

# GENERAL SESSION

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### 25th Annual Meeting

**Southeastern Association of Game and Fish Commissioners  
Charleston, South Carolina, October 17-20, 1971**

*By* LARRY R. GALE

It is indeed an honor and a pleasure to deliver the president's message of this Silver Anniversary meeting of the Southeastern Association of Game and Fish Commissioners, the best regional association in the United States! Will those who attended the first meeting please stand to be recognized.

I have been privileged to be associated with the Southeastern since 1947, having been hired as a game biologist in Kentucky shortly after the Association's first conference. Those who attended that meeting in Florida were still talking about it years later. The second meeting was held in Lexington, Kentucky, and it featured notable performances by such young biologists as Earle Frye. Since those early years, the Southeastern Association and its annual conference have grown steadily and achieved national recognition.

Throughout its history, the Southeast has been blessed with truly outstanding leaders who pointed the way not only for the region but for the entire nation. It is a credit to their successors to mention such pioneers as Major James Brown, Morris Freeman, T. A. McAmis, Ben Morgan, I. T. Quinn, A. A. Richardson, Earl Wallace, Bill Davis, Verne Davison, Jim Silver, H. S. Swingle, Clarence W. Watson, A. H. Wiebe and I. T. Bode, who was closely associated with Mr. Quinn and others in this group, although Missouri was not an official member of the Association at that time. And I believe special recognition is due our esteemed colleague, Clyde P. Patton, who is now, to the best of my knowledge, the senior Fish and Game Director in the entire country.

This is not to say that these men were perfect or that they always made the right decisions. They were human and had normal human weaknesses. But they also had a remarkably clear understanding of the wildlife conservation needs of their time, as well as the ability to develop public interest and public support for research and management programs, including law enforcement. They laid the groundwork on which our present conservation is built. Our heritage from these early leaders should be a continuing source of pride, resolution and confidence.

An occasional glimpse toward the past is both pleasant and useful, but a hard look at the future is in order now. Many of the problems we faced 25 years ago have been solved. For example, deer and turkey populations have responded amazingly well to management. Fishing opportunities have been multiplied many times by the construction of thousands of new ponds and dozens of large reservoirs. But now we are facing new and more complex problems. Usable wildlife habitat is shrinking at an alarming rate, the inevitable result of the rapid growth of human populations, with many associated forms of pollution and sheer occupation of space to fill our needs and/or demands. Recently we have discovered that fish from many of our waters are unsafe for human consumption, while channel "improvement" continues to convert productive and attractive streams to sterile storm sewers—at taxpayer expense in the name of "progress". Our task now is formidable, and few are so optimistic as to believe we have another 25 years in which to accomplish the reversal of this deterioration in the quality of life.

It has been said that every problem offers an equal opportunity. Surely no group of people ever had more critical opportunities than those available to the Southeastern Association! Possibly our greatest challenge is

to direct the current public enthusiasm for environmental improvement into constructive effort. Twenty-five years ago conservationists often were ignored as eccentric if not entirely "nutty". Today a majority of the American public has leaped aboard the conservation bandwagon, shouting the praises of ecology and demanding loudly that something be done about it, now if not yesterday. There are still some who consider conservationists "nutty". Poorly documented or completely unsupported statements by some spokesmen lend enough strength to this view to weaken our effectiveness on major issues. But regardless of the handicap of our lunatic fringe, conservation forces no longer can be ignored by individuals, industry, agriculture, or government at any level.

One of our immediate problems is that a sizeable and probably growing segment of the newly-aroused "environmentalists" equates conservation with complete protection and preservation. The more radical of these call for an immediate halt to lumbering, hunting, commercial fishing and other exploitation of natural resources. Granted the well known abuses of such activities, we *must* convince the public that properly regulated hunting of normally abundant game is good management, that commercial fish may be taken in reasonable numbers without depleting populations, and that forests are a renewable resource capable of providing a sustained yield for the benefit of the people. Above all, we must prevent the substitution of emotion for facts and reason as the basis for decisions concerning natural resources. Unless this well-meaning but misinformed trend of thinking is reversed, not only does the public stand to lose the important benefits of wise resource use, but in some instances the resources themselves may be degraded from lack of management.

