

GENERAL SESSION

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

By NELSON COX

*President, Southeastern Association of Game and Fish Commissioners
and
Director of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission*

The Twelfth Annual Convention of the Southeastern Association of Game and Fish Commissioners is now declared to be in session.

I think it well and in order at this time, for those of us who are visiting in this beautiful city to extend our thanks to the host State, to the Kentucky Game and Fish Commission, to Mr. Minor Clark and his Staff and to all others contributing to what promises to be, in these early moments, the finest Conference our Association has ever held, and I believe it would be appropriate at this time to express our thanks with a rousing hand of applause.

Gentlemen, it not my intention to stand here and review the history of this organization. You know that history as well as, or better than, I. Neither is it my intention to stand here and present a technical paper. If I did so, you would only hear a better presentation at one of the sessions later. It is my intention, however, to speak briefly about some of the approaches to our problems, and to proceed with the more important business at hand.

There are yet persons who doubt the necessity of an organization such as our Southeastern Association and the parent International Association. To enlighten such people, it would be well for us to inform them that the Southeastern Association is an instrument of service in the fish and wildlife field—a service designed to keep our objectives in full accord with the public welfare and in full accord with the interest of all creatures that dwell in this great storehouse of wildlife that God built. It is also an instrument through which we, as fellow Conservationists, cooperate in curbing widespread malpractices and prevailing fallacies.

This Association can be justly proud of its accomplishments—accomplishments too numerous to mention. A few of its most recent activities would, however, prompt me to mention that several years ago we encouraged among our state members a region-wide study on doves. A report on the result of this study recently received a very fine commendation. Some of these compliments have come from people who in the past have been somewhat critical of our work.

More recently, this organization has supported the region-wide cooperative deer study; this work is progressing satisfactorily and showing results.

The Southeastern Association was also effective in helping get the Coordination Act amended. It was instrumental in that all State Commissions cooperated in the review of the M.R.T. (Mississippi River Tributaries), and other river basin studies, with which the Southeastern states are concerned. In many other activities, such as the Coturnix quail experiment, all states have demonstrated a most cooperative attitude to exchanging information and by assisting in every possible way. In order that we can continue to show the progress that merits our best efforts and the kind of progress our people deserve to receive, my earnest hope is that this unified work will continue in the future as it has in the past.

The pioneers in our field of endeavor, some perhaps here today, should be commended. We owe to them the highest degree of appreciation. They blazed the trail by which we, who follow, may more easily find our way. In any given state of our great Nation, these forerunners, to whom we are so indebted, have put the importance of wildlife "over the hump." Each state has come to see the importance of wildlife conservation, not only as a recreational "must," but also as an all important factor in its economic structure. We have figures—large astounding figures to bear out this truth. But not enough people see, or know of these facts. We need to "talk shop" more and in the right places.

You note I mentioned "over the hump in any given state." This is very true, but nationwide we—you—and I—and our contemporaries still have a product

to sell. One of the few weak characteristics in our professional personnel that has come to bear on all of us is the fact that we have been too meek and temperate in informing our national Congressmen. Only through related and other interested agencies, most of which are non-profit organizations, has any appreciable work been done toward advising and explaining to members of our national Congress of the dollar and cent value of wildlife conservation on a national basis. In the state of Arkansas we are still required to buy a poll tax as a prerequisite to voting. At a recent meeting with our Arkansas Congressional delegation in Washington, D. C., I astounded our members by telling them that in 1957 there were more hunting and fishing licenses sold in our state than there were poll taxes. I mentioned this because it was apparent that more people were interested in hunting and fishing than voting. This knowledge was important to our delegation. My state is no different from yours—my Congressional delegation is no different from yours—every member of our National Congress needs our views, and they are anxious for information that will help them to know when and how to support legislation for the best interest of the greatest number of people.

I appeal to you as professional men to start this day in keeping your Congressmen informed of your activities, and of the importance of such activities to members of your community, your state and your nation. Yes, go a step farther than a letter or a telephone call. Take your Commission, as a group, to Washington, at least once a year, and personally inform your Congressional delegation of your interests. They will welcome you with open arms. We of Arkansas have adopted this policy and sincerely believe it is money well spent.

I mentioned previously that we owe to the pioneers a debt of gratitude for getting the wheels of conservation work started. Previously this conservation effort was based on the highest kind of ideals which compared in this respect with all other great movements that have contributed so much to making this world a better, a safer, a healthier and a more enjoyable place in which to live.

I would like to point out that these conservation ideals are still valid today, and one of the keystones of this organization should be to keep them forever at the helm of our endeavors. It is only natural, however, that with our increased knowledge of game and fish and of the mechanics of fish and wildlife restoration, we have found it necessary to change some of our methods and ways of doing things from the way they were done when conservation work was started many years ago. Unfortunately, those who advocate changes in these methods are frequently accused of deserting the ideals of conservation. This accusation is usually made by those who have not been privileged to receive more complete information. This is only one of the many crosses that Game and Fish Administrators have to bear, and failure to bear such crosses and failure to take advantage of our increased knowledge could, in itself, become a desertion of the ideals that we all should seek to uphold. The continuance of unproductive practices could also be considered a desertion of these ideals, even though it might be popular or politically expedient to do so.

In closing, may I say to you as individual members of one of the finest and most effective organizations, let us continue to support, with accelerated interest, all efforts designed to further the technical proficiency of the profession of wildlife conservation. With all the problems to solve and with all the responsibilities attached, may I challenge you—What profession could one encounter which gives such gratification as that of being employed in this great house that God built?

Gentlemen, these few remarks are indicative of the high honor you have given me, of being permitted to serve you as President of this institution—The Southeastern Association of Game and Fish Commissioners. For this privilege, I am deeply grateful.

Thank you.