

LAW ENFORCEMENT'S PLACE IN A MODERN CONSERVATION AGENCY

By

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"Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

These words were given man thousands of years ago in the book of Genesis. Today, man, despite many shortcomings, has been fruitful. He has multiplied and he has replenished the earth. Man has gone far enough toward subduing the earth that he has now entered the heavens in the form of a space capsule called "Friendship 7" or "Voskhod." Dominion has largely been established over every living thing.

As we move into the space age, our pursuit of material wealth and gadgets is now threatening to destroy our wildlife and its environments even while we subscribe to codes and campaigns to preserve at least a fragment of the unspoiled wilderness. Far too many people seem to be attempting to change the wilderness, as fast as possible, into stacks of lumber, amps of electricity, bushels of corn, pounds of meat, rows of houses and piles of cash. People must be made to realize that they can no longer regard natural resources as commodities which are owned, as a pair of hunting boots are owned, to be used, worn out, and then thrown away.

Wildlife conservation agencies, both on a State and Federal level, are obligated to the sportsmen of our country to move forward with the times, but some are content to stand and watch the rest of the world go by. This seems to be especially true in the law enforcement field. We, who are in law enforcement, owe it to ourselves to see that our departments move with the times.

Some nine years after the end of the American Revolution, in December of 1790, the State of Georgia passed its first wildlife conservation law. This law declared that it was illegal to hunt deer at night with "firelight" and provided a penalty of five English Pounds and 30 lashes, "well laid." As far as I can determine, the first of the enforcement personnel showed up ninety-five years later in 1885 when the General Assembly of Georgia authorized the Commissioner of Agriculture to appoint as many "fish wardens" as was necessary to enforce the fish propagation law. This man's compensation was to be ½ of the fines from the cases that he made. Since that time, Georgia's enforcement program has come a long way; but, we, like most others, still have a long way to go to catch up with the times.

We are members of a profession of which I am proud to belong. With all due consideration to our many fine biologists, we all know that the very duties of the law enforcement division make it the backbone of any department, both from a revenue and manpower standpoint. Some of the finest men to be found in any conservation department will be found in the enforcement division. I, for one, am getting sick and tired of hearing people, both inside our department and out, refer to our enforcement personnel as "that damn game warden."

Much of the abuse which we have had to take in the past is of our own doing. For years enforcement has been the political football that was kicked around when some politician came up with some fair

haired boy for whom he wanted to find a job. If he had requested a job as a biologist he would have been told, in no uncertain terms, that his candidate was not qualified for such a job. But when this same politician brings this same fair haired boy in and requests a job as an enforcement officer, he is put to work with the remark, "he can't hurt anything in enforcement," even tho all concerned might well know that the applicant is not qualified for such work. This political parasite is given a gun, a badge, a uniform, a vehicle and an expense account and turned loose on the poor unsuspecting sportsmen as a front line representative of wildlife conservation in his state.

To many people this man was, "The Game & Fish Department." Since the public must depend on such men for the bulk of the information they get concerning the conservation agency, it naturally follows that the impression this man makes on the public determines the opinion which the public forms of the conservation agency. We in enforcement have been content to stand by and never open our own mouth for fear that our position would be jeopardized. We have complained about enforcement being the "red headed stepchild" of the conversation field, but we have made no attempt to try to improve or correct this situation.

Today, only 15 states out of the 50 in this nation have a pre-commission training program for their enforcement personnel. To make a good enforcement officer out of a man, we must give him training in investigation, search and seizure, court-room procedure, first aid, public speaking and self protection. Even the most departments recognize the need for this training, in many departments, when the money gets a little short and people begin to look for a place to economize, training is one of the very first "non-essential" items to be dropped. Such action can only be called "penny wise and pound foolish" when we all know that ways can be found, through improved purchasing practices and a general all-around economy program, to finance at least a minimum training program for new personnel.

Two states have no educational requirements at all for applicants for enforcement work and one state requires only an 8th grade education; and, yet, we all know that it is far more desirable to have a small number of adequately trained, educated and highly competent officers than to have the woods full of untrained, uneducated and uninterested men. In order for a man to make a good enforcement officer, he must have education and training. He must know his territory and not be afraid of hard work and long hours. Such a man must be willing to spend days and nights trying to catch one particular violator. And after spending these long days and nights in apprehending this violator, the acid test comes when this officer hears an indifferent judge or jury release this violator with some mild rebuke. It takes a good man to withstand a situation such as this without showing his disgust in some way. This is only one reason why our work requires the services of men with high standards of courage, integrity, initiative, extremely good judgment, and above all, a high sense of dedication to duty. In the public's eye, this man must be a diplomat, able to settle differences between the hunter and the landowner or between the power boater and the fisherman, and yet, he must make each man believe that he won his point in the dispute. If he is neat, he's conceited. If he is careless, he's a bum. If he's pleasant, he's a flirt. If he's brief, he's an old grouch. He must make decisions in an instant that an attorney will take weeks or even months, to defend. If he hurries, he overlooks things. If he takes his time, he's lazy. If you happen to get caught, he had it in for you. If he's energetic, he's trying to impress somebody. If he's deliberate, he's too slow to catch a cold.

