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COOPERATION AMONG AGENCIES IN WILDLIFE PLANNING

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ABSTRACT

Man's overall manipulation of land and water resources has not always been in the best interests of recreational or aesthetic values. This will bear particular emphasis where the wildlife and fisheries aspects of recreation are concerned.

Governmental agencies designated to perform specific functions in land and water management have pursued their objectives with vigor and ever increasing efficiency but nevertheless with singleness of purpose. In delta regions, wildlife, fish and related recreational activities have, for the most part, been ignored in a vast plan of agricultural improvement which has transformed even the most remote niches of wildlife habitat into intensively farmed "biological deserts". Streams are channeled to provide accelerated drainage and wetlands and natural lakes are dried up by this form of progress.

Obviously, lands which fall into this category cannot readily be reclaimed; the effect of these programs on wildlife is, for all practical purposes, irreversible.

Wildlife agencies have traditionally accepted the role of a regulatory body, ascertaining that all citizens share an equal opportunity to harvest existing game and fish. In the past, poachers presented a more serious threat to wildlife than did agricultural endeavor and an agency which could effectively check illegal or destructive methods of hunting and fishing could consider it obligation to the public fulfilled.

Habitat destruction and alteration has outstripped the poacher's wildest dream in its disastrous effect on wildlife. As this basic threat to outdoor recreation appears and

grows, wildlife agencies must expand their facilities to encompass all factors which would threaten public wildlife entrusted to their keeping.

In this respect, planning and interagency cooperation, enacted by a competent planning staff within the wildlife agency, is essential.

INTRODUCTION

Since much of what has been accomplished by Federal agencies in land and water reforms has been to the detriment of wildlife interests and, as the magnitude of these programs is indicative of priorities that we can expect over other lands presently unaffected, it seems appropriate that any organization dedicated to the preservation of wildlife should participate in the initial planning phase of any land improvement project.

Having this knowledge of the ultimate outcome of past land reform programs, we can blame only ourselves if future projects parallel former projects in their destruction of wildlife habitat due to a lack of planning.

It is implausible to maintain that even extremely remote lands of value only to wildlife will not be affected by Federal reform projects. We have only to review current Federal River Basin plans to envisage the entity of complete land reform. Without planning, where does this leave wildlife?

It is felt that the contemporary wildlife agency cannot readily vindicate operations which do not include some form of planning designed to incorporate features which will assure the retention of wildlife and fisheries within the scope of a given proposed land projects.

This paper will cite, in general terms, instances of land and water manipulation in the more distant past which have been totally lacking in wildlife or fisheries considerations and, more recently, efforts which exhibit some influence of wildlife agency coordination.

THE AGENTS OF PROGRESS

In 1883, James Whitcomb Riley wrote of the "old swimming hole" in Brandywine Creek near Greenfield, Indiana. The "old swimming hole" referred to in this poem was recently closed by Hancock County Health officials because of sewer and septic tank pollution.

Unfortunately, this seems to exemplify the symbol of our times — the by-product and standard of contemporary progress. Traditional and valued land and water recreational uses have been almost systematically ignored and, for all practical purposes, eliminated in land and water management projects in far too many regions of these United States.

Ironically enough, the need for the type of outdoor recreation supplied by unpolluted streams and lakes and undisturbed timbered areas and their associated fauna has increased even more rapidly than our population, which has more than doubled in the last fifty years.

The 1967 statistics of the Little Rock District of the Corps of Engineers indicate an overall increase in reservoir recreational facilities use of 555,500 over the previous year. More Americans have more leisure time, a greater ease and speed of travel, and "a desire to escape for a time the tensions of modern living (Briggs, 1964).

These matters, of course, are of particular concern to those of us who make outdoor recreation, with emphasis on fishing and hunting, our profession. Modern technology has been applied with an accelerated efficiency to the various fields of endeavor in wildlife management, protection, and research. Nevertheless we taste the bitterness of defeat all too frequently in areas where intensive agricultural practices and industrial progress have taken precedence over fish and wildlife in land and water uses.

In the intensively farmed delta regions of our southeastern states, even today, we may very well be "whipping a dead horse" as we preach outdoor recreation reform. However, to illustrate our point, probably no area could more readily epitomize a lack of planning for wildlife and recreation.

