

## “INFORMATION-EDUCATION, VOICE OF THE COMMISSION”

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In the effort of the Mississippi Game and Fish Commission to properly educate and inform its people, it became necessary for the Public Relations Department to reorganize, expand and diversify during the past 12 months. This period of public relations rebirth has now been completed, and although we still have many needs, by most standards the department is now enjoying its most progressive era in history.

The work of our department is spearheaded by the Director of Public Relations, who has seven assistants including a secretary. Four are assigned field representative duties on an area basis, one devotes his time to Game and Fish Commission produced radio and television programs, and one is assigned duties related to writing and the Commission utilizing all sources of broadcast and print media to tell its complete story.

In addition to our own publication, *Mississippi Game and Fish*, special stories and photographs for other publications, news releases, pamphlets and brochures, civic club speaking, radio and television programs, billboards, a motion picture library, fair and tourist show exhibits, and organized youth programs, a secretary spends much time answering the dozens of letters received daily. These requests from throughout the United States involve information and research on wildlife, conservation, hunting, fishing and outdoor living.

The specific responsibility of the Public Relations Department is to inform its public, both resident and non-resident, of the activities of the State Game and Fish Commission and to teach wildlife conservation. Public Relations Department employees have to be versatile for they use many methods of achieving their goals, but they are all related toward a common goal of serving the public with a purpose worthy of attention.

Often times, as I am sure you are aware, it is with little praise that we perform our daily tasks. Because we are closely associated with politics, we face unwarranted criticism and uphill battles of major proportions. Because a small minority insists we have “soft” positions, the duties we are obligated to perform can become awfully heavy.

As Director of our Public Relations Department, I am sometimes described as “a man of my own will” by some of my lay friends. They think I am the chief and with the exception of the Commission Director and maybe the Governor, I have no bosses. I’d like to pat myself on the back and agree with them but, as you know, that’s hardly the case and I can’t enjoy that feeling of prestige for any great length of time. If a sanitation worker could have more bosses, I’d like to know how it’s possible and I have “begged the pardon” of several persons who have challenged my remark in the past.

Certainly, everyone cannot and will not be pleased. They find fault because my department could not accept a fifth civic club engagement for the same day. They criticize me because their local newspaper did not use a large enough head on a story that I had written for them. They scream because I publicized a lake in the next county. They fuss when you cannot let them call ducks on our television program. And they raise unmitigated hell when you have no use for their son’s picture with his first buck.

By far, most of the people we represent, however, can be pleased and they are reasonable. We compromise daily and change plans reg-

ularly to meet the needs of our people. Solutions to problems are often difficult to find, but they do exist and they are usually more practical than we may first think.

In trying to reach and stay in close contact with our people we use dozens of means. To pinpoint the most important means is an impossible task, although I may tend to lean heavily toward the newspaper since I am a six year veteran of that field. The main thing I try to keep in mind is the simple fact that today's trend toward proliferation in all media is apparent and in order to meet the specific requirements of my position, I must accommodate and use all sources of news and conservation education to the best advantage of the Game and Fish Commission.

In the past, news items could be made available to a handful of representatives of the dominant media with the anticipation that the message would reach an adequate portion of the population. There is general agreement that this is no longer the case, however, with the advent of diversified new sources of news, the public utilizes to become informed on current events. In the City of Jackson alone, for example, there are 11 radio stations and three television stations; five weekly and two daily newspapers; and more than a dozen other types of publication all of which have become significant disseminators of news.

My policy regarding news releases and feature articles is one that I suppose I developed while working as a newsman and that is I do not prepare them on a regular basis. I send out releases when I have something to say and not before. Our department averages two releases per week, but we have gone as long as two weeks without preparing an official news release, which may contain as many as six news items.

These releases are received by all newspapers, all television stations and all radio stations in the state. Some magazines and other periodicals are also included as well as prime out-of-state sources. For my purposes, these news sources are located in Memphis, Birmingham, Montgomery, Mobile, New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Monroe and Little Rock, primarily.

I believe another important facet of the Public Relations Department's work is to develop and maintain pleasant employee relationships. Therefore, Game and Fish Commission personnel, including the 11-man Commission, receive all generally distributed articles. We also make it a point for members of the State Senate and House Game and Fish Committees to receive our releases as well as other key political figures.

The people of Mississippi and the surrounding areas are informed of every facet of the Game and Fish Commission's operation, and news as it happens, through Commission publications. The Commission accomplishes this through our official publication, *Mississippi Game and Fish*, and pamphlets and brochures for handout and mailing purposes.

The magazine is, I believe, an informative wealth of knowledge. It's difficult to compare my publication with most of you because my per issue budget is slightly less than \$3,000, but I have reason to believe this handicap will be greatly improved in the near future. In the past year my circulation list grew from 19,000 to 30,000 and at present is increasing at a rate of 3,000 per issue. The publication is mailed free throughout the United States and 19 foreign countries.

