

# General Session

## Wildlife Management in the Southeast: Are We Doing a Good Job?

**G. T. Myers**, *President, Southeastern Association of  
Fish and Wildlife Agencies.*

---

Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies 36:1-6

For 36 years now, fisheries and wildlife people in the southeast have been meeting on a regular basis to share knowledge and experiences and to work collectively to enhance fish and wildlife programs.

Our success as an association depends on teamwork. The host state must provide a facility which can accommodate the needs of The Association. This is sometimes difficult. It frequently requires substantial funding from outside sources, months of planning, and lots of hard work. People in the southeast must be willing to take time from their normal activities to submit quality papers for presentation. Our session chairmen and others must devote considerable attention to their tasks. Administrators must obtain travel authority for a significant number of people to attend. There are satellite committee meetings of The Southeastern Section of The Wildlife Society and The Southern Division of The American Fisheries Society and there are over 16 southeastern committees functioning as charged by The Association. Some of these committees must meet periodically during the year as well as during this conference. Some committee assignments require considerable work and some involve cooperative funding by several states. The leadership of this Association, consisting of the heads of state fish and wildlife agencies in the southeast, must provide appropriate direction. And finally, all of this effort must be consolidated into a permanent record. The job of editing, printing, and distributing the proceedings is no small task, as any volunteer editor will tell you.

State agency heads in at least 13 of the 16 southeastern states have changed since 1975. A majority of the leadership in this Association is relatively new. We are mostly inexperienced as directors. As a result, I can't help but wonder if we are running this operation, and for that matter, our state programs, in a way which would be pleasing to those who began this Association 36 years ago.

What is going on, wildlife-wise, in the southeast? Are southeastern states doing a good job? What is the job? I want to attempt to answer these questions.

What is our job? Those of us who work with fish and wildlife programs regularly handle uncomfortable-in fact-difficult situations. We sometimes deal with selfish user groups who want us to abolish competing uses of a resource they view as their own. We arrest citizens who violate our laws and, who on occasion, are influential citizens. We confiscate equipment used in violations. We say "no" to requests to stock fish and wildlife in areas where stocks are adequate. We close seasons when some want them open, and we open seasons when others want them closed. We sometimes oppose extremely popular community, state, and federal projects. These difficult situations generally arise because we place the welfare of wildlife first and foremost in our decision making process-not our own personal well being. So dealing with controversy to one degree or another is part of our fish and wildlife profession.

Since most wildlife falls under state or federal jurisdiction, a major percentage of us work in state or federal bureaucracies where time-consuming bureaucratic procedures must be followed to the letter; where simple land acquisition takes months and sometimes years; where there are travel restrictions, mileage quotas, reclassification studies, mandatory training programs, psychological profiles, federal fair labor standards, and on and on. As a result, many of us spend a significant amount of time dealing with government red tape.

Merely having an ability to cope with a sometimes hostile environment, and being astute at wading through bureaucratic red tape, does not always insure success in our field. Almost everything we want to accomplish costs money. Unless we obtain adequate funding, our wildlife programs will remain in the planning stage. The impacts of a changing economy make things more difficult. So we must also be astute money managers and innovative revenue generators.

Not only do we need money, we also need laws to carry out wildlife programs. We must therefore also deal effectively with politicians. And, on top of these things, we need public support.

With the controversy, bureaucratic red tape, financial, political, and social problems associated with fish and wildlife work, one quickly gets the feeling that there is more to fish and wildlife management than we learned in school. Many of us are tempted to judge ourselves as a success if we, and our programs, simply survive from one year to the next. In this type of environment, it is easy to be abused by the public, become discouraged, and feel unappreciated. It is easy to dwell on problems. In a nutshell, it is easy to

be negative and hard to be positive. In this process, it is also easy to forget that our primary objective is not to achieve a license increase to fund our programs and pay salaries, although that is extremely important and must take place. Our primary job is to manage fish and wildlife for the use, benefit, and enjoyment of people. We administrators are frequently amazed that our people are able to focus on that task as they suffer through "witch hunts," "salary crunches," transfers and others distractions. We are also amazed that our people do not abandon our programs for more lucrative careers in more peaceful fields.

So much for what is the job. How are we doing? Are we placing the welfare of the resource first and foremost in our decision making process? I think so. This past year, I doubt that any state fish and wildlife agency dealt with more wildlife related controversy than did our host, the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. Florida drew national attention as they did court battle with protectionists over hunts designed to reduce deer herds in flooded areas. Documented evidence indicates that Florida's proposed course of action was sound. The course of action proposed by protectionists hurt, rather than helped, the deer population. Documentation of facts leading to these conclusions provides a "text book example" for the rest of us who, on occasion, may fight similar battles. Florida not only went to war with protectionists, they also did battle with hunters. A group of waterfowlers challenged the commission's rule requiring the use of steel shot. They felt the rule was arbitrary and that it did not apply equally to hunters across the state. The judge ruled otherwise. In both of these situations, Florida chose to "fight" rather than abandon sound management practices. They placed the well being of wildlife ahead of whatever might happen to their agency.

Texas did the same thing a few months earlier and over a similar issue. The Muldoon Hunting and Fishing Club, Inc., challenged the non-toxic (steel) shot zone rule in Texas. The judge determined that "The rule is a rational means of reducing the incidence of lead poisoning in migratory waterfowl . . . , The rule is not irrationally discriminating . . . , The rule is not vague, ambiguous, or overbroad . . . , The rule comes within the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's rulemaking authority . . . , The rule is supported by substantial evidence . . . , and the rule was properly preceded by agency investigation."

So much for placing the welfare of wildlife first and foremost. What kind of management job are states doing in the southeast? Missouri is most likely leading the nation in their land acquisition program. During the past 5 years, they purchased more than 141,000 acres of land at a cost of \$100,700,000. That is an accomplishment in anyone's book.

