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REMARKS BY JOHN S. GOTTSCHALK, DIRECTOR, BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, AT THE GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION MEETING, BILOXI, MISSISSIPPI, MARCH 17, 1966

Marine Game Fish Research in the Gulf of Mexico

It is a privilege and a pleasure to come to this spring meeting of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. Today I propose to review with you our plans for marine game fish studies in the Gulf of Mexico. The time for this review is especially appropriate because we are on the threshold of a new and major research effort in this region.

From my observations as I travel around the country, I have concluded that the Gulf of Mexico poses a paradox, a contradiction of opinions and attitudes with established facts. I am quite well acquainted in a general way with your coastal areas, the great bays and estuaries, the Delta, and the attenuated reaches of barrier beaches still relatively unspoiled. The Gulf of Mexico, where our interests join today, possesses great and untapped opportunities, not the least of which are those of a recreational nature. In a sense the Gulf is our last frontier.

Like our other last frontiers, yours is endangered--not from the direct result of too many people in the region (although they do have an important impact)--but from headlong exploitation of its natural resources. The oil wells, the lumber and pulp mills, the monoculture farming, the dredging of coastlines for shells--all part of your expanding economy--are contributing to the degradation of our aquatic resources and thus to the reduction of the marine-based economy and our people's opportunities for recreation as well. The mill wastes, silt loads, chemical effluents, and destruction of shell beds are taking their toll.

The paradox I mentioned is one of apparent attitudes. As a visitor here, I detect or suspect a regional lack of regard for

the balanced picture of natural resource conservation, and a preoccupation with "economic progress" in exploiting natural resources, whether they be oil or commercially important fish species.

At the same time, I note hopeful if belated stirrings of public recognition that unlimited exploitation may lead to disaster, that critical estuarine habitats must be protected and preserved. This embryonic conservation ethic still is essentially tied to resources with a direct economic significance. It ignores the recreational fisheries because their contribution to our economic base is not well recognized. Moreover, as in all frontiers of our country, fishing for fun is regarded as a light-hearted activity not to be equated with the efforts mature men put into making a living. The social and economic values of the marine game fish resources of the vast Gulf area are not well established in the public mind, and the serious conservation issues associated with them are only dimly perceived.

These are general observations, not directed at any one State, region, or organization. Indeed, they might characterize the rather cavalier treatment our estuarine-dependent resources have received at the hands of "major industry" planners on every coast and in the Great Lakes as well. Consider how the salmon has fared in the Northwest, or what has happened in the past to his New England counterpart, the Atlantic salmon. There is much in history to document my belief that in a contest with other users of the ocean's edge, the fisheries have frequently been forced to a position of secondary importance.

Part of this result lies in our failure to gather the facts needed to convince the American public of the unity of the ocean's edge. The vast expanse of ocean even today is regarded as a disposal area for much of the effluvium of our booming population, and only when its effects are concentrated in a limited area, such as an estuary, does there follow public realization of some rather nauseating realities.

The other reason for the present state of affairs is a direct corollary of the first. Lacking provable facts, we have not tried very hard to expand our public support beyond the immediate users. In a race for popularity, the commercial fishing industry will always come up second best because it involves directly but a very small fraction of the public. On the West Coast, certain people valued kilowatts and economic expansion more than they

valued the preservation of an economic structure operating on a dynamic base, even though they knew that, properly managed, that base could support the salmon-fishing industry forever, and even though they were willing to see the power users pay some rather substantial surcharges to try to maintain the salmon resource artificially.

Apathy is not the personal property of any one class of people, particularly when we are dealing in problems related to the marine sport fisheries. It took much doing to secure the authorizations of the "Lennon Bill" back in 1959.

It is extremely important that the importance of the Lennon Bill be recognized, not merely because of its intrinsic merits, but because it has the potential to upgrade public support for the fisheries, marine conservation, and estuarine preservation, to the point where these considerations will take on real significance in resource planning and management. It is the recreational marine fisheries that can open the barriers to public support for all marine endeavors. Public interest in marine sport fishing already is tremendous, it is growing, but it is largely unorganized and ineffective. What it needs is a period of truly loving care by someone or some group that appreciates the fruits that could be brought forth.

The people are ahead of us. Marine anglers in this region, as around the continent, are a substantial and growing portion of the public we serve. They and the service industries and coastal resort communities that cater to their needs want and deserve recognition as a potent political and economic force. They want the resources upon which they depend protected and developed. In 1960, a survey by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife showed there were 1.4 million anglers in the Gulf of Mexico who fished 18 million man-days in a single year, caught 185 million fish, and spent \$145 million. Some of these are the people who gave local support for a Federal program of marine game fish research in the Gulf of Mexico. It is heartening to see the concern and interest of this public take the form of support for two new research centers. Why is this so?

Thirty years ago salt-water angling was a little known pursuit practiced by a few shore dabblers and an even lesser number of wealthy sportsmen who fished the deep blue waters for finny monsters in the Zane Grey tradition. All this has changed in the space of three short decades. Now salt-water angling is the sport of millions from all walks of life. Their catch is measured in hundreds of millions of pounds, and for some species equals or exceeds the commercial catch.

