

STATE OF FLORIDA  
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT  
TALLAHASSEE

LEROY COLLINS  
GOVERNOR

JOE GROTEGUT  
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

September 30, 1955

TO THE DELEGATES AND VISITORS TO THE NINTH ANNUAL  
CONFERENCE OF THE SOUTHEASTERN ASSOCIATION OF  
GAME AND FISH COMMISSIONERS:

It is with a great deal of regret that I must send this letter instead of being with you personally. I had hoped to be able to adjust my schedule so that I could be with you to welcome you to Florida and to ask you to partake fully of the hospitality offered by our State.

All of us who love the out of doors understand the tremendous value of our fish and wildlife resources and appreciate the work you people are doing. We realize that your task is not an easy one. We know that the management of game and fish resources presents a perplexing problem that can be solved only by the most diligent efforts of all the people under the leadership of your conservation administrators and workers.

We hope and feel certain that your conference will contribute greatly to the progress of conservation in the Southeast, and I wish to extend my best wishes for a highly successful conference program.

We welcome you to Florida and hope that you will be able to take time out from your busy schedule here in Daytona Beach to enjoy our recreational opportunities and will stay as long as you can.

Again expressing my deepest regrets that I am unable to be with you, I am

Sincerely,

LEROY COLLINS,  
*Governor.*

**WILDLIFE, FISH AND RECREATION ON THE NATIONAL  
FORESTS OF THE SOUTH**

By CHAS. A. CONNAUGHTON  
*Regional Forester, Southern Region*

There are 9.5 million acres of national forest land in the Southern Region. Some of this is located in each of our southern states.

The first of the southern national forests was set aside from the public domain nearly 50 years ago. This original public domain amounts to about 12 percent of the present area. Most of the remainder of the land has been acquired by purchase since 1911 when the basic legislation authorizing federal acquisition was passed. Consequently, when we talk about the southern national forests we mean "acquired" lands primarily.

The original legislation of 1911 specified that the forest land acquisition be aimed at "regulation of the flow of navigable streams" with the land to be located in the headwaters of the streams. Thus the original purpose of the acquisition was limited to watershed protection. In 1924 this authorization was broadened by the Clarke-McNary Law to permit purchase of land for timber production also. Most of the land has been acquired since this later act was passed.

This very sketchy background of the southern national forests is presented not only as a matter of interest, but to bring out that game fish, and recreation uses were not recognized in law as a basic purpose of acquisition. Instead the

inclusion of these very real assets as an integral management objective of our public lands is by policy rather than law. This arrangement is perfectly satisfactory and a long history has demonstrated that the Forest Service firmly believes and advocates the application of multiple use principles to the fullest extent. By "fullest extent" I mean everything we are now doing and much more in years to come.

As this group well knows, the Forest Service approaches the job of handling its fish and game responsibilities in cooperation with the various states. This is done by using the mechanics of the cooperative agreement wherein the principals agree in writing on objectives and devices. This not only clears the air, but from our standpoint makes possible the handling of certain administrative and fiscal matters that would otherwise be impossible.

From the standpoint of the Forest Service, the cooperative agreement approach has been excellent in nearly every case. There is an instance or two in which the agreements do not seem to operate to full possibilities, but these are exceptions rather than the rule.

With the exception of a small refuge area, the national forests are open to hunting under state laws and regulations. Of the open area, approximately one-quarter of it is under some form of special wildlife management, mostly cooperative State-Federal management areas. Fishing waters within the national forests amount to about 5,700 miles of streams and 160,000 acres of lakes and reservoirs. During 1954 these provided an estimated 422,000 man-days of fishing enjoyment. The national forests also provide yearly about three-quarters of a million man-days of small and big game hunting. This is big business, and we will realize the success of our cooperative endeavors with the states is exceedingly important to the general public. We must, therefore, see that joint progress is consistently made and that our federal-state objectives are served with a minimum of difficulty and lost motion.

We well recognize, however, that in carrying out a job of this kind, with many diverse interests, very real problems can and will arise. Some of these problems are inherent to the job; others are a result of either omission or commission. It is our mutual obligation, however, to hold our problems to a minimum and let none reach the point where it will ever adversely effect the public interest.

Common understanding is paramount to smooth operation. To aid us in getting on common ground, I want to discuss briefly with you some items that have caused difficulty on occasion.

#### TIMBER STAND IMPROVEMENT

One matter that has caused considerable discussion, and will result in more, is timber stand improvement practices. The main facet of this in contention is deadening of low-grade and cull hardwoods.

I am not going to attempt a detailed description of our practices, but will simply say that in carrying out this work we acknowledge the need for compromising timber production and maintenance of wildlife habitat. Our instructions provide for this by making concessions to the need for providing wildlife habitat and cover. Whether or not we are right in full is an open question, and we hereby solicit all the information that can be obtained to guide us in effecting the most suitable multiple purpose management. Particularly do we urge more research on this matter, and offer the facilities of our national forests for this work.

On occasion I have endeavored to check in the field the timber stand improvement practices reputedly unfavorable to wildlife. Mostly I have found that the criticism has originated from hearsay and is not based on on-the-ground examination. When this arises we get no place at all. We welcome criticism, but we can not gain anything from it unless it is based on factual observation.