I suggest that the general public has been alerted to the *problems* of the environment but that we are failing to provide *solutions* and *leadership* in solving these problems. I would emphasize too that even if recurring crises maintain public interest in water pollution, air pollution, solid wastes and pesticides, there is no assurance that fish and wildlife will receive proper consideration unless we assume that responsibility. There are several basic concepts that the general public will understand and accept if properly explained:

1. Fish and wildlife are good indicators of the quality of our environment. Many of the same factors that destroy habitat for wildlife make lands and waters unhealthy for humans.
2. Fish and wildlife are important to the quality of life of most people—not just hunters and fishermen. Many derive great pleasure from just watching wild creatures, like the mocking bird nesting in the back yard rose bush.
3. Non-game fish and wildlife will thrive best under the protection and management of the state fish and game agencies. We have the experience and the know-how, but we must convince non-hunters that we share their interests and are willing to work with them.
4. Game and fish populations respond well to scientific management. We can point to many notable successes in restoring depleted wildlife populations to huntable levels.
5. Hunting and fishing are healthy, desirable forms of outdoor recreation enjoyed by a substantial segment of Americans. The typical sportsman is the friendly, intelligent fellow next door—not a demented villain determined to kill the last living wild creature.
6. Efforts of state and federal agencies to maintain and improve habitat for fish and wildlife benefit all of the people, and thus merit strong support from the general public. Broad public support is essential to the success of all efforts to improve our environment.

I believe we must make a concerted effort now to make all of our citizens aware of these facts. The hour is late.

I have mentioned some of the problems facing us, but I view the future with optimism and confidence. The Southeastern Association has a lot

going for it as we begin the next 25 years. We have a sturdy foundation built by our early leaders, great experience and expertise in managing fish and wildlife, more public interest and support than ever before and a fine group of dedicated young workers coming on. I firmly believe that our children and theirs will continue to enjoy the healthy pursuits of hunting and fishing. I believe also that the United States will in time solve its environmental problems, with the Southeastern Association of Game and Fish Commissioners leading the way.

## REMARKS BY GOVERNOR JOHN WEST

### Southeastern Conference of Game and Fish Commissioners

President Gale, Chairman Eltzroth, distinguished program members, ladies and gentlemen.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome each of you to South Carolina. I am also pleased that the Southeastern Association of Game and Fish Commissioners chose the City of Charleston for its 1971 Conference. My only hope is that you will not hurry home immediately following the close of your meetings, but will stay with us for the remainder of the week and enjoy the many recreational opportunities that South Carolina has to offer.

The decade of the 1970's has been referred to by many as being the period in our country's history that will see the greatest amount of change in the utilization of our resources. This change is coming about because we are beginning to realize that resources no longer are restricted to what we extract from the ground, grow in the soil, or cut from our forests, but these resources in reality make up the very environment in which we live. During this period of the 1970's we are also more aware of the fact that the residents of this State, of the Southeastern States represented here, and of the country as a whole are also a part of our resources that must be considered. No longer can we consider natural resources without also considering our human resources.

As we move ahead in our efforts to provide for an ever-increasing human population, we are constantly reminded that we must be responsive to the needs of this user. It is for this reason that planning, in-depth planning, is a prerequisite to whatever we do. Planning provides for the orderly programming of development, of funding and for determining before a critical need arises where and when we must place our efforts.

The Southeastern region, which is so well represented here today, is the sleeping giant which is beginning to stir. Improved transportation facilities place us now within easy driving distance of the population centers of the mid-Atlantic States and the Midwest. As we look at the utilization of our developing parks, our welcome centers and the general activities of tourist organizations, we clearly see that the Southeast is attracting more and more people throughout each of the twelve calendar months. This means as more people are attracted to our region, the demand for space increases, thus placing an increasing premium on our finite resources.

The Southeast has also demonstrated its desirability as a site for the production of the goods required by this expanding population. This has provided for economic growth, employment opportunities, changes in land use and population shifts from the farm to the city environments.

To Game Managers, these changes mean the constant loss of edge and interspersion of type so desirable for game production. It has also meant the conversion of old growth timber to short rotation pine which demands new game management techniques if the same acres are to continue to produce a wildlife crop. It also has resulted in drainage pattern changes which again, affects production dynamics and in some areas the removal of habitat on which these game populations existed.