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Mel Steen
Nebraska Game, Forestation and Parks Commission

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THINGS WE NEED TO DO

by MEL STEEN, *Director*
Nebraska Game, Forestation and Parks Commission

Nebraska has great need to preserve and develop her wildlife and recreational resources. We have reached that point in our history when we can no longer rely on yesterday's measures in this field. For our own social and economic good, we must now do things we have hereto considered unnecessary.

We face problems that a few years ago were unknown. The complexity and rapid growth of modern civilization, a civilization that has reached heights never before attained by man, create new and growing problems on the wildlife and recreational front. We have great need to preserve that which we have, but an even greater need to build for the future.

There is no better nor healthier recreation than outdoor sports. Hunting, fishing, water sports, picnicking and tourist travel are major outlets for America's recreational needs and one of her biggest industries. In the years ahead, Nebraska can and must play an increasingly important part in this field. Game, fish and water resources are especially important, hence we must give them special and serious consideration.

BIG GAME

Nebraska already has a substantial deer herd, and a considerable number of antelope, but both can be increased and their range extended. The antelope must necessarily be confined to those sections of the state where habitat and the agricultural use of the land make their maintenance possible. On the other hand, deer, especially Whitetail deer, show an amazing ability to live in and with dense human populations and intense use of the land. I am certain that the deer herd in Nebraska can be increased to a point where deer are a major wildlife resource in this state.

Big game resources in America, generally speaking, were over-harvested in the past because of the economic incentive. In other words, we shot off our buffalo, elk and deer because we could take the meat or the hide, or both, to market and get cash or goods for them. The nature of buffalo and elk is such that we can not have them as free-ranging game herds in present-day Nebraska, but we can restore deer to a fairly high level.

At the present time, most of our deer are confined to the northwestern and north central part of our state. Eastern and southern Nebraska are fertile fields for the expansion of the deer herd. We actually have too many deer in some portions of northwestern Nebraska right now, but not enough in the greater part of the state. The management problem, therefore, is that of keeping the deer at a desirable level in those areas where they have already become burdensome to agriculture, and building the herds up in those areas where deer are sparse or absent. In either case, the level at which we must carry our deer is that point which is compatible with agriculture. There is no justification for carrying deer herds at a level which is an economic burden to the farmers and ranchers of this state, nor is there any good reason to do so. We can have all the deer hunting we need in Nebraska, now and in the future, without imposing an economic burden upon the men who provide the land on which the deer must range.

This management objective will require trapping and transplanting of breeding animals, and full authority in the Commission to manage the deer in keeping with this objective. If we can have the manpower and the authority to do these things, we can make deer a major wildlife resource in Nebraska.

FARM GAME

Farm game (such as pheasants and quail) is the biggest wildlife management problem of today. Farm game is just as much a crop on the land as any other farm commodity, and the yield of farm game that we realize depends upon the kinds, the quantity and the distribution of the food, cover and water that support these creatures. It is easy to say that food, water and cover conditions are as good today as they were ten or fifteen years ago, but the truth is that they are not, either in quantity or quality. The truth is that there has been continuous reduction in the food, water and cover that produces farm game ever since the beginning of World War II. During the last fifteen years, habitat conditions for farm game have deteriorated greatly, and farm game populations have declined right along with these changes. No honest wildlife manager will deny this. On

the contrary, he will face the unpleasant truth and ask, "What can we do about it?" In my opinion, there are two things that wildlife management can do to offset this trend in the farm game field.

The first is to "hold the line" on farm game habitat insofar as possible. This is being done in a limited way through the habitat restoration program. This program should be augmented as rapidly as funds can be secured with which to step up this work. Farm game can not be stock-piled. We must have conditions which will carry a good breeding population through each winter, and enable that population to produce a good crop each summer. Good habitat is the thing, and the **only** thing, that will bring this result.

Agricultural practices are major factors in farm game management. There are two promising new practices on the agricultural front. The Soil Bank, through the Conservation Reserve, can provide substantial acreages of permanent cover. If this comes to pass, farm game will benefit greatly and will increase substantially.

Another growing practice, namely irrigation, also holds promise for farm game, and especially for the ringnecked pheasant. Irrigation produces much of the food, cover and water that is essential to the welfare of the ringnecked pheasant.

Even now, most of our better pheasant populations are found in the irrigated sections of the state. It is interesting, also, to note that in all western states, such as Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and the states west of the Rocky Mountains, the major pheasant populations, and often the only pheasant populations, are found in the irrigated fields and valleys of those states. While I do not anticipate rapid recovery, I believe there are better days ahead for the Nebraska pheasant hunter.