The wisdom and justification of this type of land management is, to say the least, questionable. Most of us are aware of the inconsistencies of Federal subsidy programs which share costs in land improvements such as drainage and land clearing and, concurrently, take other agricultural lands out of production through the Conservation Reserve. We are informed that of 127 million acres of wetlands originally present in the United States, 45 million acres have been drained for dry land use. The 1959 Census of Agriculture indicates 92,269,864 acres in subsidized drainage projects and Federal reservoirs have permanently inundated over 13 million acres. And reclamation and land improvement continues (Saveson).

Obviously the enormity of these programs has played havoc with waterfowl populations. Once productive streams are choked with silt and insecticide laden effluent and are devoid of "game" fishes. In delta regions of eastern Arkansas, wildlife cover has been removed to the extent that small game hunting can be experienced only on private clubs or state-owned public shooting areas.

Streams investigations evaluating the effects of channelization and associated habitat alteration indicate a 90% reduction by weight of game fish per surface acre following channelization (Bayless and Smith, 1964).

Siltation, colloidal turbidity, agricultural chemicals and wildly fluctuating water levels omnipresent in managed streams of this description combine with denuded spoil banks and general defacement of proximal land areas to further detract from any aesthetic or recreational value of the stream.

Migratory waterfowl have declined numerically at a rate which conspicuously parallels drainage and other agricultural land improvement practices. Alexander (1963) commented, "These effects are highlighted by the steady reduction of waterfowl and shore birds, to the point where they may, like the buffalo, only be of interest to the sightseer who views them on protected reserves".

Perhaps in a land so richly endowed with an abundance of natural resources, the immediate effects of current land and water management practices have not been readily apparent. Wildlife can always retreat to that vague "somewhere" beyond the effects of a current land improvement project and, certainly, moderate amounts of cropland surface runoff could not completely ruin a stream. We should, by now, be acutely aware of the terrible permanence of these investments.

In eastern Arkansas, sportsman's use of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission's public shooting areas far exceeds carrying capacity. Lands purchased here in a once homogeneously timbered bottomland region stand almost precariously in the midst of consumptive agricultural endeavor.

Sport fishing is provided in limited quantity by small Commission impoundments where levees encompass impounded water to provide absolute topographic isolation.

Those of us who would promulgate adequate outlets for the recreational needs of our citizens and future citizens, would do well to heed the evidence presented in the wake of unilateral land management practices.

Perhaps no geographical location is entirely safe from similar forms of "progress". We are informed that we can expect future manipulation of all significant bodies of inland water, standing or running, by one or more of the thirty-three separate Federal agencies which engage in the management of our water. Needless to say, if future activities of these agencies continue on a scale and pattern which approximates past management, opportunities for traditional outdoor recreational uses of the areas affected will be even more seriously impaired.

Recreation has, however, been recognized as a need, or more appropriately, a necessity of the public and, as such, has been given limited consideration in the framework of Federal land and water management practices.

Current brochures describing Federal reservoirs often state that "in addition to flood control, it (the reservoir) will serve the purposes of water supply, recreation, and fish and wildlife" (U. S. Corps of Engineers, 1968). Ultimately, of course, a flood retention structure would create more agricultural land and perhaps the reservoir proper inundates thousands of acres which generally cannot be profitably utilized for agricultural purposes and is usually valuable wildlife habitat. Environmental changes within the reservoir proper and its tailwaters, are frequently incompatible with native

aquatic life of the impounded stream and the fishery must eventually be retained by the introduction of exotic non-native fishes and supporting fauna.

Perhaps pursuant to a declaration of the validity of recreation or incorporation of the term in descriptive literature, 'recreation' should be categorized or more concisely defined. The license holding sportsman often finds that sitting at a concrete picnic table and gazing out upon a vast expanse of artificially impounded water is not particularly inspiring or congruent with his recreational needs.

We are approaching an age when the recreational value of a primeval, bottom land hardwood environment will far exceed that of the conventional man-created installation as the relative diversity and abundance of recreational opportunities provided is weighed against public demand. We are swapping our dwindling primitive resources, and the accompanying types of outdoor recreation, for a form of recreational environment which is becoming over abundant and out of proportion in the overall scheme.

