

Possibilities for Conservation in an Agricultural State

KENNETH M. KUNKEL, Department of Conservation

I represent that division of Indiana's state government known as the Department of Conservation and charged with administration of state laws relating to the conservation of natural resources. Created in 1919 and made part of the Department of Public Works by the 1933 Reorganization Act, functions of the department are administered by a Commissioner who is appointed by and responsible to the Governor.

Continuing today as established, the department has six co-operating subdivisions: Division of Geology, Division of Entomology, Division of Forestry, Division of State Parks, Lands, and Waters; Division of Engineering, and the Division of Fish and Game, of which I am the Director. Duties and activities of these divisions are so varied that it is not possible, in the time at my disposal, to review their operations, and my subsequent remarks will be confined to the Division of Fish and Game.

Powers, duties, and functions of this Division, as prescribed by the Indiana General Assembly, are, in brief: to promote beneficial fish life by improvement of lakes, streams, and watercourses and by artificial propagation; to preserve, propagate, and introduce beneficial species of game and game birds and song birds; to acquire and operate properties for fish and game propagation; to enforce such regulatory laws as may be enacted for preservation and protection of wildlife; and, to encourage, by education and organization, the formation of associations to further this program.

Out of the privations and sorrows of the depression has come the determination of the people of this country that a sensible and permanent national policy of restoration and preservation of our natural resources is necessary. Our resources of land, forests, and wildlife are so closely allied that to improve one is necessarily beneficial to the others. The replanting of forests and their protection from fire; the sensible management of land for agriculture, to prevent erosion and depletion of fertility; and a comprehensive plan of water conservation, both to conserve water in times of drought and to prevent wasteful floods, all have effects equally beneficial to the habitats and food supply of wildlife.

In this planning for the present and the future, the farmer occupies a peculiar and very important position. Due to the small acreage of public land in Indiana, it is to the private landowner that we must turn. Always a sportsman and by reason of his occupation a conservationist, the landowner must also keep in mind some material aspects of conservation. Seldom prosperous year after year, with taxes always a burden and oftentimes with his land heavily mortgaged, the farmer is entitled to be relieved of the major cost of restoration work. With his land constantly overrun by all of us with our inherited tendency to destroy wildlife, it is our responsibility to find easy, economical, and efficient means whereby wildlife can be restored to normal numbers.

Wonderful results have been accomplished by game management in areas where the population is small or in areas where hunting is restricted to the few. In our state, where everybody hunts, all of our land must be made to produce a capacity crop of wildlife to take care of our requirements. In future years heavier demands will be made upon our land for wildlife.

It is known that the number of sportsmen is constantly increasing, making further demands upon the area available for fishing and hunting. This necessitates, of course, that we make the available area more productive of fish and game. To do this, it is absolutely necessary that we receive the co-operation and support of the landowner who oftentimes in the past has been abused, his property destroyed and his feelings outraged by the careless sportsman who thus destroyed the sport of many of his brothers for the future. I am glad to say that this feeling is not as prevalent in our state as in many other sections of the country. In this country we have a system, the basis for which is the right of private ownership. By that right, the landowner controls who and who shall not enter upon his grounds and, within the boundaries of that right, are we dependent upon the landowner for the enjoyment of the sports of fishing and hunting.

There is another basic provision in our general order, which is that the right and title to all wildlife remains in the state. As a department of the state administration, and representing the people of the state, the custody of the fish and game in Indiana is in our care. We hold this right in trust for the benefit of all of the people of the state. We extend the privilege for a fee to a certain class of people to take fish and game at certain times of the year, under certain rules and regulations. This is a privilege enjoyed by all who pay a license fee, and the proceeds received by the department from the sale of these licenses constitute our entire revenue to replenish and protect the wildlife of the state. I want to emphasize the fact that the Division of Fish and Game receives no money whatsoever from the general funds of the state but conducts all of its operations through revenue derived from the sale of fishing and hunting and trapping licenses.

