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ANNUAL REPORT
MIGRATORY BIRDS COMMITTEE
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GAME, FISH AND CONSERVATION COMMISSIONERS

September 20 - 22, 1965

This report of the 1965 Migratory Birds Committee will concentrate less on Waterfowl and will present some plans, proposals and recommendations on several species of migratory game birds. These plans and proposals come from individuals and official committees working with these various species.

WATERFOWL:

As in the past the Committee presents a summary of the federal wetlands acquisition program supplemented by data on state acquisition progress in the prairie pothole region.

The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife's acquisition continued to pick up momentum although it is still far behind the authorized schedule. Appropriations for the first five years of the seven-year program total only $32,500,000. The authorization provided for $15,000,000 per year, or $75,000,000 the first five years. Thus, less than half the authorized amount has been appropriated.

Despite initial difficulties in getting the program rolling, the Bureau has utilized all appropriated funds. Through June 30, 1965, fee and easement acquisition totaled 521,141 acres. There is a backlog of Migratory Bird Conservation Commission approvals totaling $26,000,000. In the pothole production area the the Bureau has acquired in fee or has purchase agreements on 97,154 acres. In addition, easements prohibiting destruction of wetlands have been secured on 268,995 acres. In fiscal year 1965 easements were taken on 177,796 acres; nearly double the previous accomplishments. Total costs in Region 3 through June 30,1965, are $15,500,000.

During this same five-year period there has been available to the Bureau an estimated $21,337,500 from Duck Stamp sales which is also used for wetlands and

refuge land purchases. The total of 521,141 acres acquired through May 31, 1965 includes acquisition with Duck Stamp sales funds.

Average cost of lands acquired in fee is $44.39/acre and for those acquired under easement the average is $10.95/acre. The increase in program costs is striking when compared to the 1963 figures. Through June 30, 1963, the respective costs for fee and easement acquisition were $27.45/acre and $6.41/acre. This represents per acre increases of 62 percent and 70 percent.

It is obvious that the $105,000,000 acquisition program will not be completed in the seven-year period and an extension is necessary and highly desirable.

Data were secured from the prairie pothole states as to their expenditures and success in acquiring production habitat. In the states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota and Iowa, the average annual expenditures for this purpose ranges from $12-$18,000 in North Dakota to $500-$600,000 in Minnesota. Total wetland acquisition over the past fifteen years is estimated at approximately 225,000 acres.

One other item of real importance in waterfowl management is the method of disposal of National Wildlife Refuge lands. Members of Congress have protested the Bureau of the Budget's policy of disposing of such lands. H.R. 8432 - Dingell (Michigan), provides for amending the Migratory Bird Conservation Act so no refuge lands shall be disposed of without the approval of the Migratory Bird Conservation Committee. The Migratory Bird Committee strongly recommends support of this bill.

In three Flyways, the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Pacific, broad surveys were initiated to determine the extent, nature and distribution of wetlands held by private interests for waterfowl and the degree of management practiced. The Central Flyway is cooperating to a limited extent in this national effort to document some of the most important wetland holdings in North America. These

surveys have moved slowly and are far from complete in any Flyway.

This Committee recommends that the Association urge all states to complete the survey to the fullest extent possible during the coming waterfowl hunting season. A meeting of the four Flyway Committee Chairmen, Bureau Flyway Representatives, and a representative of the Wildlife Management Institute is being planned for March 1966 in conjunction with the N. A. Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference to appraise progress in completing the private wetlands holding survey.

One of the most important items on waterfowl is Canada's newly initiated program of wetlands acquisition. This program, approved for implementation, calls for the acquisition of some 4,000,000 acres of wetlands at a cost of about $5,000,000 per year over a ten-year period, 1967-1976. In addition, large marsh acquisition is planned at the rate of about $2,000,000 total over a five-year period.

The Migratory Birds Committee recommends that the Association commend the Canadian government for this most important step it has taken in waterfowl management.

For the past several years over-all duck production has been poor; due to drought, fall flight forecasts have been pessimistic and the total duck population has declined. Many conservationists have strongly urged that duck hunting regulations be drastically curtailed or closed with the objective of sending a strong population back to the breeding grounds when water conditions become more normal. However, in spite of one or two curtailed seasons we have continued to over-harvest some species.

In 1965 we had good water conditions but only about half enough breeding ducks to populate the available areas. It appears very evident that now is the time to restrict the harvest, especially on some species, and allow our dwindling duck population to build back. To this end the Committee recommends that the

Association urge the U. S. Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, the Canadian Wildlife Service, the Mexican Government, and all states to close or greatly curtail the season on certain species when breeding grounds conditions are good so the duck population can recover.

