

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION SESSION

MISSISSIPPI PUSHES FORWARD IN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

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Mississippi pushes forward in wildlife conservation through *education*. Just a short decade in the yesterdays the word conservation to too many Mississippians meant, "You have no right to keep me or prevent me from using my land and timber and the wildlife on my land as I please!" The point in focus here is attitude. Too, there were far too many people, in the yesterdays referred to above, that could not or did not want to understand that the long time practice of using the open range land as their own must come to an end. The open range land was owned in a majority of the cases by absentee landlords and industrial corporations. "I'll get splinter or kindling wood where I find it." "I don't need but two or three large trees right now for lumber so I guess it will be O. K. for me to take them." "I have been living here all of my life—anyway, my parents lived here all of their lives." "Our cattle and hogs have always used that range back there on the river swamplands." "I've always hunted and fished when and where I wanted to and no damn Game Warden is going to stop me." "The Game Wardens are working for them there city folks anyhow." It was not unusual that the poorest or more unreasonable attitudes belonged to persons whose land holdings were no more than twenty to forty acres adjacent to or near large tracts of private or public lands. The woods or fields on these small tracts were burned in the fall and the fire just "somehow" got out of control and spread to the open range lands, burning hundreds of acres. Too, it was thought that the burning of the woods not only afforded early grazing but killed the cotton boll weevil, ticks, stink bugs and snakes. Such was the thinking and the attitude that the conservation-minded citizen and especially the Wildlife Conservationist encountered on every move toward a program of better hunting and fishing.

The attitude of many natives was not helped by Absentee Landlords that sought to grow pine timber without much thought or regard for the conservation of wildlife habitat. I recall one instance in which certain large tracts of timberland was being worked for pine timber growth improvement, the mast bearing hardwoods were being girdled without regard to food and den trees for squirrels, and woods fires began to appear here and there. Much investigation followed by irritant investigators of private enterprise to no avail. Finally, crudely printed signs began to appear reading, "You girdle the oaks and we will burn the pines." Situations like this were serious and had to somehow be corrected.

How could we cope with such attitudes and situations, was the question in the minds of all conservationists and especially the State Game and Fish personnel and leading sportsmen in the state. Hence, an active program of education and public relations came into being. The answer *was* and *is Conservation Through Education*. The approach was conferences between Education and Public Relations representatives and similar personnel of large landowners and other State and Federal conservation agencies, and a more or less unified educational program of wildlife conservation was on its way.

The only excuse for the existence of the State Game and Fish Commission, so said the Executive Director of the Commission, is to provide and promote better Hunting and Fishing for Mississippians and our visitors from other states. Therefore, it was mandatory that the Director of Public Relations and Education devise and put into motion an active plan of Conservation through Education.

The first part of the plan was to go into every rural and urban school in Mississippi, go into every city school in Mississippi, go into every Junior College, go on every Senior College campus in the state and tell the story of "How to Have Better Hunting and Fishing in Mississippi."

The story is simple and short. Lesson number one is—KEEP THE FIRES OUT OF THE WOODS. Wild woods fires burn up the home of the wild animal. Wild woods fires not only burn up the home of the wild animal but they burn up his groceries. And that is not all—wild woods fires burn up the wild animal's source of supply of groceries. What would you do if your home and your groceries burned up? What would you do if the source of supply of your groceries burned up—your job? You would have to move, that is, if you didn't get burned up in the burning. Oh, yes, you might build your home back in just a few days or weeks, but not the forest, it takes almost a lifetime to build or grow a great forest. Do you like to hunt and fish? Sure you do! Then KEEP THE FIRE OUT OF THE WOODS. But some little boy in almost every group would say, "I like to fish, but I don't fish in the woods—I fish in the creeks and lakes and ponds." How does keeping the fires out of the woods help fishing? Fish are suffocated or killed by stream pollution from silt and debris that rush down the hillsides and valleys when it rains where woods fires have destroyed the vegetation and humus that holds the soil in place and drinks most of the water into the ground to be used by the growing vegetation in drought or "dry spells." In wooded areas where the woods are not burned, the streams and lakes of water are a thing of "clean beauty" and afford good fishing. All the young people agree. The result is—changed and changing attitudes toward timber growers and Damn Game Wardens.

The second phase of the plan was to get an invitation to every Civic club, every Garden club, every Audubon society, every Hunting club and Sportsman's organization in the state and present the program of the State Game and Fish Commission aimed at Better Hunting and Fishing in Mississippi. The result—better understanding and cooperation between the business man, the legislator, the sportsman, and the game law enforcement officers.

