

OUR PROFESSIONAL NEGLIGENCE OF THE WATER USE PROBLEM—AND A REMEDIAL APPROACH

By THE COMMITTEE ON WATER USE

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There is an old saying that a committee can be defined as, "a group of the unfit, appointed by the unwilling, to do the unnecessary." Now we may be unfit to serve on this committee and the report we are about to present may well bear this out, but the rest of that definition certainly doesn't apply. Your president who appointed us has never been known to be unwilling and if there were more like him we could probably give you a less critical report. And as far as the subject under scrutiny is concerned we certainly don't feel it's unnecessary; but apparently a lot of people do, which brings us to the matter at hand.

Fellow members, we are dealing with a sick child by the name of Water Use. And besides being sick he's mostly an orphan. Nobody seems to want the responsibility to care for him. And that "nobody" includes us. This seems rather odd since we apparently showed an initial interest in the waf when we got into this conservation field. Why shouldn't we be good parents to this offspring since we went to the trouble of getting our sheepskin to administer proper treatment and protection, and foster growth of the child?

But somewhere along the way we apparently gave up on the youngster. Did we do it because he was bad? No, because he wasn't bad. Did we do it because he embarrassed us? Maybe. Did we do it because we didn't seem to find the time? Could be. Did we do it because it just seemed too much to handle? Probably. All humans are lazy and most people are humans. We just got too lazy—the problem seemed too big and we weren't being pushed into it, so why bother; if our neighbors (sportsmen in our case) didn't object to our neglect why should we make the extra effort? So we have just sat back in our seats and on our seats. Nice, isn't it?

Or is it? Is it nice to sit back and turn our heads the other way? An ostrich may have his head stuck down a hole but he surely leaves a big target to shoot at. And one of these days that just might happen. But we shouldn't wait for that. The neighbors may not realize our parental neglect until the child's eating his last meal in the death house.

Year after year we spend thousands of dollars on habitat improvement yet turn our backs on habitat preservation, in this instance aquatic and hydrophytic. We give the patient an aspirin while he's bleeding to death. He may get rid of his headache but he's going to wake up dead.

So let's get down to this water use program. But, wait! Do we have a program? An emphatic "NO" for the most part. A roll call or review of the record for each state could be revealing and while we are rabid enough to resort to this we believe a year's grace might be in order.

If we had first asked "Do we need a water use program?" there would have been a big showing of hands. So why the difference? Why do we all say we need one but then are forced to admit we don't have one? There must be a reason and there is. It all goes back to what was said a minute ago—the problem seems too big, too complex, or too unwieldy—you choose the word. We just don't know how to approach it and, since we aren't being pushed, we lose interest or keep putting it off.

Each year we have a committee report on water use, wise words are spoken (and we are not being facetious when we say this), heads are nodded in agreement, the meeting breaks up, and all is forgotten for another year. Let's not have it happen again. Let's do something about it—now!

What should we do? We propose that the director of each state game and fish agency go home from this meeting and select one man to represent him on water use matters. It need not require a new man nor a transfer of job responsibilities and initially it will take very little time. It should not be too difficult to pinpoint the one man presently employed in that department who is

closest to the subject and this man probably already has some interest and certainly a background to accomplish the job.

The first thing this man should do is go to the nearest Corps of Engineers office and get a list of the water projects authorized for his state. This in itself will probably be a revelation. Go down this list and the state will undoubtedly find work proposed for areas dear to the heart of the sportsminded public and dear to the life of a particular resource. This simple act may induce shock and stimulate action, which is what we are hoping for. We scream about dams, dikes, canals, and drainage but we often have only ourselves to blame if the project goes through without regard to fish and wildlife interests. All projects are not bad and most projects can be improved if we but make the proper study and submit *and promote* our recommendations.

But, again, at the present moment we aren't asking the states to spend money on long-range investigations or to hire additional personnel. Everybody has budget problems. We simply ask that a present employee be appointed to make this list of authorized water projects.

Next we would like to ask that an off-hand "yes" or "no" be placed beside each project name on the list to designate whether or not the area to be affected has present or potential fish and wildlife values. We again believe the "yesses" will overwhelm the "noes."

Next we would like to have a "yes" or a "no" placed opposite each project name to indicate whether or not a study is, or has been, planned for the area in question.

The results could be embarrassing but if they are then something should be done about it.

We would then like to have all lists submitted for inclusion in next year's water use committee report which, bear in mind, should be prepared for public distribution at the meeting and included in the published proceedings of the Southeastern Meeting. We wonder, at the same time, how many states would be willing to have this list placed in their own game and fish magazine. This is an acid test and could hurt but—alright, do you or don't you want action? If the answer is "no" we feel sorry for the natural resources of that state and those citizens being deprived of their present and future pleasure.

It is easy to say that this is the sole job of the Office of River Basin Studies of the Fish and Wildlife Service but it isn't and deep down inside you know it yourself. That Branch is overburdened with work, has neither the time, equipment, money, or manpower to adequately do the job, and is only as strong as the states in which they work. If you don't believe it just ask them. So accept the responsibility—don't palm it off!

We suggest that each director forward the name and address of their selected water use men to the president of this Southeastern Section and that the president take it upon himself to furnish reminders when necessary. The president should compile the list and supply copies to all members of this "regional water use committee." We also suggest that the supervisors of the River Basin field stations and regional office be included as members. We further suggest that initially the regional supervisor of River Basin Studies be named chairman of this committee as he is in a position to travel around the region to contact, advise, stimulate, and perhaps console fellow members. Once the committee is set up additional details can be added a little at a time.

There is much work to be done but we have intentionally made no mention of the details. An excellent report was prepared by last year's water use committee which goes into the background of the problem. We believe in a humble and simple start as too large a dose of medicine may gag the patient.

This committee, therefore, proposes that the President of the Southeastern Section of the Wildlife Society recommend to the Southeastern Association at this Mobile meeting:

1. That each state director appoint one staff member to a Regional Water Use Committee of the Association.
2. That each member of this committee inventory the status of water use planning, project by project, in his state.
3. And that a brief, concise, factual summary be prepared by this committee and presented at the Spring business meeting of the Association.

This will give us a place from which to start, and we will know how derelict we have been in our duty to this wet orphan.