small, to see if they warrant special preservation measures, even if some of the waterfowl habitat potentials of the refuge might be sacrificed thereby.

Six years ago I said, and I quote:

"Wilderness is absolutely essential to a number of our interesting and important species of North American wildlife. Those who have studied the declining numbers of grizzly bear and the virtual disappearance of the wolverine from most of its former range know that these species cannot exist in close proximity to man. The American bison was largely dependent upon the wild grasslands which once covered thousands of square miles of the western United States. They cannot now roam wild except in an area comparatively free of man. The ivory-billed woodpecker is now an outstanding example of a vanished species of North American wildlife that was entirely dependent upon the original hardwood forests of the river bottoms which once covered a vast area in the Atlantic coastal plain and the lower Mississippi River valley. As these hardwood forests were logged and the ecology changed by flood control and drainage, and as the land was cleared to make way for agriculture and industry, this beautiful and unique bird disappeared.

"So we have more than just a sentimental interest in preserving wilderness. From a hard-headed practical standpoint, a wildlife manager knows that certain natural wildlife habitat must be saved if he is to fulfill his responsibilities to those wildlife species that can survive only if comparatively undisturbed by man and in an environment to their liking."

But I also said:

"The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as a Federal conservation agency responsible for administering Federal fish and wildlife legislation, has a broad range of responsibility affecting directly or indirectly almost every species of fish and wildlife found in this Nation--and many of these species which are most valuable to the public for hunting purposes thrive on habitat altered by man. For this reason, the Service is, to a large extent, in the 'managed habitat' business.

"A review of Federal and State programs in the general field of wildlife management in recent years will reveal that these programs have been directed toward the manipulation of environmental factors designed to increase the yield of game for public recreational use. Game management, in other words, has been concentrating on techniques that will compensate in some degree for the loss of wildlands, and supply the demand by a rapidly expanding human population for reasonable opportunities to enjoy our wildlife resources in various ways. And we must remember that with changes in land use there has come a realization that a well-integrated program of multiple land use is beneficial to many species of wildlife. The relatively large populations of deer presently found in many States are the product of forest management practices. The ring-necked pheasant has flourished under land use practices which on the other hand have caused the prairie chicken

to disappear from much of its former range. It is evident that we must strike a balance somewhere between multiple use and the preservation of wilderness to meet the varied and complex requirements of our North American wildlife. We have attempted to achieve such a balance in the National Wildlife Refuge Program."

While this was quoted from my speech of six years ago, I still believe the situation is the same today, but I want to assure you that our minds are open to suggestions and I hope you will point out to us where you feel we may have overlooked an opportunity to preserve a unique piece of wildlife habitat or a wilderness area on a National Wildlife Refuge or Game Range. There is a lot of feeling for wilderness in the Fish and Wildlife Service.

President Kennedy's interest in behalf of wilderness is well known to you as is the favorable attitude of Secretary Udall so I need not dwell on that. However, I would remind you of another recreational measure before Congress which has a different purpose than the wilderness bills but which will, if passed, help the general cause of outdoor recreation. I am referring to the proposed Land and Water Conservation Fund bill which is part of the President's recreation program and which would provide funds, through car stamps and otherwise, for the development of these recreational areas which should be developed.

In closing, I want to assure you that our Bureau stands ready to cooperate in every way in the establishment of a National Wilderness System which, in turn, will help preserve a remnant of many species of wildlife which require this type of environment.

I am quite confident that we are in full agreement with your objectives.

x x x