

President's Message

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I feel most fortunate to declare the 38th Annual Conference of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to be in official session. I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you from the City of New Orleans and the State of Louisiana.

As you are aware, the Southeastern is one of, if not the largest, wildlife conferences in the nation. A special thanks is in order to you, the participants, and to those within your respective organizations who are responsible for your being here. This is a working conference. It is your conference. Take advantage of it and reflect on the future of our profession.

We probably all have a tendency to reflect on times gone by and say that things were much simpler in the "good ole days"; that the issues and the problems that faced our predecessors were not as complicated as those facing us, as resource managers, today. This may or may not be true. Certainly, those managers that came before us thought that some of their problems and the issues of their day were insurmountable. This is the only time we have—we'd better make the most of it.

We have come a long way in the past half century in the scientific management of our wildlife and fisheries resources. This is evidenced by the number of hunters, the number of fishermen, and in most cases, good populations of game animals throughout the region. We owe these accomplishments to the good managers that faced up to the problems of their day. We must do the same thing today.

But what are the issues and problems that face the resource managers, the biologists, and the administrators in a modern society? Is it education? Is it user ethics? Is it the land ethics? Is it the loss of habitat? Of course, it's a combination of all of these. They all are related and they all are interrelated. They can act as alloys to form success or they can act as opposites to cause failure. Depending upon how we treat them.

We hear an awful lot these days about education and ethics. And, indeed, we should be hearing a lot about hunter education and hunter ethics. Com-

bine these two and we aid in protecting the sport of hunting and we aid in the proper management of the wildlife resource. The cause of the anti groups is aided tremendously when we fail to educate hunters and when we fail to teach hunter ethics. The non-hunting public's perception of hunters may very well be the same perception they have of us professional wildlife managers. Research and surveys reveal that many non-hunters and anti-hunters alike feel that hunters require and possess very little skill and knowledge to pursue their sport. We have an obligation and duty to not only that segment of society which we serve but to society in general to do the best job possible. We have an obligation and a duty to hold ourselves accountable to our own profession.

The use of the land and the loss of wildlife habitat may be the most pressing issue and problem facing us today in the southeast. The loss of wetlands, upon which so much of a healthy environment depends, is enough to discourage even the most optimistic. The misuse, the mismanagement, and loss of upland areas is alarming to say the least. The loss of hardwood bottomlands in some areas is almost total with seemingly no end in sight.

A very, very disturbing piece of information recently came to my attention. In the past three years not one acre of mitigation lands has been recommended to the Congress of the United States by those public agencies responsible for the loss of wildlife and fisheries habitat through their public works projects. All too often this becomes a state by state issue and as a result the battles are lost. When this happens, we all lose. Whether we're in Louisiana or North Carolina, it doesn't matter. Perhaps it's time for the regional associations and the national organizations to write and consider a major thrust for the replacement of these lands that mean so much to the quality of life for all Americans.

The American outdoor tradition dictates that wildlife is held in public ownership. There are two kinds of land—that which is privately owned and that which is entrusted to the public. Since game is a product of the land, this concept provides for an inquiring situation—a situation with ramifications which become more complex each year, and raises formidable questions in the minds of both the users of wildlife and the managers of wildlife. More and more land is being posted each year, and “No Trespassing” signs are appearing at an ever increasing rate, prompting hunters, trappers, and fishermen to reflect on the future of their sport. The misuse of the land and water resources and the loss of habitat coupled with increasing pressure on public management areas are prompting wildlife managers to reflect on the future also.

Hunting, trapping, and fishing are all part of our national heritage. The decisions that have to be made today concerning the land and its renewable resources are decisions that must be well conceived scientifically, well thought out philosophically, and well planned politically in order to preserve that heritage.

That old cliché that “a hundred years from now it won't matter” is just not true. It does matter. What we do today and how we treat today's issues

and problems, and how we plan for tomorrow's hunting, fishing, and trapping opportunities will determine whether or not our children's children will view us with respect or with contempt.

The solutions we provide and the questions we answer may bring forth *new dimensions in both our biological and political thinking*. A clear understanding of our goals of providing recreational hunting, fishing, and trapping is of absolute necessity in these modern times. It is imperative that relative to these goals, we understand our motives, our directions and ourselves. As a famous conservationist once stated, "Man is given the intelligence, though perhaps not the humility, to learn."