

Because of its very high production as a result of supplemental feeding, its popularity among fishermen, and catch per unit effort, the channel catfish should be ranked as a most promising species for use as a sport fish in ponds. Research now in progress at the Agricultural Experiment Station of the Alabama Polytechnic Institute should provide needed data on the most desirable stocking and feeding rates, understocking or restocking, the use of other combinations of species, and related problems.

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

NEEDED—FEDERAL AID TO PUBLIC RELATIONS

By GUS ALBRIGHT
News Editor, Arkansas Game and Fish Department

Perhaps I should first explain the title of this discussion—"Needed, Federal-Aid To Public Relations."

I am not thinking in terms of legislation and/or federal formulas, such as are called for by the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson Acts. Rather, it is my hope to focus a share of attention on what I believe to be a shortcoming of the programs we already have working for us.

This shortcoming, as I see it, evolves around the one basic ingredient so vital to game and fish administrators today, if they are to "win friends and influence people." That ingredient is *Public Information*.

Acknowledging that factual information is the prime requisite to good public relations and since this particular discussion has to do with the participation (or lack of it) by our federal friends, my subject might be more bluntly termed, "The Fish and Wildlife Service Needs To Release More Information."

Now I'm aware that mine is not the first approach to this subject and I recall, as you do, that two years ago Mr. Ross Leffler, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife, on another occasion, met this challenge by acknowledging the Service's shortcomings in the field of Information and Education and announcing that, "in the future, greater emphasis will be placed on this phase of the program."

It is not my intention to reflect that our State programs have reached the ultimate in I & E programming. Far from it. Most of us on the State level still have a lot of "selling" before our administrators accept Information and Education as influencing factors in game and fish management. However, I sincerely believe we are farther along in this respect than our big federal brothers.

And right here I would like to point out that this business of keeping the public informed should be a partnership approach. If information services have a place in the professional management of game and fish resources, then surely these services should be favored the same attention in federal programming as on the State level. Why draw the line? After all, we are dealing with the same people and our objectives are the same.

But it appears that a line has been drawn. And although top-level federal policy making must bear the large share of responsibility for these informational shortages, the principal loss to those of us working with State programs lies within the realm of regional authority.

There has been noticeable improvement from the Washington headquarters, but apparently the arms of policy-making haven't reached to the regional level—and that's where we need it most.

We must tell the folks what's going on. I say "must"—at least, we'd better if we expect to gain ground in behalf of river basin objectives, migratory waterfowl needs, anti-drainage support and realistic approaches to growing insecticide and pesticide problems.

Here are a few Arkansas examples to explain more clearly what I mean.

Early in 1957, information from a private source revealed that the General Service Administration was in the process of disposing to private bidders a 4,000 acre Arkansas river island, known as Holla Bend.

This island, always a stop-over for geese each winter, had for several years been on Fish and Wildlife Service and Game and Fish Department "file" as an ideal location for a goose refuge.

But these reports and recommendations were so securely filed away that our own Information-Education Division didn't even know about them. And certainly the public was not informed. In fact, when it came to light that the GSA selling date was drawing close, with grazing interests having the upper hand, and an all-out effort was launched to obtain the island as a federal refuge, many of the local people favored the grazing interests.

They didn't know enough about it and were a little miffed at the sudden splurge of pressure that was thrust upon them. It was a job to win them over. But in the final analysis, it *was* the local people who saved the island for the Service. The point is—had the earlier reports and recommendations been made public, it wouldn't have been necessary to "push the panic button." Yes, the lack of public information at the right time almost lost what is now known as the Holla Bend Island National Goose Refuge.

Then we had this experience.

One of the best tailwater trout fisheries in the Nation has been developed on the White river below Bull Shoals dam in North Arkansas. It's largely a put-and-take operation, but the White river, being unique to any other stream in America for its overwhelming supply of foods, minerals and other habitat features favorable to rainbow trout, has rapidly gained national fame.

This river attracts many thousands of non-residents each year. The Department of The Interior has located one of its largest trout hatcheries there. But this year, because of the lack of proper information, the local community, the Arkansas Game and Fish Department and the Fish and Wildlife Service suffered a serious setback in public relations.

Last year the Service announced its trout stocking schedule for 1959. White river was to get over 500,000. But the hatchery, in only its second year of production, fell far short of its expected output—the result being that White river received only one-fifth of the scheduled allotment. This production failure was, of course, something that couldn't be helped—a fact the people would have accepted in good faith, had they been told at the time.

