

Presidential Address

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Again, welcome to Alabama and to Mobile. We are pleased to have you as participants in the 41st Annual Conference of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and look forward to a most informative and enjoyable meeting.

As those of you who have hosted this meeting know, a tremendous amount of time and effort is required to put things together and I feel exceptionally proud to have had the support of personnel within our Game and Fish Division and other areas of our Department to get everything in order. Special thanks go to general chairman Sam Spencer, for he has gone well above and beyond in coordinating and managing the program arrangements.

Following in the footsteps of my good friend and past President Steve Lewis, I recognize the important role our committees represent in the Association's success and I thank and commend each of you who have played such an important part. I also thank our Association editors, Section officers, and our hardworking Vice President Joe Herring and Secretary-Treasurer Don McCormick.

Most of all I want to thank each of you for your continued dedication to sound management of our fish and wildlife resources and hope that when you leave this conference you can feel that you have participated in one of the best.

Twenty-eight years ago I attended my first meeting of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies as a state director and since that time I have witnessed tremendous progress in the management of fish, wildlife, and people. Much of this success is because of this organization. It has often been said, and I fully concur, that this Association has been better organized, better managed, and more cooperatively oriented than any similar organization in existence.

Twenty years ago I served as president of this outstanding organization and became one of a group of directors dedicated to the proposition that man and wildlife are compatible when proper respect is shown to each.

The continued increase in the level of professionalism among all segments of the fish and wildlife fraternity is something for which we can be proud but also something to which we should remain dedicated as we move to the future.

During the very early years, the value of the mourning dove as a huntable species was recognized and in 1949 the Southeastern Cooperative Dove Study was implemented to gain vital information about the effects of seasons, bag limits, zoning regulations, etc. on dove populations. This cooperative effort among the Southeastern states and the Federal Aid Division of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was a forerunner to many additional accomplishments through cooperative efforts.

There was mounting concern during the early 1950s about the effects of disease within a rapidly expanding deer population on domestic livestock and again the cooperative spirit was displayed through the formation of the Southeastern Cooperative Deer Disease Study. This forerunner to our present Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study was a combined effort by the Southeastern states, the Atlanta office of Federal Aid to Wildlife, and the University of Georgia. The success of this effort is now recognized worldwide and is a shining example of how to share costs and combine efforts to get desired results.

Having experienced the tremendous benefits of the dove and deer disease projects, several members of the Association took advantage of the opportunities at North Carolina State University to create the Cooperative Statistics Study Committee. As one who has been involved since creation of this cooperative program, I can attest to the high value accruing to member states at a fraction of the cost if each state had to carry its own program. Those of us heavily involved in dove management recognize that had it not been for the expertise from key personnel at North Carolina State, we would not have been able to maintain the mourning dove in its present status as a popular huntable species.

Cooperative projects on Fish Disease and Continuing Education were developed between several member states and Auburn University and the benefits over cost to the individual states is considerable.

Cooperation among states, universities, and other agencies to get the best possible product for the least amount of money is a common practice of our Association and one that should continue and improve during coming years. A good opportunity for yet more cooperative effort lies in the need for additional thrust in both small game and nongame management.

As the future unfolds, we can expect constant change and increased problems relating to managing our fish and wildlife resources. We are no longer afforded the privilege of being judge and jury on many management decisions and the task of selling our needs to decision makers at higher levels is greatly demanding and will require the best expertise we can gather to assure that fish and wildlife is given a fair shake.

We are fortunate to have Gordon Robertson, legislative counsel for the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies with us. Gordon will present a detailed report to the directors during the business meeting but he will also discuss with any of you matters of national or international interest, particularly legislative issues.

For the past few years we have witnessed an appreciable increase in wildlife management activities by U.S. Forest Service personnel in the Southeast and this is

a major plus for the future of public hunting. As evidence of this increased interest and effort, I ask that all of you with the U.S. Forest Service please stand.

Speaking of the future of public hunting, I am forcefully reminded of what we face here in Alabama. The leasing of hunting rights at top dollar value is a serious matter with us and one that must be addressed in a forthright manner.

Some hunting rights in my state are going for as much as \$10–\$15 per acre and agricultural interests are now considering wildlife and hunting rights as a major source of farm income.

More acreage utilized by fewer hunters continues to erode the public hunting opportunity and we must be very careful, as I have said time and time again, that we do not reach a stage where hunters numbers have been reduced to a level of political ineffectiveness. I welcome any and all recommendations for solutions to the public hunting problem we face for once we lose the necessary voting strength of hunters we will have lost the whole ball game.

I was saddened and dismayed to learn from our hunter education coordinator that the National Rifle Association (NRA) had cancelled plans to participate in the workshop on Shotgun Shooting for Waterfowl. I recognize that the short notice of no participation by NRA was not a staff decision but one of the Board.

I do not know all the details leading to the change of position on steel shot by NRA but I do know that what we do in this Association and the International is done in what we consider to be in the best interest of the waterfowl resource first and the hunter second. I take pride in this position for it is sound and will serve the best interest of all of us in the long run.

I concur with my good friend and past President of the International Association Bob Brantly that we do what we do because sound management practices demand it and anyone who chooses to insinuate that our actions are not in the best interest of sport hunting and the hunter should relate himself/herself to facts and not emotional fiction.

Recognizing that Frank Dunkle and Larry Jahn have preceded me, I dare not discuss in detail items of national interest except to again encourage you to give your full support to the North American Waterfowl Plan and that you also keep a close eye on your P-R and D-J Wallop-Breaux funds for once they are committed to sources other than those now receiving them, we could be in very deep trouble down the road.

As one who has devoted almost a lifetime to administering a fish and wildlife program, I can attest to the fact that the talent to carry us successfully into the 21st century is among you and I know you will continue your dedication and hard work to assure that our fish and wildlife resources are not left behind in our march to the future.

Recognizing that this will be my last formal address to this very fine organization, I thank you for your support and hope that your future in fish and wildlife management is as bright as that which I found in my past.

Have a good time and come back soon.