WILDLIFE AGENCIES

In an age when most drainage or land improvement projects were accomplished through the use of hand tools or horse-drawn implements, habitat alteration or destruction presented little threat to wildlife and fisheries resources (Studholme and Sterling, 1965). Wildlife agencies were geared to prevent destructive means of harvesting fish and game and to ascertain that all citizens shared an equal opportunity in the harvest. These agencies, for the most part, have been retained in this concept of protection in the public eye. And I feel that in the field of protection, we certainly are credited with a 'job well done'.

More recently, state wildlife agencies have also accepted their fair share of the increased recreational burden placed on remaining resources, however, the accumulative demand usually far exceeds the potential of any singular agency.

The Federal Water Project Recreation Act, of 1965, gives state agencies some needed leverage in projecting plans for the future needs of outdoor recreation. Public Law 89-72 states, in part, that "in investigating and planning any Federal navigation, flood control, reclamation, hydroelectric, or multiple-purpose water resource project, full consideration shall be given to the opportunities, if any, which the project affords for outdoor recreation and for fish and wildlife enhancement". Other provisions of this Act provide for non-federal administration of recreational aspects of the project on a cost sharing basis.

In effect, recreation is considered to be a valid constituent of the economic benefits of a given water project. However, Federal projects continue to lack adequate recreational facilities and planning for want of local sponsorship, and planning by the state wildlife agency is, in many cases, an extracurricular activity of management personnel.

Since the early 1950's when state project planning with the River Basin Studies' office was assumed by the State of Arkansas, the task of cooperation and planning has been shuffled among individuals of the Game and Fisheries Division's management staff. The duties of planning have been assigned in addition to, and often in conflict with, the routine managerial responsibilities of the District.

As the multitude of proposed Federal projects in Arkansas will, undoubtedly, adversely affect remaining hunting and fishing resources, if processed in accordance with usual unilateral procedures, our participation in planning is mandatory if we are to provide outdoor recreation in quantities which can meet the public demand. Although token consideration is given fish and wildlife values by the various State and Federal agencies interested in water management, we cannot expect to accrue adequacy in this respect unless we participate in the initial planning phase of each project.

Interagency cooperation has given Arkansas recreational opportunities which otherwise would have been lacking or of reduced magnitude on Federal water projects. Cooperation is essential in timing, water level manipulation, and public access for fisheries management and maximum utilization of reservoirs. Opportunities for land recreational uses such as hunting can be provided through similar cooperative

acts. Zoning in this respect is probably synonymous with planning.

In many cases, small watershed project impoundments can be modified in initial planning stages to provide substantial outdoor recreational use areas. The opportunities for participation and planning in multiple use installations are practically unlimited and yet far too many projects are completed in limited scope for lack of local sponsorship.

For example, the White River Basin Comprehensive Plan (1968) for eastern Arkansas calls for the construction of 3,500 miles of group lateral and major outlet ditches which would eliminate the remaining fishery resources of the channeled streams and would ultimately result in hundreds of thousands of acres of bottomland hardwood being cleared for agricultural purposes. This plan, if carried to completion in unaltered form, could very well represent the demise of public hunting and fishing in eastern Arkansas.

On the other hand, modifications inserted into the original plan by a competent planning staff within our wildlife agency can assure maximum benefits to fish and wildlife.

In our case, in Arkansas, a planning staff would devote full time to activities which are currently part time work of management biologists. Essentially the duties of planning would include:

I. Coordination of the activities and recommendations of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission with all Federal Agencies in Arkansas concerned with water problems.

These agencies would be, primarily, the Corps of Engineers, the Soil Conservation Service, the Agriculture Extension Service and the U. S. Forest Service.

II. Coordination of the activities and recommendations of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission with all state agencies connected with water management problems.

III. Attending all public hearings and Basin Planning Committee sessions and representing the interests of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission at these sessions.

The ideas expressed here are not new, nevertheless, I feel that the need of planning and of a department to state the convictions of the wildlife agency cannot be overstressed.

The future of hunting, fishing and other forms of outdoor recreation in our state will depend directly on planning, zoning, and interagency cooperation inacted by an agency whose convictions and resolutions in wildlife conservation are expressed in any situation where unilateral land and water management practices threaten the existence of those forms essential to man's recreational well being.

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