



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
INFORMATION SERVICE

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

For release JULY 11, 1960

SECRETARY SEATON PAYS TRIBUTE TO WILDLIFE WORKERS

Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton today paid tribute to the "diamond anniversary" of the Federal Government's entrance into the field of wildlife research on July 1, 1885, when he congratulated the Department's Fish and Wildlife Service on the wildlife achievements of that agency during the past 75 years.

Federal fisheries activities will be 90 years old next February 8.

Commenting on a communication from Ross Leffler, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife, which reviewed highlights of the Government's work in wildlife conservation, Secretary Seaton said: "Wildlife administrators of today are deeply indebted to those pioneers who started out in 1885, in what was practically a virgin field, to find out all they could about the various species of wildlife, and their requirements for survival.

"The findings of those early naturalists, which fill many volumes, form the solid foundation of many of today's wildlife management principles, protective laws, and regulations. Those scientists, as well as their successors, are to be congratulated on their achievements.

"Currently, the importance of wildlife in the national economy, and its value as a recreational resource, is well recognized. The task of meeting the demands made on these resources is a continuing one, however, and to provide for them properly in the future is a challenge worthy of the dedicated concern and support of all Americans."

Correspondence between Secretary Seaton and Assistant Secretary Leffler is attached.

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July 7, 1960

Memorandum

To: Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife

From: Secretary of the Interior

Subject: 75 Years of Federal Wildlife Research

Your memorandum recounting in brief form the highlights of 75 years of wildlife research by the Federal Government is such an interesting document that I am going to make its contents public, so that wildlife conservationists throughout the country can join us in paying tribute to the "Diamond Anniversary" of the Federal Government's entrance into wildlife research.

In connection with the growth and expansion of the Fish and Wildlife Service, so notable in recent years, I want to congratulate the members of your staff who have had an active hand in developing the wildlife activities of the Service to the level they have now reached. They can be justly proud of the agency's history and its record of notable achievements which you outlined.

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(Sgd) Fred A. Seaton

Fred A. Seaton



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

JUNE 28, 1960

Memorandum

To: Secretary of the Interior

From: Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife

Subject: Seventy-fifth Anniversary of Federal Government's Entrance
into Field of Wildlife Research

I think it only fitting to call your attention to the fact that the Fish and Wildlife Service will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Federal Government's entrance into the field of wildlife research on July 1 of this year.

The Service's responsibilities in the field of wildlife research and management, now vested in its Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, had their inception in 1885 when the 48th Congress appropriated \$5,000 "for the promotion of economic ornithology, or the study of the interrelation of birds and agriculture." The money became available on July 1, 1885, and the work was started as a Section of Ornithology in the Department of Agriculture under the direction of Dr. C. Hart Merriam. His staff consisted of one assistant, Dr. A. K. Fisher, and one clerk.

The need for a Government unit of this kind resulted from a survey started by the American Ornithologists Union, organized in 1883, to gather information on bird migrations and the relation of the introduced English sparrow to agriculture. Because the work grew so rapidly, the A.O.U. could not handle it and recommended to the Congress that the Federal Government make ornithological investigation a part of its regular work in the field of agriculture.

I have always been interested in the close relationship between fish and wildlife in those early days for it was Professor Spencer F. Baird, a life-long ornithologist, who became the first Commissioner of Fisheries in 1871 and was responsible in 1885 for selecting Dr. Merriam to become head of the new Section of Ornithology. (Incidentally, the fisheries personnel of our Fish and Wildlife Service will have their turn at an anniversary next year when they will honor the 90th anniversary of the establishment of the U. S. Fish Commission on February 8, 1961.)

In the years that followed, this small section devoted to economic ornithology grew into the Bureau of Biological Survey which, by 1940 when

it was merged with the former Bureau of Fisheries to form the present Fish and Wildlife Service, had achieved a world-wide reputation for leadership in the handling of wildlife conservation problems. Its role of notable scientists has read like a "Who's Who" in the biological sciences.

I believe a review of some of the achievements of those early days will be of interest to you.

