

instructor's kit is supplemental with an instructor's manual prepared by the Commission.

At the end of our first year in this program, we have a ratio of one hunter safety award for every 200 licensed hunters, and one reported hunting accident for every 8,000 licensed hunters.

As you may know, 13 states now require a certificate of competence or a certificate of proficiency in safe hunting for those who are purchasing a license for the first time. Basically, the *volunteer* program is more effective among the sportsmen than the *mandatory* program. At first it seems that the mandatory approach will settle all the problems of hunting in a safe manner, but it just doesn't work that way. Administrative details soon encumber the program and impair its efficiency. A sound, voluntary Department—sportsman relationship will serve the interest of both in a more effective manner.

## A LESSON FOR WILDLIFE MANAGERS FROM VIRGINIA'S WILDLIFE ESSAY CONTEST

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From among the thousands of papers received each year in the Virginia Wildlife Essay Contest, preliminary screening results in the selection of the finalists of the 8 eligible grades, the judges, representing the State Board of Education and the contest's co-sponsors, the Virginia Division of the Izaak Walter League and the State Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries, then select the scholarship, grand prize and other cash award winners.

While reading the essays in the capacity of final judge for the Commission last spring, I was impressed on the one hand by the youthful essay writers' great awareness of natural resource conservation problems and yet, on the other hand, by the great gaps in their understanding of the basic principles of wildlife management.

The widespread acceptance of the need for protecting forests from fire and the desirability of reforestation and management was evident, reflecting the effective campaigning of the Virginia Division of Forestry and the U. S. Forest Service.

Most of the children expressed considerable knowledge of the soil in their communities and how it should be used and protected. Here, years of effort by the U. S. Soil Conservation Service and V.P.I. extension workers have "gotten the story across" to the youth of today—and the adults of tomorrow.

The same conservation consciousness was reflected in most of the remarks on pollution control and watershed development. Excellent progress has been made with young people in these areas.

Their writing on the subjects of wildlife and wildlife management left much to be desired, however. I do not mean that progress has not been made in this field, because it has. There was very much in evidence the knowledge that wildlife is a product of the soil, plants and water found in any community. The children knew that the word "habitat" means the "home" of a given bird, animal or fish and that each species demands certain combinations of food and cover in order to produce young, raise them successfully and then survive through the months of cold and hunger.

The fact that shortcomings in their knowledge remain is dramatically shown by their placing too much faith in the setting up of refuges, preserves and sanctuaries; in the belief that winter feeding makes things all right again after a heavy snow; that restocking desirable species is the answer in game-short areas; that all we need is more game wardens or protection; that hunters and fishermen have caused all the shortages; that our forefathers started all this by being so greedy. These are the statements which worry me, which indicate that modern wildlife management concepts are not understood, that reflect the inadequacy of the available printed explanations these children have.

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In wildlife management the primary consideration, of course, is the creation or maintenance of an environment (food, cover, water, etc.) in which the bird or animal finds everything it needs to live. This has and always will be the number-one goal. Without it, no amount of protection, predator control, refuges, restocking, winter feeding or any other step will make any difference—the desired species still will be absent.

The second realization must be that even with the best habitat, only so many of the desired species can live in the area—no matter what you do. You cannot stockpile wildlife. The woods can support only so many deer, grouse and squirrel in the same way that they contain only so many chickadees, woodpeckers and blue jays, for exactly this reason.

The third and most completely misunderstood principle of wildlife management is that the breeding population of any species, game or non-game, on any area tries to fill the world with its kind but cannot do it, because all the forces of nature are against it. It may seem paradoxical, but, on the other hand, nature gives the species the drive to survive and, on the other hand, makes sure they can't overdo it. It is here that predator-prey relationships and all the other factors that knock the population down play their roles. It is also in this area of nature's operation that hunters and fishermen enjoy their recreation. The game birds, animals and fish harvested by sportsmen come from this surplus that the species creates. In some species, it is quite true that seasons and bag limits must be strictly enforced to save the species; however, in most cases, the seasons and bag limits simply serve to distribute the game equally among the sportsmen. The harvest has no effect whatever on the next year's population of those game species.

If you doubt this, why do you think that the few forms of life that men like to pursue for sport are any different from the rest? Why is the world not more abundantly blessed with bluebirds, robins, wrens, weasels, meadow mice, salamanders or hoot owls?

Other thoughts expressed by the children in their wildlife essays which I rated low were those regarding the "misdeeds" of our pioneer forefathers. This kind of information is evidently easily accessible, but to me this is most unfortunate. No one doubts that the forests were burned, the game hunted and some sod busted. But how many tree farms could you have established 100 years ago? How much corn could be raised in an oak-hickory forest? In the light of present-day wildlife knowledge, how much game was actually destroyed? The wilderness species are all that actually became extinct, and you can't preserve wilderness when that's what you've got most of. Many game species became more abundant as a result of man's activities. I believe the children deserve some new insight into just why our forefathers acted as they did. This old attitude actually has branded some modern conservationists as having their heads in the sand—and rightfully so.

In summary, the essays indicate much success in efforts to achieve with youth an understanding of conservation problems and the positive actions that can be undertaken. It is to the credit of the teachers and students that the time has been spent in this kind of study, and it is to the credit of the contest that interests has been aroused and beliefs stated so that progress can be measured.

It is my sincere hope, however, that wildlife managers will take more time to explain to the public their management methods which, according to our wildlife essays, are so poorly understood at present.

## PUBLIC RELATIONS AND CONSERVATION

*By* RICHARD E. HODGES, JR.

Thank you very much. It's a privilege to be here this morning to share with you a few thoughts about this sometimes nebulous field of public relations. I must confess to you that I have reservations about my ability to handle the subject just as Bob Short has announced it. That is "Public Relations and Conservation." These reservations get pretty big when I consider that most every one of you is directly or indirectly involved in this subject every working day. I'm involved in