The second thing we can do about farm game problems is to find a species that will do well under the new order of things. It is both possible and probable that we can find desirable game species somewhere in the world that will do well in the habitat we create by modern agriculture and civilization. That is exactly what we did when we introduced the pheasant into range that would no longer support the prairie chicken in large numbers.

One such species is the Coturnix Quail. This quail is the most widely distributed game bird in the world, and probably the oldest small game species insofar as the recorded word is concerned. The Coturnix Quail is referred to in the Bible, and is still abundant in the Old World. This bird has many desirable characteristics, one of which is its ability to thrive and prosper in areas which are under intensive agricultural use.

While no one can say with certainty what may happen when an exotic bird is introduced in a new range, I can say that five years of study and investigation led me to select the Coturnix Quail as the best bet on the farm game front. There is, I believe, a good possibility that this bird will succeed in America, and should it succeed, the Coturnix Quail will probably become as important a farm game species as any we have in this nation.

However, the Coturnix Quail is not the only species that may help us solve our farm game problem. We will press the search for new game species which can supplement and increase our farm game resources in a careful, methodical and scientific search for species that may provide answers to our farm game problem.

Farm game management objectives must be:

1. To restore and increase our present farm game species insofar as money, manpower and modern agricultural practices permit, and
2. To supplement these farm game resources with the introduction of new species that are able to thrive on lands where habitat conditions are unfavorable or uninhabitable for our present farm game species.

I repeat, farm game management is the biggest problem we face in modern wildlife management, but the problem can be met and solved and we intend to do just that!

WATERFOWL

Nebraska lies astride the Central Flyway for waterfowl. This Flyway carries one of the greatest flights of waterfowl on the continent, and wildfowling is one of our most important sports. We have need for waterfowl management in this state, and that need will grow in the years ahead.

It is necessary that we manage waterfowl for our own uses and purposes,

and also essential that we play our part in the continental management of this resource. The Federal government cannot do this job alone, nor do Nebraskans want them to do so. The states must help them to preserve, perpetuate and increase our waterfowl resources.

The range of North American waterfowl can be divided into three segments: the breeding range in the north, the migratory range in the central part of the continent, and the wintering range in the south. While Nebraska has some nesting and some wintering of waterfowl, we are primarily a migratory-range state. Our problem is to feed and care for the birds as well as we can while they are here, and to do this in such a manner that we induce them to stay with us as long as possible in order that our people may harvest their just share of this resource.

We have a few waterfowl refuges in Nebraska, but we have no real waterfowl management units. In this day and age, a waterfowl management unit must include more than a body of water with refuge signs around it. A good waterfowl management area must consist of three things:

1. A rest area or refuge,
2. An abundant supply of high-quality food, and
3. Public shooting grounds.

The rest area is necessary in order to hold waterfowl in any given locality. Hunting pressure is so great today that waterfowl will not tolerate the gunning they are subjected to unless they have some place where they can find sanctuary a good share of the time. Lacking this, they move on. If we would keep the waterfowl in Nebraska so that we may harvest our share, we must provide rest areas, otherwise the birds will be driven out of the state.

Having provided the rest area, we must also provide an abundant supply of high-quality foods. The length of time that the birds will stay with us, and the degree of gunning they will tolerate, depends very largely upon the quantity and the quality of the food supply. There is also another factor here that is significant in waterfowl management; namely, the effect of nutrition upon the production and survival of young. Waterfowl are with us during the months just ahead of the reproduction season, and the quality and adequacy of the foodstuffs we provide greatly influence the reproduction and survival of young. We want a good crop of waterfowl to shoot each year, but if we do not feed waterfowl well on the wintering grounds, we cannot expect a good crop to come back from the summer breeding grounds.

Finally, and most important of all, we must provide for public shooting grounds on our waterfowl management areas. There was a day when the waterfowl hunter could go most anywhere he wanted to in Nebraska and have access to waterfowl hunting, but those conditions have virtually disappeared. Let's face the truth. A great many of today's duck and goose hunters have difficulty getting on or even near any water where they can expect a reasonable opportunity to harvest waterfowl. Competition for shooting spots is keen, and the better ones are owned or leased by the fortunate few who can afford to pay for this luxury. Public hunting grounds are needed in Nebraska right now, and that need will grow with each passing year!