The third phase of the plan to promote better hunting and fishing in Mississippi was to initiate and assist in the forming and organization of Conservation clubs in every section of the state, especially in areas where there were large tracts of private and public woodlands. The result was, and is, better relations between hunter, fisherman, absentee landowner, and the agents of law enforcement.

The fourth stanza in the song of CONSERVATION THROUGH EDUCATION was an educational exhibit on the conservation of WILDLIFE in every county fair in the state as often as possible. The medium of newspaper releases, radio and television programs in every section of the State at least semi-monthly throughout the year receives top priority. The result is a currently informed public and the acceptance of the fact that the CONSERVATION PROGRAM of the Game and Fish Commission is real and alive.

Finally, the net result is that Mississippi is pushing forward in a program of WILDLIFE CONSERVATION THROUGH EDUCATION. Mississippi now has more than a million acres of managed and supervised public hunting areas located throughout the state. The lake, pond and stream fishing, not to mention the Gulf Coast, in Mississippi is second to none in the whole Southland. The same people that just a few years ago defied a program of forest fire prevention or control, now willingly pay a two cent per acre tax for fire control. These same people hunt and fish in season. (There is no closed season on fishing.) The Game Warden, in most cases, is accepted and respected as a leading citizen in the community and county. Tree farms and woodland plots for wild game habitats are numerous in every county in the state. There are more than fifty Sportsman's Clubs and Conservation Groups that are official or are in the process of being affiliated with The Mississippi Wildlife Federation, an affiliate of The National Wildlife Federation. Absentee Landlords are leaving den trees and selected mast trees, timber is growing faster and jobs for men and women that like to hunt and fish and recreate in the great outdoors are being thusly made every day. A leading State-supported institution of higher learning is making ready to offer conservation courses of study to teachers and conservations enthusiasts next summer (1960) for credit. (Thanks to the Mississippi Wildlife Federation for their leadership in this phase of the program.) Today, Mississippi offers some of the best HUNTING AND FISHING opportunities in the United States with a recreational and economic value undreamed of in the not too long ago.

Did the Game and Fish Commission accomplish this alone? Has the job been finished? No, a thousand times no; as stated in the beginning, all the conservation agencies and organizations in the state are working together toward one common goal, the conservation of all our natural resources. An example of this, working together, is that every summer camps for hundreds of boys and girls are held with instructors from the various state agencies assisting in the camp and working toward the same objective—the wise and careful use of all our natural resources.

When will the job be finished? Not until time is no more. "People are funny," and a good program of Wildlife Conservation is just like a good church or religious program—you just can't afford to let up. It has been said that to be a strong Christian a person must first be a strong believer in the principles of Christian faith; likewise, for a person to be a strong conservationist he or she must first believe that the *whole* of our natural resources—people, soils, forest, water and wildlife—are of vital importance to every citizen and to every business enterprise in the nation. In other words, "You've got to believe all of what you preach."

A REPORT ON THE YOUTH CONSERVATION EDUCATION SECTION OF FLORIDA'S GAME AND FRESH WATER FISH COMMISSION

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In the following pages an attempt has been made to report succinctly the progress made of various programs created in the Youth Conservation Education Section of the Information and Education Division in Florida.

I have attempted to report the basic facts relating to each program and in no way have I embellished them with fanciful wishes.

I need not delve into the philosophy of conservation in this paper. Being specialists, you are fully aware of this philosophy and the importance of our assignments.

I sincerely hope that perhaps any one of these programs may be the nucleus for many program experiments for our youth. It is only through the combined efforts of all of us everywhere that any kind of success, conservation wise, will be accomplished.

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The Florida Youth Conservation Club League was created in 1952. The league was organized to consolidate the various conservation efforts of the youthful clubs in the state. The league is administered by a board of directors composed of youngsters who are elected annually. The board has the power to create and recommend policies which are reviewed by the executive secretary who acts as a liaison between the board and the Game Commission.

There are twenty-four clubs in the league with an approximate membership of six hundred. These members make up the Youth Conservation Corps. The program was designed to include the youth who is not a member of any other organization. It is a program that takes care of a particular group. Most of these clubs in the past three or four years have been initiated by local citizens in their communities who see the need for this type program.

In April of 1959 the Florida State Adult Advisory Council was established and consists of eleven members. These board members are generally club advisors who have been appointed from various youth conservation clubs located in the geographical areas of Florida. The members are citizens who serve without pay.