

GAME AND FISH MANAGEMENT ON THE NATIONAL FORESTS OF THE SOUTHERN REGION

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I appreciate the opportunity of presenting a paper before this group, the members of which are engaged in a progressive activity which is becoming increasingly more important each year.

By education and training, I am a forester, the bulk of whose experience has been in national forest administration in the southeast — sixteen years on four National Forests, and the last five years in the regional office at Atlanta. My present work is in Division of Lands, Recreation, Wildlife, Watershed and Range Management, where much of the work of coordinating forest resource use on the National Forests is carried on. Consequently, although not a biologist or wildlife management technician, I am directly concerned with, and very much interested in, game and fish management.

In the rest of this paper, for simplicity and because it is common usage in Forest Service terminology, I shall refer to game and fish management as wildlife management.

The Southern Region of the U. S. Forest Service includes approximately 9.5 million acres of national forest land in the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas.

In considering the place of wildlife management on the National Forests, it is necessary to review the broad objective of national forest administration. Stated very briefly, this objective is to insure a perpetual supply of timber, to protect the watersheds, and to provide for use of all the forest resources in such ways as will produce the greatest permanent benefit to the nation and its citizens. We are thus committed to a policy of multiple use land management — a system of management designed to yield the greatest variety and volume of benefits compatible with wise coordination of uses and with the basic objective of management. This policy has been the basis of national forest administration for nearly 50 years. In his letter of February 1, 1905, the Secretary of Agriculture directed the Forester to administer the forests to the end that they would yield "the most productive use for the permanent good of the whole people, and not for the temporary benefit of individuals and companies;" and that "where conflicting interests must be reconciled, the question will always be decided from the standpoint of the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run." Such a policy requires a balanced program, strong enough to withstand temporary pressures not in harmony with the primary objective, yet sufficiently flexible to permit adjustment to significant, permanent trends in the national economic and social structure. This puts the Forest Service squarely in the middle, surrounded by often conflicting personal interests of individual and group users of the National Forests, and faced with the task of resolving conflicts with the least possible disturbance of the interests of all users, and in the best interests of all the people. You can appreciate the enormity of this

task, for I am sure that your own field of endeavor is not without the push and pull of variant interests.

Wildlife management is an integral part of the national forest management job. How is integration accomplished? First, Service-wide and regional policies recognize the importance of wildlife and require its consideration in all resource management plans. Second, timber management plans provide for maintenance of wildlife openings, leaving den and game food trees in timber stand improvement work, leaving uncut strips along fishing streams, stream pollution prevention measures and other practices which create more favorable wildlife habitat conditions; also, the size and distribution of timber sales, and the timing of timber stand improvement operations, are adjusted to favor wildlife wherever possible. Finally, wildlife management plans are prepared to guide the activity on each forest, with the intensity of planning depending on the amount and character of wildlife work.

So far, I have discussed mainly the mechanics of fitting wildlife management into the multiple use pattern. Now we come to the primary decision which must be made; and this is the \$64 question. Remembering that our objective is to manage all forest resources to produce the greatest possible benefit to the nation and its citizens, just what relative position shall wildlife, or any other resource, occupy in the coordinated whole? Briefly, the decision must be made for a specific area, based on:

1. Known facts.
2. All phases of present and potential wildlife prospects.
3. Extent of resource use conflict, if any.
4. Determination of calculable relative values, and evaluation of effects of any required use adjustment.
5. Determination and analysis of public opinion and demand.

Decision will often require some compromises. Normally, resource use integration can be accomplished without serious effect on the conflicting uses, and rarely will the complete elimination of one use in favor of another be necessary.

Management of the wildlife resource on the National Forests in the Southern Region is a cooperative undertaking. In no other phase of national forest administration is cooperation more essential. Wildlife is a product of land and dependent on the other products of land for its survival. It seems appropriate at this point to quote Regulation W-2 of the Regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture:

The Chief of the Forest Service, through the Regional Foresters and Forest Supervisors, shall determine the extent to which National Forests or portions thereof may be devoted to wildlife production in combination with other uses and services of the National Forests, and in cooperation with the Fish and Game Department or other constituted authority of the State concerned, he will formulate plans for securing and maintaining desirable populations of wildlife species, and he may enter into such general or specific cooperative agreements with appropriate state officials as are necessary and desirable for such purposes. Officials of the Forest Service will cooperate with state game officials in the planned and orderly removal in accordance with the requirements of State laws of the crop of game, fish, furbearers, and other wildlife on national forest lands.

In this cooperative set-up, the Forest Service provides and is responsible for the habitat, and the States are responsible for protection and utilization of the wildlife. The Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, by separate agreement between it and the Forest Service, is responsible for: 1) operating fish hatching and rearing facilities and providing fish for stocking national forest waters; 2) fundamental fish and animal research on lands under Forest Service administration; and 3) conducting federal predator control projects on national forest land.