On occasion the criticism is based on field observation, but is conditioned on opinion with no research information to verify or disprove the position. This circumstance may prove stimulating, but it does present a problem without an answer. The solution is more research so that the wildlife technician will be able to provide the land manager with specifications for forest manipulation

that will enhance the game habitat. This information we must have to be successful.

There have been instances where basic instructions have miscarried and even with the limited information available to us we appear to have jeopardized the wildlife habitat by injudicious forest practice. Where this has occurred we have endeavored to correct this miscarriage of instructions at once and get on an even keel.

In short, the timber stand improvement-wildlife controversy boils down pretty much to lack of knowledge on the part of both biologist and forester as to just what should be done. Until research gets the answers, we are going to have to "play by ear," recognizing that mistakes will be made. At any time we will welcome information, criticism, and advice if it is based on firm personal knowledge of the problem. As you well know, we can not, nor would you, be concerned with criticism based on hearsay, rumor, or unverified opinion.

### GAME MANAGEMENT AREAS

Another operational problem which has caused rough spots is the establishment of game management areas with special limitations on hunting privileges. There is something to be said on both sides of this. On the positive side, management areas, with special limitations on hunting, permit and justify special fees and licenses. This income can be used in turn for a variety of purposes to enhance hunter use. Furthermore, these areas are real pilot plants for game management work generally. These factors are real advantages. On the opposite side, the special restrictions in management areas are often resented by local sportsmen. They thereby create local resentment and such things as incendiary fire problems.

Our preference would be to have all national forest areas open to hunting under regular license. We recognize that we are not ready for this because there is no arrangement available to us for substituting a better plan, particularly insofar as the special fees for management areas are concerned. We do feel though that we should work toward unrestricted use, except under regular state licenses on all areas where adequate game populations permit.

We know the need in several instances for special management on areas where game restoration is the dominant temporary objective. We have full sympathy with such restoration projects and urge their establishment on the national forests, with the understanding that hunting be permitted as soon as judgment of wildlife technicians indicate.

### EITHER-SEX HUNTING

In respect to open and closed season, we defer entirely to the decision of the various states. This works admirably well in most cases. We do have a problem that exists in some localities and will appear elsewhere in the future. I have reference to either-sex hunting of deer.

I do not presume to advise you how and when to determine when either-sex hunting should be permitted. Obviously, when the deer population builds up to the point where overgrazing threatens, either-sex hunting should be instituted in the interest of the herd itself. I appreciate that this involves a lot of problems, but know that these problems have successfully and outstandingly been met in enough instances to show that it can be done.

We will welcome the chance to participate in creating the right environment for acceptance of either-sex hunting by the public, but we realize that the main burden will fall on the states. Our objective, of course, is to see that it is done before damaging consequences result to the resources. And, I should add, that bitter experiences of the past amply document the fact that real trouble can arise when we falter in making provision to keep herds in balance with the forage.

In relation to deer hunting we have another problem, rather minor in extent but very real when it does exist. I refer to the use of dogs for hunting in the *uplands*. Granted that the sportsmen have pretty well eliminated the practice by their own desires, there are still a few places in the uplands where it

is condoned. The Forest Service is unalterably opposed to this practice and believes it can and should be stopped. Where public opinion still leans in the opposite direction, we want to participate with you in reversing it.

### GATES ON PUBLIC ROADS

At various times and places the question of gates on roads in the national forests has plagued the sportsman, game law enforcement officer, and ranger. Each situation presents a somewhat different set of circumstances and the details can not be generalized. As an overall policy, however, we do not feel that there are many roads in the national forests on which gates should be placed for any purpose. We take the position that these roads were built with public money and should be open to the public at all times.

Exceptions are recognized where, for one reason or another, gates are desirable and acceptable. These should be held to a minimum and in some instances where we now have gates we would like to remove them as rapidly as local conditions will permit. Where fish and game considerations are involved, the advice and concurrence of the various states will be sought, bearing in mind that the burden of proof will be on the lock on the gate in every instance.

### A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

I have highlighted a few points of mutual interest involving the national forests and fish and game utilization. The list of items is by no means meant to be all inclusive, but time is running out and I want a few minutes to remark on the future outlook as I view it.

I firmly believe that history will show the movement now in progress to restore and maintain the fish and game resources of our southern forests will be one of the conservation highlights of all time. We are fortunate to be a part of this movement. At the same time we have a tremendous responsibility to see and direct the course of this movement so that rough spots will be avoided. The public is interested and appreciative of our efforts, yet at the same time a hard and exacting taskmaster.

As for the national forests, we want them to be properly and intelligently integrated into the plans for wildlife and fish restoration and management for each state and for the region as a whole. Along with the wildlife and fish resources, we want all other resources used to a maximum consistent with the public interest. We recognize that in order to do this more knowledge of our problems is required, which in turn calls for more research. This we hope will be undertaken promptly.

Each year sees greater and greater pressure on the national forests for outdoor recreation. This is as it should be and we welcome the opportunity to serve this public demand. In fact, we visualize that in time to come the relative position of recreation, including fishing and hunting, will increase in importance in the multiple-use picture. On some of the national forests public interest will dictate that management be oriented primarily toward recreation use. This will be in perfect harmony with our objectives and we must be in position to make management adjustments that such a situation demands. Your aid in achieving these is solicited.

The national forests represent the biggest single ownership of forest land in the South and we are extremely anxious to see that fish and game programs occupy their proper position in their administration. We feel in charting the course for the future a mutual responsibility with you and welcome the challenge that this joint effort presents.