



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

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ADDRESS BY ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROSS LEFFLER, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, AT THE ANNUAL BANQUET OF THE COLORADO DIVISION OF THE IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE, AT GOLDEN, COLORADO, JUNE 15, 1957

LET'S FACE OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

I am really delighted to have this opportunity to speak to you about some of the conservation problems which face you and me today, and about our hopes for conservation in the future. We must look hopefully to that future for the remedies for present-day fish and wildlife management ills. . .ills rooted in the past which now menace the health of these natural resources. In this respect, the theme of your program--The Next Ten Years in Conservation--certainly is right down our alley. I say that because the United States Fish and Wildlife Service now is up to its neck, figuratively and actually, in planning for a 10-year conservation action program which will really meet the future needs of our country with respect to these important fish and wildlife resources. These next ten years are critical ones for that planning. During that period the program must get up a full head of steam. Otherwise, it will be again the old story of too little, too late. That we must not, will not, permit to happen.

I am sure most of you heard Dan Janzen this afternoon tell about the kind of an all-out effort which is going into this planning operation for the Federal sport fisheries and wildlife conservation program of the future. I will not repeat any of his reporting, but I do want to emphasize as strongly as possible one thing about this planning: The task forces have done, and the staff people in both of our bureaus--Commercial Fisheries and Sport Fisheries and Wildlife--are now doing a bang-up job in developing these plans.

Wisely, they are providing for adequate research, geared directly to primary program needs developed by operational experience in the field. That procedure, coupled with constant program review, guarantees us a most productive effort and with all our needs we can't have anything less. Long ago in industry, we found that progress comes through research. It's no different in conservation. Don't ever forget it and don't ever let anyone restrict fish and wildlife research efforts. They are vital ingredients in a good program.

Equally as important is the planning for the activity which makes it possible to implement in the field the findings produced by research. Without this, the research effort goes for naught. With it, an operational organization is available to bring essential technical services to other government bureaus and to the States wherever needed and whenever requested to handle biological investigations and prescriptions for management programs for both fish and wildlife.

Existing fish and wildlife operations of the Federal Government are to be realistically expanded in the new operation with high priority on a sharply

stepped-up program of acquisition and development of key wetlands for migratory waterfowl. This latter is most important. Fortunately, this fact is widely recognized and the need for quick action strongly endorsed.

However, a program is no better than it is known and supported. So, to stimulate public understanding of, support for and participation in all good activities for fish and wildlife, we're going to have the most aggressive conservation education and extension effort we can devise and we're going to do it with a most conservative budget.

In developing these important plans for the future we tapped the best conservation minds we could find--in the Service, the States and private conservation agencies. From all the prescriptions will come the master plan for Federal fish and wildlife conservation, but that is really just the beginning. A plan is merely a piece of paper; it has to be completely implemented to make the action program a reality. This can take place only if all of us discharge certain responsibilities which each one of us has in the conduct of an improved program.

Let's look at our responsibilities in the Department of the Interior and in the Fish and Wildlife Service, which have to be met and discharged if we are to have an effective program--one which will do the job that's called for.

First, we in the Federal Government have got to make certain that the future will see constant, close cooperation between the Service, State Fish and Game Departments and private conservation agencies. This is not a one-man or one-organization show. The national fish and wildlife program for tomorrow has to be a full partnership effort, and we must make certain Federal activities efficiently supplement and do not duplicate State efforts. Only in that way can we spread out the strength of our various organizations and mount a big enough attack to attain all of our objectives. That's why close teamwork and good liaison are so essential

We in national conservation administration also must make certain that fish and wildlife forces can attract and hold the ablest possible people available if we are going to carry out all the assignments set up in the planning for the future. We have some fine people in our organizations. I often wonder how we hold them. I feel it's because they are so dedicated to the job of improving fish and wildlife management that they stay on even though they could do very much better financially elsewhere.

This is the personnel problem we face. In business or industry, college men graduating this year can expect starting salaries averaging about \$400 a month. In contrast, the starting salary for a college man in the Fish and Wildlife Service is about \$300. After 10 years, the average college man in industry can expect to earn somewhere around \$825 a month. Experienced fish and wildlife biologists with about six years of specialized university training and five or more years of field experience, average less than \$375 a month. In 1956, the average annual salaries of 304 nonsupervisory game and fish biologists was \$4,386. In sharp contrast, the average pay for several classes of nonsupervisory laborers in the construction field was over \$6,000.

Within the framework of our budget, by good housekeeping we've got to find ways to correct this situation. We must be able to attract and hold the top quality personnel which are essential to the successful conduct of a highly technical program such as is involved in the management of natural resources. This good housekeeping practice of constantly checking all our activities to make certain we are operating with greatest efficiency and every economy, I assure you, will be a routine procedure of our administration. In that way, we will guarantee maximum progress for conservation from the funds available and accomplish special objectives such as I have just mentioned.

Sportsmen also have a very definite responsibility which must be met if we are to have the most economical and most effective conservation effort. That responsibility is to give up any local, special interest point of view and always think in terms of the national program. And you must make that objective, national interest point of view known to the Congress. When local projects which do not meet the test of serving national program needs are pushed through just to get some local patronage, conservation is put in the pork barrel. Then it becomes a race to get yours and everybody loses. That's not the way to economical fish and wildlife operations; neither is it the way to get the most effective program. Always the test for every project should be: Does it contribute to meeting a national need? Is it the best use of the money involved? The Congress, I know, will be most happy to get answers along those lines, particularly these days when there is such great interest in economy measures.

Federal budget cutting also brings to the Congress a special responsibility with respect to this fish and wildlife program for the future. Obviously, reductions in the budget will be made on the basis of priorities assigned for the various national activities. Therefore, if we are to have a program adequate to meet tomorrow's needs for fish and wildlife, the natural resource conservation activity is going to have to be given a higher priority in Federal budgeting than it has been accorded most of the time in the past. The decision on this is entirely the responsibility of the Congress.

But, no matter what the appropriations are, you can rest assured that every dollar we get will do more work for fish and wildlife conservation than it ever has done in the past. That will be our constant objective, and it will be insured by all this planning by the dedicated workers in the conservation field. We just cannot fail to have a better fish and wildlife program in the future. We will not fail if all of us meet our responsibilities. Clearly, we stand today on the threshold of real conservation progress.

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