He must be an expert in first aid. He's expected to arrive first at the scene of an accident, make a diagnosis of the victim's condition, start breathing, stop bleeding, apply splints to broken bones and send

the injured person home with scarcely a limp. He must be an athlete and be able to subdue men twice his size and half his age without damage to himself or his uniform or without violating their civil rights and without using undue force. If you strike him, he's a coward. If he strikes you back, he's a bully. If you see him first, he's a bonehead. If he sees you first, he's just lucky. If he gets promoted, he's got pull. If he doesn't get promoted . . . well, you knew he wasn't worth a damn all the time. And finally, he must be economical because he has to live on what a game warden makes.

According to a recent survey which I made of the 50 United States, the starting salary for an enforcement officer in this country ranges from a low of \$275.00 per month to a high of \$600.00 per month. This means that our national average starting pay for an enforcement officer is approximately \$350.00 per month. The maximum pay for non-supervisory personnel ranges from a low of \$325.00 to a high of \$900.00 per month. This is a national average of approximately \$496.00 per month.

Most states are like we in Georgia, severely understaffed. Our wildlife enforcement officers are patrolling a territory of about 500 square miles per man, yet, the national average stands at 1493 square miles with South Carolina and Minnesota each low with a 30 square mile average and Alaska high with a 15,000 square mile average. Even a large and effective wildlife enforcement group can police only a small per cent of present-day sportsmen. The answer to the problem of enforcement must, in part, lie in education. However, education alone is not the answer. Someone has said that the best proof that education alone is not the answer is to look at our highways. In spite of all the warning signs, grisly photographs, TV shows, lectures and newspaper articles on the subject of traffic safety, we continue to kill and injure more of our people on our highways than ever before in history. It is the jail sentence and the loss of one's drivers license that stops the drunken and reckless driver in his tracks. The same holds true with the game and fish violators. Strict enforcement, followed by court action with heavy fines, jail sentences and forfeiture of equipment used in the violations, have made more conservationists than all other methods combined.

Any subject has two sides, and on the subject of cases there is another side. We still have those departments who rate their enforcement personnel by the number of cases they make. An officer should not be rated on this alone. He should be rated on his ability to satisfy the sportsmen of his area by keeping them informed of changes in department policies and regulations through meetings with various sportsmen's groups as well as civic clubs. He should be rated on his ability to handle complaints and keeping complaints to a minimum. He should be rated, not on the number of cases he makes, but on the kind of cases he makes, and, whether he uses sound judgment in making cases. He should be rated on his willingness to obey the orders of his superiors and to adhere to departmental regulations. He should be rated on his willingness to support the policies of the department, on his personal appearance and on his willingness to cooperate with his fellow officers and other department personnel. But, again, he should not be rated solely on the number of cases he makes.

I don't believe that we should ever attempt to compare one man's work too closely with another's, simply because some men are capable of doing more than others. I feel that what each man is doing should be looked at in the light of what that man is capable of doing and whether or not he is putting forth an effort to do a good job.

To make our program a success, we must have public acceptance of our laws and regulations. One thing that our departments can do to encourage such acceptance is to make sure that these laws and

regulations are fair and just, and will make sense to the hunter and fisherman. I firmly believe that all affected divisions of a department should be consulted on regulations before any definite decision is made. It is absolutely necessary that the enforcement officer, who is going to have constant contact with the sportsmen, should be consulted and kept informed on such matters. We sometimes are handed regulations to enforce that are next to impossible to enforce. I believe that if the enforcement officer could have some influence on the regulations as they are written, our regulations would be fewer, simpler and easier to enforce. I don't mean that I think the enforcement officer should be given the final word in writing the regulations because I fully realize that there are many things that must be taken into consideration in addition to enforcement. It shouldn't be any problem for all of our divisions to work together to come up with the best and simplest regulation that we possibly can.