The first important task of the Section of Ornithology was to separate beneficial species of birds from those whose effects were injurious. Subjects for immediate attention were: The depredations of bobolinks, or ricebirds, in the South; the status of the so-called English sparrow in America; the true status of the various birds of prey in relation to agriculture; the depredations of blackbirds in the grain-growing districts of the Northwest; and the destruction of small fruits by birds.

It was not long before mammalogy was added to ornithology and the systematic collection of specimens of animals and related data was pursued and the concept of life zones incorporated in the studies. Many American species and subspecies were first described by workers in the Biological Survey. In fact, it has been said that Dr. Merriam named more animals than Adam did.

In 1890 the work of preparing large-scale maps of North America showing the boundaries, or life areas, of different faunas and floras was being highly acclaimed. Those early days of wildlife research were notable for many projects, the Death Valley Expedition of 1891 being one of the most spectacular. In this area, plant and animal life below sea level and up through all the life zones to the top of the 14,000-foot plus Mount Whitney were available for scientific study. In one place on the east side of the Sierras, all the life zones of the North American Continent from the plateau of Mexico to the Polar Sea could be crossed by traversing a distance of only 10 miles.

In reviewing the pioneer work of the Biological Survey, it is important to realize that Bureau scientists not only made the original basic scientific investigations of the country's flora and fauna but also devised many of the techniques that they had to use and that were later adopted by other scientific colleagues.

Systematic field work in Alaska was begun during the summer of 1899 by Dr. Merriam and two assistants. In 1900 field work in Canada in connection with the geographic distribution of species found in the boreal zone along the border of the two countries got under way.

Also in 1900, the Lacey Act which restricts the importation of foreign birds and animals was passed as the result of the work of Survey scientists.

Soon after the Biological Survey entered the field of wildlife protection following the enactment of the Lacey Act, it began also to have a part in the conservation of wildlife in Alaska when Congress enacted the first Alaskan game law on June 7, 1902, by setting the game seasons and enforcing their provisions. (This function, as you know, continued until Alaska took over its Statehood duties.)

In 1903 the work of the Biological Survey was expanded to include the administration of Federal Wildlife Refuges, with the first refuge being created by Executive order on March 14. This was the Pelican Island Reservation on the east coast of Florida. Numerous other refuges for the protection of various species of birds were created from time to time. Several big-game refuges were created under Acts of Congress.

In 1905 a new line of work was started--economic mammalogy--an investigation of the economic relations of mammals to agriculture. Experiments were started with poisons to control coyotes, rabbits, ground squirrels, rats, and mice which were preying on sheep, livestock, and crops in the Western States.

One of the principal functions of the Fish and Wildlife Service today is the protection of migratory birds. But, at the turn of the century, there was no Federal law for their protection. In many parts of the country, waterfowl were being killed in the spring, and market hunters were thriving on the sales of huge numbers of ducks and geese. Public interest was aroused and finally, after many attempts, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act was enacted in 1918, based upon a treaty with Canada for the protection of the birds migrating between the two countries. (In 1936 this was amended to include Mexico.)

In 1920 the Biological Survey took over the work of the American Bird Banding Association, and since that time the data acquired through banding have been of outstanding importance in connection with all studies of the migration, distribution, and abundance of birds.

In 1929 the Migratory Bird Conservation Act authorized a program of land acquisition to provide refuges for migrating waterfowl. This was supplemented by the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act of 1934 which provided the funds to purchase and maintain waterfowl refuges through the sale of Federal "duck stamps."

Federal funds for cooperative wildlife research units became available on July 1, 1935, and in the following fiscal year nine units were established at land-grant colleges to train men in the rapidly growing field of wildlife management and research.

A law of far-reaching importance in wildlife conservation was passed on September 2, 1937. This was the Pittman-Robertson Act which provided funds for Federal aid to the States in wildlife restoration projects.

On July 1, 1939, the Bureau of Biological Survey was transferred from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of the Interior, and a year later it was consolidated with the Bureau of Fisheries to form the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The growth of the wildlife activities and the many solid accomplishments since that time are well known to you since you participated in many important decisions.

I am sure that you will join with me in congratulating our wildlife workers on past accomplishments and extending them our heartiest support in meeting the new problems of our dynamic age.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ross Leffler". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Ross Leffler