Our department also has prepared a 160-page wildlife conservation manual for use by students, members of hunting and fishing clubs, landowners, and other individuals who wish to further the cause of wildlife conservation. We have plans to update and reprint the manual during the next year. We also have brochures and pamphlets on the

different types of wildlife, what landowners can do to produce more and better game and fish, hunting and fishing guide material, how individuals can help with pollution problems, and others.

The availability of a semi-modern printing room to the Public Relations Department has given us the opportunity to edit and print many of our own articles of information. This service has been a great savings to the Commission and has speeded up the overall operation.

Game and Fish Commission produced radio and television programs play an important role in keeping the public informed. We readily recognize the vast scope of television and at present we have 10-minute television programs on all eight stations in Mississippi and four out-of-state stations located in Memphis, Mobile, New Orleans and Baton Rouge. We also produce spot-news video tapes that are seen regularly on these 12 stations.

We produce radio programs that are heard on 24 stations scattered from the Mississippi Gulf Coast to the Tennessee state line. These programs are ten minutes in length and may be picked up anywhere in Mississippi.

In connection with broadcast media, one of the things we have discussed and plan to do is to capitalize on the use of Mississippi celebrities carrying messages for us. It is my feeling that the general public is more prone to pay closer attention to Bobbie Gentry, Don Kessinger, Willie Richardson or Miss Mississippi than they would to me, for instance.

I was a bit reluctant to make my first request along these lines, but I was pleasantly surprised when Miss Gentry, the famed singer and guitar artist, agreed to write and sing the Game and Fish Commission a specially written theme song. I must admit, however, I was expecting the song prior to this year's State Fair and as yet I have not received it. Specifically, I wanted the song for background music purposes at our exhibit at the fair which was held two weeks ago.

Miss Gentry agreed, in writing to accept the uncompensated task so I am confident she will come through. And I really should not complain although I am a bit disappointed that she's a little late.

Direct contact with the public is made through speaking engagements. Audiences vary from elementary school youngsters to elder community leaders. Daily, representatives of our department carry messages to sportsmen's clubs, boy and girl scout troops, community development organizations, civic and garden clubs, and school assembly programs.

Our method of approach is usually one of an informative nature. In this type of presentation we try to include a summary of the work performed by each of the Commission's divisions in all programs. We also utilize films for information, entertainment and educational purposes.

Another of our personal contact responsibilities is in teaching the National Rifle Association Hunter Safety Program. We feel obligated to train young sportsmen how to use weapons safely. We try to put our pupils, both young and old, in actual circumstances that they will encounter in the field.

This past summer we either exposed or completely trained more than 1,000 youngsters at encampments throughout the state. We have plans to expand our safety program even further next spring and summer.

Department personnel are also responsible for teaching wildlife conservation in classrooms throughout Mississippi. These classes are conducted in connection with vocational agriculture departments, 4-H clubs, science clubs and sports clubs. Since the department believes the future of conservation lies in the education of youth today, much of the public speaking activity is devoted to younger groups.

The film library remains an active part of our overall program. Films are used by groups of all ages to further their knowledge of wildlife. The library consists of some two dozen films ranging from 15 to 30 minutes in length.

Our department's different types of exhibits provide information, education and entertainment for many thousands of persons annually. This year, we used live animal exhibits at a few county fairs, but most of the smaller fairs saw the same professionally-constructed exhibit that we used in the 10-day Mississippi State Fair about two weeks ago in Jackson. We hope to use the display at travel shows outside Mississippi this spring.

The exhibit consists of large color photographs with captions that we hope tell the Game and Fish Commission's story. We are using mounted fish and wildlife for back drop purposes. The display also includes a slide projector flashing a picture story on a screen mounted inside a television set.

We were fortunate enough to obtain free billboard space from a major outdoor advertising company this summer and located 100 throughout the state. The billboards remained in their locations, and some of them in what I considered prime locations, for one month. The money I spent in connection with the billboards was less than \$500.

In its entirety, the Public Relations Department's job is one of great magnitude and importance. Without a successful public relations program the work of the other divisions of the Game and Fish Commission are of little value, and I am proud that most Commission employees realize this fact.

We are interested in serving the needs of all sportsmen, whether his "thing" be bird watching, frog gigging, bream fishing, turkey hunting, or just enjoying nature's bountiful outdoor wonders.

Public relations or information and education is many things in our state, and although our department is young, I feel our ideas are fresh and our accomplishments are many. I certainly recognize, however, the value of experience and since all of you probably have that over our department, I would welcome any criticisms you might have to offer.

I want to close my remarks by saying, I appreciate your time and attention and the opportunity of telling Mississippi's wildlife story from the public relations point of view.