MOURNING DOVES:

For several years attempts have been made to secure larger appropriations for mourning dove research and management. The amount sought, approved previously by the International Association, is $256,000. To date efforts to secure these funds have been unsuccessful. At a meeting of representatives of several conservation agencies and organizations in March 1965, an expanded program of research and management was discussed. The decision was that species other than mourning doves should also be considered. These other species will be discussed later.

At the annual dove regulations meeting in Washington in June 1965, proposals were made by several states for experimental regulations for the 1965 season. These included: (a) full day shooting in one state; (b) larger bag in one state; (c) liberalized baiting in one state; and (d) zoning in one state.

Bureau personnel stressed the point that the effect of such experimental regulations could be measured only if separate and distinct populations were involved in each experiment. At present it is possible to consider dove populations only on the basis of the three management units; Eastern, Central and Western. If future banding programs further define distinct populations such experimental regulations may become feasible. However, based on existing knowledge they are not now advisable on an individual state basis.

At this same meeting reference was made to the present organization of Technical Dove Committees on the basis of regional associations of states and provinces. It is now felt that the problems of dove management can be met better

through the organization of such Technical Committees on the basis of the established Management Units. In accordance with this proposal the Association of Midwest Fish and Game Commissioners approved discontinuance of the Midwest Dove Committee in favor of an Eastern Management Unit Committee. The Migratory Birds Committee recommends that the present Technical Dove Committees be replaced or supplemented by Management Unit Committees.

WHITE-WINGED DOVES:

One species which has received little attention but is actually in more need of attention than the mourning dove is the white-wing. Although restricted to a four-state area and Mexico, it is a highly important migratory game bird where it does occur.

During the past several years William Kiel, employed by the King Ranch, has pointed out several important problems confronting the maintenance of a healthy white-winged dove population. As with most wildlife, the number one need is to preserve nesting habitat. In the case of the white-wing this means the acquisition of native brushlands in the United States and Mexico. In both countries clearing for agriculture is rapidly eliminating native brushlands.

The World Wildlife Fund started a program of brushland acquisition in Texas and Mexico. The program started off with a $200,000 grant by the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Foundation. However, at least twice this amount will be needed to acquire the 5,000-10,000 acres considered necessary.

The request for increased appropriations for dove research and management should include consideration of the white-wing.

RAILS; WOODCOCK; SNIPE; BAND-TAILED PIGEONS:

Rails, woodcock, snipe and band-tailed pigeons are other species which are recommended to receive attention as a result of the afore-mentioned meeting. Preparation of an outline for a program of research for each species has been assumed by various individuals. When these have been completed they will be presented to the group, probably at the time of the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in Pittsburgh in March 1966. When approved it is hoped that means can be found for financing the necessary research and management programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A - WATERFOWL:

1. Urge Congress to provide an additional 10 years for completing wetland acquisition under the $105,000,000 advanced loan program.

2. Urge all members of the Association to energetically support and advance efforts aimed at developing a non-toxic shot to replace lead shot.

3. Support H.R. 8432 - PROCEDURE FOR DISPOSAL OF NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES. Mr. John D. Dingell (Michigan)

4. Work to have funds over and above the $105,000,000 loan fund made available for:

   (a) Grants to states for wetlands acquisition, lease or easement taking programs on a non-matching basis.

   (b) Development of existing or potential wetlands safe from exploitation, to raise their production capacity.

   (c) Incentive payments to landowners, as supplements to USDA subsidy payments, to retain, restore or create water areas which do or would have value for waterfowl production.

5. Urge all states to complete, as fully as possible, the survey of private waterfowl lands.

6. Commend the Canadian Government, through an appropriate letter from the Association President, for establishing the new wetlands program of vital importance to waterfowl management in North America.

7. Support greatly curtailed or closed seasons on ducks, by individual species when necessary, to permit breeding populations to recover and occupy more fully available aquatic areas.

B - MOURNING DOVES:

1. Support the establishment of a Technical Dove Committee for each of the three Management Units to develop research and management programs according to Unit population needs.

C - WHITE-WINGED DOVES:

1. Support the program of the World Wildlife Fund in securing funds to acquire and preserve white-winged dove nesting habitat.

D - RAILS; WOODCOCK; SNIPE; BAND-TAILED PIGEONS:

1. Support development of research and management plans for rails, woodcock, snipe, and band-tailed pigeons.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas R. Evans
Chairman
Migratory Birds Committee

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TRE:h
September 14, 1965