But the Game and Fish Department didn't even know about the trout shortage and later in the summer, when fishing fell off badly and it developed that the river was short of fish, our Department was caught in a bind. We had tried to convince the people that other factors were responsible for the poor fishing success.

Local people became hostile and all sorts of wild rumors were born. We were flooded with protests, both locally and out-of-state. Then the Service told what had actually happened. Once presented with the facts, the people began to cool off and today they are pretty much resolved to the circumstances.

But here again—had the public been given the facts to start with—we would have eliminated most of the criticism and confusion to which both agencies were subjected.

Another example—and we in Arkansas are in the middle of this one right today. It has to do with an hydroelectric plant being constructed on the Little Red River. It's called the Greers Ferry dam—a \$56 million project, 11% complete at this time.

In September 1957 the Service recommended to the Army Corps of Engineers that construction plans for the dam provide for warm water releases, the reasons being: (1) Eighty miles of river below the dam, not capable of supporting a cold water fishery, would be completely barren of fish life, if the dam was designed for cold water releases; (2) the fishery of White river, into which Little Red flows, would suffer severely from cold water releases.

These recommendations stayed "on file" for two years, during which time the public was never informed. About six weeks ago, after the Corps had started construction work (over-ruling the Service's recommendations), the people were told the story.

Now, everyone (except the Corps) is turning handsprings, holding meetings, wiring Congressmen and doing everything else possible to affect a change in the construction plans for the dam. But the chances aren't favorable.

Once more, if, when the Service made its report to the Corps in 1957, the public had also been informed, we wouldn't be in this sweat today.

There is another danger, a serious one, to this secret Service policy. It's catching! If, in our meetings and other transactions with Federal-Aid representatives, our State administrators and Commissioners are constantly pledged to this "not for publication" treatment, they are more liable to develop the same attitude about State programs. Most of us need help in the other direction.

The Fish and Wildlife Service, we all know, is of tremendous importance to our programs—becoming more so each day. Because of its direct associations with State projects and, more important, its responsible role with other federal agencies, the Service, in recent years, has rapidly gained a status of extreme prominence.

The Service is our one strong hope in Washington, where, without a doubt, the future's biggest conservation battles must be fought. But I sometimes wonder if this agency is not the biggest enemy to its own objectives.

We're kidding ourselves if we think we can compete, for example, with the Army Engineers and the Department of Agriculture for public favor by "file cabinet" tactics. In most instances, the public is sold that those agencies can do no wrong—that what they want they should get. And when we operate strictly on the "Q-T", we're playing right into their hands. If the Service is to sell its program, it has got to sell the people. *And the first step is to keep them informed.*

Show me one major Federal accomplishment, involving conflicting interests, where local public support was not the influencing factor. I have my first to see. We have to bring the people into these projects some time, so why wait until we are in trouble?

The public has both a right and a need to know what any Government agency is doing and why it is doing it. And only when the public is fully informed can the people act wisely to insure the continuance of worthwhile programs—or the abolishing of useless ones.

This quote from Mr. Leffler, addressing the North American Wildlife Conference in Washington, D. C., March 6, 1957:

"Faced with the paradox of providing more with less, there is—as never before—the need for public understanding. An informed public adjusts to reality. It follows, then, that the public, as well as cooperating agencies and Congress, should be fully informed of the Bureau's objectives, activities and progress. If this challenge is to be met, an effective program of Information and Education is essential. People will give the backing needed when they understand the problems and what needs to be done."

Then on April 14, 1959 at the 14th Annual Convention of the National Fisheries Institute, Mr. Leffler had this to say: "I feel we also have a responsibility to assist in any and every way possible to expedite the exchange of the information produced among agencies involved—both public and private."

In conclusion, *I especially wish to make this one point clear.* Any criticism I may have of the Fish and Wildlife Service's information policy is just that—a criticism of policy—and nothing more. After all, this is within the family and I feel that those of us working with State agencies must share in any guilt of neglect to this responsibility.

You may be sure that we in Arkansas have the finest of working relations with our regional Fish and Wildlife Service office. I doubt that any State has better. Perhaps the basis for this problem (if it is a problem) lies in the fact that Information-Education is the baby in the organizational parade.

First, there was protection, then propagation, then management. Research came next and now—as probably the final tool in the conservation workshop—Information-Education. Federal-Aid to public relations? Let's face it—we're talking about an orphan of the orphan.