The cooperative approach seems to be the most logical and advantageous to all parties concerned: first, because it provides for exercise of basic authority by the responsible agency; second, because it offers greater opportunity for pooling knowledge and cooperating in studies and research; and third, because it gives the cooperators the advantage of a united front in dealing with problems of protection, development and utilization.

The first cooperative wildlife management agreement in this Region was made with the State of Georgia, March 9, 1936, and covered 145,000 acres, in four areas. On July 1, 1936, an agreement with Tennessee was signed, covering three management areas. Today, we have cooperative agreements with all eleven States. Under these agreements, 49 cooperative wildlife management areas cover a total of 1,933,691 acres of national forest land, or 20% of the total. In addition, State and Federal game refuges closed to hunting include 417,464 acres, in 17 areas. The refuges, originally established to provide breeding grounds, are gradually being eliminated as such and added to the management area system. The total area of national forest land where the wildlife resource is being given special attention therefore amounts to 2,351,155 acres, or 25% of the total.

Activities conducted under our cooperative agreements with the States began, of course, with protection and restoration of fish and game, but have spread out rapidly to include: managed hunting and fishing; construction and maintenance of physical improvements such as buildings, roads, trails, and fish holding ponds; establishment of game food plots and seeding of logging roads and log landings on timber sales; special deer browse cuttings; habitat condition surveys and research studies; and various other kinds of development and maintenance activities on the management areas. Back in 1936, major game species such as deer and turkey were few in number and confined mostly to isolated spots or relatively inaccessible areas. Today, we estimate the deer population at 79,000, most of which are on the management areas and refuges. I have no figures on turkey, but they have been brought back in considerable numbers on several management areas.

All who have had a part in the cooperative development of the wildlife resource on the National Forests can take pride in the gains made since the beginning of the program. Without attempting to enumerate the specific accomplishments of each agency, I wish to give full credit for the fine work done by the States, which in several instances have gone beyond the terms of their cooperative agreements with the Forest Service in the performance of habitat improvement work for which the Forest Service has basic responsibility but cannot always do because of limited funds. Also, the Fish and Wildlife Service has made valuable contributions through research, its fish hatching and rearing activity, and the Federal Aid program.

The challenge of the future is clear and unmistakable. A look at some significant figures tells the story better than words. From 1940 to 1950, in the

eleven States of the Southern Region of the Forest Service, population increased 12.6%, per capita income 199%, and number of hunting and fishing licenses sold 212%. From 1944 to 1954, on the National Forests in this region, the estimated number of big game increased 142%. Lacking the means for securing accurate data on number of hunters and fishermen on national forest land, our estimates, which indicate a 400% increase from 1944 to 1954, are probably questionable; the actual increase is likely in reasonable proportion to the increase in hunting and fishing licenses sold. Recreation use, which is closely allied to wildlife use, shows an increase of about 300% since 1946. These few data paint a picture of what the future holds in store. We can expect increases in wildlife resource use as population increases, given a favorable per capita income situation.

Associated with these trends is another one. The expanding population is creating continually greater use demands — for agriculture, industry and urban developments, to cite just a few. Coincident with this situation is the gradually increasing withdrawal of private land from public entry. The Summer, 1954, issue of *South Carolina Wildlife* contains an interesting article on one phase of restriction of public rights, by James S. Verner, Assistant Attorney General of the State of South Carolina. He states: "Civilization is closing in upon us. Hunting and fishing, and the right to pursue them, have changed woefully in the last 150 years in this State," and continues with a discussion of the development in South Carolina of laws restrictive of individual rights in connection with hunting and fishing. Consequently, public lands — municipal, county, state and federal — will have to take care of a large part of the hunting and fishing pressures of the future. It is, therefore, very important that public lands be so managed to produce the maximum wildlife potential consistent with the basic objectives of management. At present some 8 million acres of the National Forests in the Southern Region are open to hunting and fishing under State laws, without payment of special fees or application of other regulatory measures except for such controls on management areas as are required to assure proper utilization. On the bulk of this 8 million acres no special restrictions are imposed. On the balance of the land (about 1½ million acres), special fees are charged and control exercised in most instances over numbers of hunters.

Meeting the challenge of the future will require the best cooperative efforts of all of us in fundamental research and application of its results to scientific management. The objective of the Forest Service in this region is to manage the national forest wildlife habitat so that wildlife population will be maintained at a level consistent with the requirements for other services of the land, and in accordance with their recreational and related public uses and values — in other words, integrated multiple use. There will be constant pressure from all interests, and compromises will be necessary, but if we fulfill our responsibility to all the people, we will maintain a balanced, coordinated program.