Nebraska's strategic position astride the Central Flyway, and her potentials for waterfowl management, offer almost unlimited opportunities for development in this field. In addition to her rivers and natural lakes, Nebraska also has a substantial number of man-made impoundments. From Minatare in the west, to Lewis and Clark Lake in the northeast, to the Harlan County project in the south-central part of the state, waterfowl management opportunities go begging for lack of the money and manpower needed to take advantage of these possibilities. The Missouri River Valley, the Platte River Valley, the Republican River Valley, the far-flung reaches of the Loup Rivers, the Sandhill country, and the lakes and reservoirs of the Panhandle, plus all the other natural and man-made water areas we possess, are existing opportunities for waterfowl management work. To these will be added an extensive system of reservoirs and lakes which we will build in the years ahead. In my opinion, the construction of many more man-made lakes and reservoirs in this state is inevitable, a subject I shall discuss in connection with the review of our fish and water resource problems and possibilities.

In summary, our waterfowl management objectives must be to create a systematic and statewide series of waterfowl management units, strategically located with respect to flyways, the ancestral grounds used by waterfowl, and our need for public shooting grounds. The first such project is already under way at the Plattsmouth Rifle Range, a 1200-acre area of land which the state has

owned for approximately ten years. Others will follow as rapidly as money and manpower permit. Progress in this field is entirely a matter of annual income, since opportunities are virtually unlimited.

FISH AND WATER RESOURCES

Fish and water resources are extremely important in the outdoor recreational field. Water sports such as swimming, boating, water skiing and related activities are participated in by a great many of our people as well as by the tourists we attract to this state. The biggest drawing-card, however, and the greatest recreational value is the sport of fishing.

It is interesting to note that only three-fourths of one percent of the area of Nebraska is water. On this very limited acreage, we entertain 230,000 anglers, while only 170,000 hunters go gunning on the ninety-nine percent that is dry land. I have often said that we normally concentrate more recreation on an acre of water than on one hundred acreas of land, and that is definitely the case with fishing and hunting in Nebraska.

The recreational importance of fishing to our people can scarcely be overestimated. In hunting, the participant is largely confined to the male between 16 and 65, but in fishing, the participants include both sexes from the time they are first able to hold a fishing pole until they are no longer able to hold one.

Great changes and major problems lie just ahead of us in Nebraska in the use and development of our water resources. We have a highly fertile land. The major limiting factor on production is water. We can irrigate and increase the quantitative yield of our lands without reducing the qualitative values of the crops we grow. This we can do because we have such a high level of plant foods stored in our soils.

With this in mind, let's consider the problems that are ahead. The American people are increasing at a tremendous rate. A new American appears on the scene every 13 seconds—300 every hour. Seven thousand new Americans sit down to breakfast each and every morning in this land of ours. The current rate of increase is 2,800,000 people a year, or double the entire present population of the state of Nebraska! The latest population estimates indicate that we will have 230 million people in America by 1975. That fact is tremendously significant to Nebraska, and will have major impact upon her land and water resources.

We are fast approaching the day when agricultural production in the United States will no longer be surplus to our domestic needs; when we will need all the food and fiber we can produce to feed, clothe and house our own people. Most authorities believe that we will reach that point within twenty years. They may miss it a few years, but the important thing is that this point will be reached soon—certainly within this generation.

Since these developments are inevitable, it is also inevitable that this highly agricultural state, with its fertile soil and great water resources, will use both these resources to the fullest in the production of this food and fiber. It is profitable to irrigate today, but it will be doubly profitable to irrigate tomorrow! Water will become our most precious natural resource! As I see it, the question will not be whether we have enough water, but how far can we make each drop of water go! Let me state a significant truth here: the available supply of fresh water is a deadline beyond which no community, state or nation can ever go. The end of the water supply is the end of the road for all human industries and activities! I repeat, within this generation water will become the most precious resource we possess in Nebraska, and we will be forced to use every drop of it for as many purposes and in as many places as is humanly possible!

In the recreational field this means that we must treasure our water and develop our water resources whenever and wherever we can. It will be necessary to develop the fisheries, waterfowl and recreational resources of all our irrigation reservoirs. We must build public fishing lakes on the upper reaches of our watersheds. We must acquire and hold for public use all the good natural lakes that are available. We must develop the recreational values of our rivers. We must guard and develop all our water resources; there is no discernable alternative!

These, then, are major things we must do in Nebraska. We are a lucky people, we have great resources and great potential. Let us preserve what we have, and begin now to build for the future. This we can do, and this we must do, for this the destiny of Nebraska!

Game, Forestation and Parks Commission
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