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FARM LANDS IMPORTANT IN CONSERVATION OF WILDLIFE

Annual Report of Biological Survey Stresses Wildlife's Need for Land and Protection

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Wildlife must be produced on farm lands as well as on lands publicly owned if benefits from this resource are to be perpetuated, says Ira N. Gabrielson, Chief of the U. S. Biological Survey, in his annual report to the Secretary of Agriculture. The report, which covers the year ended June 30, was released by Secretary Wallace today (December 31).

Discussing a current study of wildlife management as a supplementary farm enterprise, Doctor Gabrielson says that the outstanding results so far have been "the stimulating of attention and interest and the bringing together of individuals and organizations that have some interest in the production, administration, and utilization of wildlife, particularly as related to agriculture and land use." The study is being made in cooperation with the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, of the Department of Agriculture. It thus far indicates that State or Federal lands alone can not supply sufficient wildlife or adequate facilities for its use and enjoyment by the public.

The close relation between farm practices and wildlife management is also indicated in Doctor Gabrielson's discussion of development work on Federal refuges. "Emphasis this year," he says, "has been on physical and biological rehabilitation. Wildlife technicians have supervised the planting of tons of duck-food plants and

of millions of food-bearing trees and shrubs to make the areas further attractive to wildlife."

Provided we have the necessary regulation of hunting, Doctor Gabrielson indicates that a wildlife increase depends almost entirely on the land provided specifically for wildlife and on the way in which all kinds of areas can be managed so as to include wildlife -- farm lands and other privately owned lands, as well as public areas. Wise action for the future of wildlife is largely a matter of using land wisely and regulating hunting carefully.

Federal Refuge Areas Increased

Continuing the wildlife restoration program begun in 1933, the Biological Survey purchased more than 600,000 acres of refuge lands during the fiscal year, and over half a million acres more were held pending title conveyance. Almost a million acres were added by Executive order. Since July 1, 1933, the Survey has purchased more than 1,500,000 acres of refuge lands, and in the same period over 4,000,000 acres have been reserved by Executive orders.

On June 30 there were 216 Federal refuges in the United States with an acreage exceeding 7,000,000, and 15 refuges in Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico raised the total above 11,500,000. Acquisitions during the last year included areas for 70 refuges in 32 States and Alaska.

When present funds are exhausted the program will have reached nearly the halfway mark, Doctor Gabrielson estimates.

Pointing out that the refuges newly established are already producing results, Doctor Gabrielson estimated that wildlife populations of the refuges have increased threefold. The increase was in part attributed to development work that has been carried on by C.C.C. camps and W.P.A. workers. Their work included improving food conditions, planting and transplanting, and building water-conserving and controlling structures. They also improved buildings and trails to facilitate

administration of the refuges.

Regulations Conserve Breeding Birds

The only practicable way to make sure that there are abundant wildlife populations to use the refuges is to regulate the annual take by hunters throughout the country, according to the Survey Chief.

"There is no magic way," he says, "to restock the new and former breeding grounds. Either an increasing number of birds must be allowed to return to them each spring or the sport of duck hunting will vanish. The necessity for severe restrictions on hunting has not passed."

Benefits of the strict regulations are shown in the fact that some waterfowl increases have now been noted for two consecutive years.

Doctor Gabrielson reports that "there is increasing cooperation between Federal and State Governments, and there is ever more manifest among sportsmen a willingness to support and abide by regulations restricting former liberal hunting privileges. There is also a growing appreciation of the fact that unless hunters exercise self-restraint in the kill of migratory game, there will be no birds to occupy the refuges."

Outstanding events of the year included the completion of a treaty with Mexico for protecting migratory birds and regulating shipments of game mammals, the successful prosecution of persons illegally handling furs, and the continuance of the drive against duck bootleggers and persons taking waterfowl by means of bait.

Research the Basis of Wildlife Work

Doctor Gabrielson's report emphasizes the need for a more adequate knowledge of wildlife.

The Biological Survey is fundamentally a research agency. The purpose of its establishment in the Department of Agriculture half a century ago was to study the relation of birds to the farmer. Other studies followed until now every problem of wildlife conservation and management is the concern of some scientist in the Bureau.

Naturalists from the Survey during the past year observed and studied wildlife conditions throughout the United States, in Canada, in Labrador, in the far-flung Aleutian Islands, and in the sub-tropical regions of Mexico. Others studied the effects of crows, skunks, weasels, and foxes on nesting waterfowl, the food habits of the coyote, the effects of mosquito-control drainage on wildlife, the diseases of wildlife, and the problems that confront fur farmers and rabbit raisers. A research refuge was established along the Patuxent River in Maryland and a laboratory nearly completed at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma. Studies are in progress at ten land-grant colleges where the Biological Survey maintains research and demonstration units in cooperation with the American Wildlife Institute, and the college and State conservation agencies.

Control Animals Doing Damage

Animals doing damage or threatening human health are reduced in numbers by the Biological Survey cooperating with local, State, and other agencies. The work is handled in such a manner as to minimize the destruction of harmless and useful species and is conducted locally where definite needs are apparent. During the past year the Survey supervised the reduction of rodents on 34,652,418 acres for the protection of farm crops, range grasses, silvicultural plantings, and reclamation waterways, and for the conservation of surface soils. Survey specialists developed improved orchard-mouse baits and field practices in New England. In Alaska the Bureau resumed the demonstration of trapping methods for predator control, and in Hawaii it established a control-methods laboratory and bait-production plant in Honolulu for experiments in rat control and for the manufacture and canning of baits for distribution to island plantations.