

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

CHESTER F. PHELPS

Let me welcome all of you to the fifteenth meeting of the Southeastern Association of Game and Fish Commissioners. It is with distinct pleasure that I serve as your president this year and also a real treat for all of us to be the guests of this great State of Georgia. The hospitality here, as we say in Virginia, is "some kind of good!"

May I also take this opportunity to greet all representatives of the agencies and organizations that are concerned with the enlightened management of the fish and wildlife resources in the southeastern states. We are happy to have you and to hear from you. We think we have a wide awake group and we are especially proud of our cooperative ventures and our progress in all conservation matters.

The history of our accomplishments has been very adequately reviewed in past years and, thus, I will not dwell on this subject. Rather, permit me to dwell, if you please, on the basic fundamentals of our business. Let me also present some thoughts as to how and where and when our states, our federal government and our private organizations can cooperatively forge the links to the chain of strength in wildlife resource management.

The fundamentals of fish and game management are rather unique and yet quite simple. Those who pursue these recreations must have a place to go. They must have a supply of fish and game, possessing sporting qualities, to pursue. They desire, and deserve, a framework of simple and understandable regulations. They also deserve protection of their resource during the closed seasons—and the enforcement of equality of distribution during the harvest. These are the fundamentals on which we stand. They should be the basis of our every decision.

A place to go can be assured in many ways from outright purchase to the supplying of the private landowner with an incentive to welcome hunters and fishermen. Let it suffice to say that we need now, and even more so in the future, a place to go. Purchase is expensive but lasting. Military areas fluctuate with the temper of the Kremlin. National Forests are permanent but stabilized in area. Cooperatively managed private lands hold much promise but on these we must remain guests. Leased lands are expensive and a matter of administrative philosophy. The undeniable fact, however, is that even with all of the above, approximately 90% of the land remains in private hands. Can we afford to hang the future of hunting and fishing on 10% of the land area? I think not. We must point the way to management by private landowners.

The supply of fish and game depends upon land use. Fishery biologists can and are making tremendous strides in impoundment management but the future value of streams, rivers and even lakes depends on other factors. Intensive management is popular today but the economics must be justified. Here again, can we afford to depend upon 10% of our land area? The search for exotics adaptable to present day situations must continue, but let's not forget the native species and the potential wealth of a citizenry informed with good management techniques.

The seasons and bag limits for most of our species present problems of such a magnitude as to make a Univac shudder. In nearly all cases, the reasons are that those who regulate do not understand the concept of a harvestable surplus—and neither does the aroused public who promote the "exceptions." I do not wish to belabor the obvious but this one fact is the most misunderstood of our fundamentals and the key to the log jam of unnecessary regulations. I am not sure that all of us here should not review that belief, now.

Protectionism as a belief in matters regarding fish and game has held forth now for many years. It is still paramount in many high-placed minds and is, of course, but one phase of our programs. The harvest period is for the recreation and enjoyment of the sportsmen. Officers are necessary to enforce the distribution plan set forth in the seasons, bag limits and possession limits. They must also protect the resource during closed periods. They must realize, however, that our

business is to foster the resource for recreation—and not to prevent its utilization.

If our information-education programs could focus on some of these matters for a period of years, I believe the situations would begin to ease. We hit it occasionally now but not strongly enough or consistently enough.

Those in private organizations can actively participate at all levels at the management programs. They can also work miracles amongst legislators and administrators when the facts are at hand and their desires made known.

Those of us in the profession at both the federal and state level must base our decisions and programs on the fundamentals. We must gain the facts through research, apply the methods in management and lead the sportsmen to logical decisions, all in an atmosphere of fiscal sanity. To do less will result in a switch of recreational interest from pleasures we know are deep seated and sound but not guaranteed to prosper.

I'm certain that we will meet the challenge.