Today, Georgia has over four million people scattered over 58,876 square miles. During the past fiscal year the enforcement personnel, of which there were approximately 110 men, checked over 312,000 hunting and fishing licenses, made almost 4,400 cases, destroyed 701 illegal fish baskets, 550 illegal fish nets, 762 illegal traps and confiscated much other illegal equipment including automobiles, guns and telephones. We are trying to see to it that the cases made by our enforcement personnel are good cases that will stand the test of a jury if necessary. Our men are paid a salary; and, therefore, no commission, either to the officer or to the department, enters into the picture to encourage needless cases. We feel that we have come a long way in Georgia since the days of the "fish wardens" of 1885.

The future lies ahead. We have recently gone through a period of trials and tribulations in Georgia, but, perhaps this was a blessing in disguise because the future looks bright. Recently, for the first time in the history of our department, trained, career men were moved into the top administrative positions within our department. Political consideration was completely left out of the selection of these men, and this is a good sign. We are now in the process of revising our qualifications for our enforcement personnel so that we can be assured of getting the best qualified men available. The reorganization which we have begun in our department provide chances for promotion for our field personnel and we are working on plans, including a written examination, to allow the men who are interested, to compete with each other for promotions and those people who rate highest will be given priority in filling the vacancies as they occur.

One area in which I am especially interested is the training program. We are making plans to completely revise and improve our training program. I am in the hopes that we will be able to come up with some sort of pre-commission training program. With this in mind, I hope to be visiting some of your states before too long to observe your training program and to get information that will help us have a sound, workable training program in Georgia.

We are making plans to revise our game and fish laws in Georgia. We are hoping to completely rewrite these laws and ask the General Assembly to repeal every law that we now have on the statute books and then to enact a new package of laws that will be simple, workable, up-to-date laws.

We have great plans and an exciting future ahead of us in Georgia, but we know that our department can only be as good as its weakest link. Whether or not a department is respected depends to a very large extent on what the public thinks of the individual who enforces the law. All too frequently the public judges an entire department by some thoughtless or discourteous act on the part of one or two individuals. Unfortunately, many of our departments have set salaries and entrance standards of enforcement officers far below that of other employees. As a result, the quality of enforcement personnel has

not been what it should be, in spite of the fact that this man is "the Game & Fish Department" to many people.

Officers must be made to realize that in order for them to be effective they cannot themselves be lawless. This is particularly true of the officer who must, occasionally, go into court with a case. An officer whose private life is above reproach will inspire the confidence and trust of the public. On the other hand, one who allows favors to friends or who uses alcohol on the job, will never be respected by the public or his fellow officers. It is a well known fact that the public demands of its servants a better example of conduct than it expects from private citizens. The enforcement officer of tomorrow must be well educated and well trained. We now have some 12 states in this nation which require a B.S. degree for their enforcement personnel and the trend is in that direction and so it appears that education is going to take care of itself. Training is another thing. We must continue to move toward an intensified training program.

I would like to see the members of the Law Enforcement Section of the Southeastern Association, during this convention, consider the possibility of an exchange program between the enforcement personnel of our respective states. I feel that much valuable knowledge could be gained by both states if enforcement officers from one state visited and worked for a week or two with the enforcement personnel of another state. This seems to me to be a way whereby we might work out solutions to some of our mutual problems. The expense involved would be negligible in comparison to the good that could come from such a program. I hope each of you will give this idea your careful consideration and discuss it with your friends and if you think it is practical and worthwhile, let's get something started along this line.

The gun-toting, man-hunting warden of yesterday is fading away and in his place will come a competent enforcement officer trained in all phases of wildlife management. This man, will oversee a program of enforcement, management, and public education. He will wear a distinctive, good quality uniform in the manner prescribed by his department. Uniforms are important in that a uniformed man commands quicker attention and more respect than an officer without a uniform.

There will be better law enforcement and better laws to enforce. This will come about because of an aroused, informed and sympathetic public demanding that we protect this natural resource. The enforcement officer of the future will command and receive the respect that he is entitled to. The future sportsman is going to find a reduced habitat, but he is also going to find that better use is being made of the habitat that is available. He will find that management practices will provide a maximum of game and fish on each habitat and that more varieties of game and fish will be available. Colleges teaching courses in wildlife conservation will include law enforcement as a part of their curriculum and as a result, more and better qualified personnel will be found in conservation law enforcement work all over this country.

None of you can possibly be in conservation law enforcement because of the salary this work pays, so I must assume that you enjoy the work. If this is true, it is your duty to see that your department takes its rightful place in the world of today and prepare for its rightful place in the world of tomorrow.

We in Georgia are going to move ahead. Won't you join us?