We have approximately 350,000 license-buyers in the State of Indiana. We have no public hunting area in the state. It is evident, then, that the license-buyers must enjoy their sport upon privately owned lands, which means that under our laws permission to enter upon the lands of another is necessary. It is our responsibility to educate the license-buyers to follow the law in securing permission to hunt and fish, to comply with the rules of good sportsmanship, and to protect the supply of both game and fish. It is our responsibility to regulate hunting and fishing for the benefit of all and to see that both fish and game be taken in such numbers and at such times as to prevent depletion. To maintain the supply of game, we must furnish it with a suitable place to live, which means that we must preserve a sufficient breeding stock at the end of each open season and see that it is properly taken care of during the winter and that its habitat is of sufficient quality that the game is enabled to propagate and exist naturally.

It is only reasonable to assert that, because the license-buyers of the state pay for the protection, preservation, propagation, and introduction of wildlife, their desires and wishes should be considered in the management of the wildlife resources of the state. This department is the only protective agency of the state administration, not only for the protected species of game birds, animals, and fish, but also for the non-game species.

In Indiana, I hope it will always be possible for the man who lives in the city to find a place to hunt in the country. To destroy free hunting in our state would be to end a period in our history under which the finest type of citizenship was developed. To restrict the sport of hunting to a favored few, who, by accident of birth or special advantages, could either possess land or buy the privilege of hunting upon such land, is a condition which I should certainly dislike to see imposed upon Indiana. Free hunting can be continued in our state if there is co-operation between the man who wants to hunt, the man who owns the land upon which the game is found, and the state as represented by the Conservation Department, which owns the game that is hunted. We do not encourage the posting of land, but we do encourage and should insist upon every sportsman's asking permission before entering upon the lands of another. It is easy to influence the farmer against the "city sportsman," who dresses in fine clothes and carelessly claims for his own that of which the farmer feels he should have a share. It has been the history of this country that class and professional prejudice is easily aroused. That is the reason that the organization of farmer groups is easy, especially when the sportsmen as a class are described as destroyers of wildlife. The sportsman is entitled to the credit of being the protector of wildlife, as it is he who supports the only protective agency for wildlife in the state, and it is he who pays for the winter feeding, the refuges, the restocking program, and for the new species which are introduced in our state.

To encourage landowners to post their land deprives the real sportsman of the opportunity of recreation and does not prevent the violator from continuing as he always has in the past. We are thoroughly sold on our educational campaign, and no one is working harder than this department to bring the landowner and the sportsman together. We have thousands of farmers enrolled in our conservation clubs and taking an active part in accomplishing our conservation program for this state. This educational campaign and the idea of working together is much better and productive of more lasting results than could be accomplished by the prohibiting of hunting.

The farmer should be made to see that he holds in his possession a natural resource which is the common property of all the people, that he controls the enjoyment of a recreation that can be obtained in but one way, that the need for recreation extends to all the people, and that he has no right to withhold the enjoyment of that form of recreation. Both the sportsman and the farmer need education designed to promote the mutual understanding so necessary for a close co-operative agreement. Each needs the other, and each has a responsibility in this complex social order of ours.

Some of the factors which have been responsible for the decrease of our game are: first, more intensive cultivation with the clean fence rows and the utilization of waste areas which accompany it; second, over-grazing and spring burning of roadsides, fence rows, and so forth, which destroy nesting cover; third, the destruction of our marshes and water areas for our waterfowl and the pollution of our streams and lakes for fish life; and fourth, of course, the ever-growing number of hunters and fishermen. Some of the above can be corrected, but we cannot hope to restore primitive conditions nor ever again to have the abundance of game and fish life that we once had. None of us wish to go back and lose the advantages of intensive cultivation of land with its attending prosperity and rise in the standard of living for those who till the land. We hope by education to merge the present day methods of farming with a few simple practices of game management in such a way that both will benefit.

In planning management of any area, it is necessary to keep in mind that the expenditures for any plan must not be excessive, and the plan must not conflict with the successful farming of the area. The actual mechanics of game management are simple. All authorities agree that the destruction of the natural habitat of game is largely responsible for its decrease. The improvement of that habitat, so that a given area will produce more game, is the result sought by game management. Perhaps it is a misnomer to call it game management; it should be called land management or utilization. The best game management agency is nature, and she will quickly restore to game fertility land which is not now productive of wildlife. In all game management projects we should try to work with nature instead of against her.