Louisiana has done well by accepting a 63,000 acre gift of wetlands from 3 landowners. Arkansas added additional prime bottomland hardwoods

along the famous Cache River, bringing their ownership in that basin to 18,091 acres.

A number of states have improved their revenue situation. Alabama, Arkansas, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Virginia initiated tax check-off programs to provide funds for non-game. The relatively new waterfowl stamp programs in both Texas and Arkansas are similar and have been tremendously successful. Last year, their first year, Arkansas netted about ½ million dollars and Texas made \$1.4 million. North Carolina and Alabama established a lifetime license. They are placing the revenue from those licenses in a trust fund. Arkansas is drawing interest on its money for the first time and has also founded a non-profit tax exempt foundation whose expressed purpose will be to seek donations of money, land, or equipment. Missouri was able to protect their conservation sales tax revenue from attempts to divert portions to fund state parks, soil conservation, and city storm sewers. Oklahoma now receives 3% of their boat registration fees for fish production and restoration.

I believe it is significant that Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee, and Georgia harvested more deer last year than ever before in their entire history. Virginia set a bear harvest record. Kentucky, as a result of cooperative trades with several southeastern states, had their best turkey harvest in history last year, as did West Virginia, Georgia, and Tennessee. Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and North Carolina made improvements in their deer management systems. Louisiana has received authorization to expand their alligator season statewide; and Louisiana's brown pelican population has been stabilized.

South Carolina has upgraded enforcement. Tennessee completely updated their law book. Virginia obtained full police powers for their officers. Georgia, Missouri and Oklahoma are proud of their relatively new reward systems. Missouri has a new wildlife habitat program that takes several forms, including an agricultural officer who maintains contact with state and federal agricultural leaders and appropriate university personnel. They are involved with demonstration farms for wildlife and agricultural production. They do intensive management on private lands in selected pilot counties, and wildlife biologists have been assigned to work with the soil conservation personnel in regions of excessive soil erosion. Mississippi is proud of their cooperative deer management assistance program which now serves the entire state, working with over 350 cooperators covering 850,000 acres. This effort is enabling Mississippi to better regulate deer herds. South Carolina is beginning a \$4 million aquaculture center. Maryland has initiated a waterfowl habitat improvement and restoration project. In West Virginia, trout production, this past year, surpassed all previous records by 20%. Aggressive resident goose flock programs are underway in several southeastern states.

This is by no means a complete list, but it provides an indication of progress being made.

Is The Association accomplishing anything?

My pride and joy has been the work of The Association's Information and Education Committee. A slide show was produced, designed to tell waterfowl hunters why they should support the use of steel shot in areas where lead poisoning is a problem. This, by the way, is the formal position of this Association. This slide show was viewed by the Atlantic Flyway Council, Mississippi Flyway Council, National Flyway Council, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Undersecretary of the Interior, and the full body of The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. It has been distributed for use by all southeastern states, The National Wildlife Federation, several states outside the southeast, and to others. This effort, plus court activity in Texas and Florida, cast the southeast and this Association as leaders in an effort to do something about a significant resource problem—all within the last year. I should also mention that Texas expanded their non-toxic shot zone for 1983 to protect their entire coastal marshes and coastal prairies. The wintering area for 30% of the Central Flyway will then be protected from lead poisoning. This is truly an accomplishment which required courage. We still have significant lead poisoning problems in the southeast, and we certainly have a long way to go before they are solved. But, this Association has made it very clear that we stand on the side of the resource in this important issue.

Because of time constraints, I cannot go into detail, but I will tell you that the Southeastern Information and Education Committee also produced a slide show which addresses the hunter-houndsmen conflict. They developed an in-depth packet of material on hunter ethics, and the committee is working on a slide show which demonstrates the value of a well funded wildlife agency. Considerable time and effort has gone into the development of these products, and they are being used. Our Forest Resources Technical Committee is doing an outstanding job and their advice is frequently put to use by state directors. Our Enforcement Committee is working hard. My bet is that products from that committee will most likely be put to use shortly to enhance enforcement programs. Other long-standing committees were mentioned last year, so I won't say much about them this year. But, you should know that they are always there when we need them, and we need them frequently. Dr. Hayes and his staff "lived" with Colonel Brantly throughout the deer season controversy, providing valuable technical assistance and working with the news media.

I would also like to point out that members of this Association represent the southeastern views on national issues through The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. My involvement with The Inter-

national has been short, about 5 years. But, during that period, I notice that southeastern representatives dominate the executive board of that body. It may not be that we have any more members on the board than other sections of the country, but it is clear that we have more people in attendance at every meeting, whether it is in Oregon, New Mexico, Hilton Head, or Washington, D.C. I personally have been pleased with our representation and point out that Jim Timmerman from South Carolina is now serving as President of The International. I also want you to know that the southeast has considerable political influence. Some may disagree, but I believe we have used that influence in a professional manner and in an honorable way. We had considerable involvement through The International in the recent attempt to pass the D-J Expansion Bill. In fact, The Southeast initiated the push in The International for this compromise which came within a hair of passage and which would have had more impact on fisheries programs in this country over the next 20 years than anything I can think of.

My purpose in making these comments is not to boast. Nor is it to lead anyone to believe that we in the states accomplished these tasks working alone. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Forest Service, The National Wildlife Federation, the Bureau of Land Management, the Wildlife Management Institute, TVA universities, The International, and a host of others played a role in our success. My purpose is to simply point out that you, the states, and this Association are making considerable progress. My conclusion is that we are running this operation in a way which would be pleasing to those who began this Association 36 years ago. We directors are proud of our people, we are proud of our programs, and we are proud of our Association.