

TEACHING OUR TEACHERS

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There are many problems facing fish and game departments throughout the United States. One that has slowed the efforts of our management programs has been the public's lack of understanding about what wildlife management is and how it works.

In an effort to bring the message to the attention of the public, each state has set up some type of education program. These programs have been effective to a certain degree, but many of the people we should be reaching are being overlooked for one reason or another. The key would be to educate our school children and who has the ideal setting to accomplish this? Our classroom teachers.

We all know what the teachers of today have to go through to get their certificates. They must have many hours of education methods and education psychology . . . called Professional Education Courses. In addition, they are required to take courses in math, English, history, biology, economics, physical education, and a few others. On top of all this, they may elect to teach in a specified field such as math, English, etc.

I know, from first-hand knowledge, the requirements. I hold a B.S. in Education. The question then that I want to put before you is: Where are our teachers getting their knowledge of wildlife and its management?

If you have children, then you know that what the teacher says is "the truth." How many times have you heard a child correct or disagree with a parent about something and, when asked why little Billy believes this, his answer will be "Because my teacher, Miss Jones, says so." And they (the children) *do* believe what these teachers say. Now, if these teachers have no formal training in the principles of wildlife management, where do they get their answers to questions raised by students on hunting, fishing or wildlife management? If we are lucky, the teacher is a hunter, or comes from a background of hunters and can answer intelligently. However, what if the teacher bases her opinion on information put out by Sid Rosenthal of Fund for Animals, or what if she has seen on television programs such as "Grizzly Adams"? I am sure you would be surprised at the number of teachers whose knowledge of wildlife comes from watching "Disney" on television. From this type of foundation, they cannot understand why we want to shoot the poor little brown-eyed deer, when all that deer does is to go through the woods making friends with all the other little forest animals. This opinion is being taught to our children. Last year one of our education specialists went to a parish school board office to set up hunter safety programs in the physical education classes. The supervisor of instruction told the specialist that he did not believe in guns, therefore, the students in his schools would not have anything to do with guns.

Wildlife management should be taught in the schools and it should be taught by the teacher. In Louisiana, we have had an education program now for about 18 years. Most of our work consists of personal approach to the local schools. Through this method, we have reached a lot of youngsters. But, we have also missed a lot. We are with a group once, or seldom more than 2 times each year. To be able to effectively teach a subject, meeting with a group only once is not enough. On the other hand, teachers who have proper training can get the subject across much better because they are with the kids daily. A few children absorb a little of what we say and that part that they get is not enough and it is not of most importance. In many cases we find ourselves entertaining the students for an hour. We are unable, in most cases, to get the kids involved because of the lack of time. Also the students know that we will not test them on the subject, therefore, they tend to view the program as entertainment.

In a limited number of schools in our state they are offering environmental education classes. The approach used is to let the children discover for themselves what is true and what is untrue. Again, with this method of teaching, called the discovery method of learning, the classroom teacher is more equipped to do the job. For example, the teacher may have a section on water quality and talk about channelization. If we were to talk to that group, we would talk about the bad that it does. SCS comes in and tells all the good that channelization does. Who is the child to believe? If that teacher has

the background and goes into the effects of channelization in the environment he leaves something for him to think about. Is it good or bad? A well versed teacher in environmental education can take the time to investigate the changes that occur when man manipulates the environment. It may take much time on the subject to get the points across to a class. There is no way we can do it all with 50 or 55 minutes during a program.

What can be done? I don't think that we should ever stop our personal appearances on programs to schools, but we can try to educate our educators. First, the universities should require all teachers to have a course in environmental education with a strong emphasis on wildlife management. All teachers should be required to take it before they can receive their certificate. Even math, history and English teachers. Environmental education can be taught in every class in schools . . . social changes, history, new words, economics, are all related to the environment and can be used to illustrate what is happening every day around us. This is where the teachers have the advantage over you and me. They are there everyday.

Second, we should try to set up some environmental education areas through our states so that we can offer special instruction for teachers in the summer and students during the school year. The summer sessions for teachers could and should be credited towards their education and part of some universities' curriculum.

At present in Louisiana, we are working closely with some of the universities in teachers' workshops. These workshops are an accredited course at the particular university. Here we are reaching about 120 teachers a year, but most of these are science and history teachers and have been teaching for years. Also, in several parishes we have conducted environmental education workshops for all of the teachers in the parish. Here we are doing some good. But there are still a lot of teachers who are not being exposed to this type of training.

We know how effective it is for the classroom teacher to be able to cover this subject. In our hunter safety program we conduct instructor training courses in many parishes for the physical education teachers. This is done on a voluntary basis and many teachers, as well as school systems, do not elect to participate. But the ones who have are doing an excellent job and training a lot of children.

We must find a way to get to the teachers and have them teach the truth about wildlife management. One start would be a required course in environmental education with emphasis on wildlife management.