In the days not so long ago, when ocean fish resources were virtually untapped and their habitat was unspoiled by pollution, pesticides, and developments, it was sufficient for a few lonely biologists to pursue their studies at a leisurely pace, often with leaky boats and torn nets or by examining dead fish from the market. Today this approach will not do. The demands upon these resources are such that only a major effort can conserve them. Conditioned as they are to the miracles of science, today's angling public wants a full-fledged research and development program. It recognizes that nothing less than a major effort will provide the broad background of knowledge and understanding that must precede sound management.

This intuitive public awareness reinforces my own analysis of the state of our knowledge. We are woefully short of the facts needed to answer even the everyday problems like we should. All of you are aware of these problems. Our plight in the Everglades is an example. Here water-diversion plans threaten to change the character of estuaries and make them too salty for the survival and growth of pink shrimp and as nurseries for a host of other fishes. Urgent research programs and stop-gap pumping projects are now underway to help solve the emergency water problem in the Everglades. Consider the Texas Basin Project, which involves the fresh-water supply of nearly the whole Texas coast and its complex of estuaries. The Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Texas are working, with the full cooperation of the Bureau of Reclamation, I might add, to assess the possible effects of this potential project in an effort to establish construction and operation criteria for the protection and enhancement of the vast and valuable food and recreation fisheries. We simply do not now have all the facts which we need to make those assessments. We have substituted our best trained judgment, for the time being, but we are hopeful that a major estuarine research effort can be included as a part of that project if it should be authorized.

Billfishing in the Gulf of Mexico is a recently discovered and exciting sport, attracting well-heeled tourists to coastal resorts with facilities and know-how to serve them. On the eve of its development, this resource is threatened with greatly intensified exploitation.

A tremendous public clamor has arisen about the greatly accelerated billfish catch by commercial fishermen of two other nations, both in the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. Yet we have only the sketchiest ideas of how many of these giant gamefishes there are, or where they come from and where they go, or about their life histories, and the factors that control the populations. Conservation without these elemental facts is an exercise in frustration, futility, and foolishness.

In our own recent studies to select sites for our laboratories, several otherwise choice areas were rejected because of pollution and turbidity. We know that these conditions disarrange the ecological system, but we are not sure how or why. These are just a few of the many examples of immediate and practical research needs.

Up to now, our conservation efforts in the Gulf of Mexico on behalf of marine game fishes have been largely in the hands of our River Basin Studies people. They have worked closely, and we believe effectively, with you to protect these resources against the many adverse developments that are the price of advancing civilization: the draining, ditching, filling and diversions. In these efforts we have depended heavily upon the advice and help of fishery biologists from the coastal States and of those of our sister Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. More often than not, these activities are characterized by short deadlines with no time for research and a forced dependence on a few scanty facts or informed guesses.

Our agency has fallen far short of its responsibility to provide the broad background of basic knowledge and information needed to back up your management responsibilities and ours. I believe the Federal Government is naturally and ideally suited to take on a larger role in the field of research, and I look forward to the opportunity to lead our agency in a greatly strengthened program of marine game fish research.

Started in 1960, the program is now underway on the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts, with laboratories at Sandy Hook, New Jersey, and Tiburon, California. A third laboratory is now under construction at Narragansett, Rhode Island, with completion scheduled for July 1966. Though we come late to the Gulf of Mexico, the beginnings are auspicious. This year we have planning and design funds for two new laboratories--one to be at Panama City, Florida, and the other at Port Aransas, Texas. Both will be modern and well-equipped facilities. If our plans materialize, and I am determined that they will, the Bureau will be ready to support its share of a coordinated and comprehensive attack on the conservation problems of marine game fishes in the Gulf of Mexico.

I think it is premature to comment here, except in general terms, on program elements. They will concern the same broad subjects that have occupied us on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts: life histories, behavior, habitat needs, environmental surveys, and pollution. If there is a dominant theme to this research, it is this: to determine how and why the abundance, distribution, migration, survival and well-being of marine game fishes are influenced by natural and man-made variations in the environment.

We hope to focus a great deal of attention on the estuaries for the very good reasons that most of the important game fishes of the Gulf are estuarine-dependent at some stage of their life cycles. Even the offshore predators such as mackerel, bluefish, snappers, and groupers, which seldom enter estuaries, feed on the hosts of mullets, menhaden, anchovies, croakers, and shrimp that move back and forth. All of us know too well that the critical estuarine habitat is being degraded and destroyed at an ever increasing pace.

I would bring this discussion to a close on a subject that is perhaps more important than any of the preceding. Although I call it compartmentalized research, it is just another aspect of coordination. Too much of our research in the past has been compartmentalized, both by specialists and by agencies. In a recent talk, Assistant Secretary Stanley A. Cain said:

"Fish and Wildlife biologists are ecologists, and many of them are very good ones. But let us ask ourselves whether we have confined attention and research on species, or whether we have gone on to explore the communities and environments in which each species plays a probably minor role. How much of our attention has gone to understanding the ecosystem as a whole?"

These are fundamental and perceptive questions. Rather than be a collection of compartmentalized scientists, specializing in species, oceanography, microbiology, parasitology, and so forth, our laboratories will strive to take a broad ecological approach.

The second concept of compartmentalized research concerns the walled-off agency programs. Lest my previous remarks leave you the thought that we would like to do it all, I assure you again of my recognition that there is far more than all of us can do. To avoid both gaps and duplication, we must work closely with you as individual States and with your Commission, both in program planning and execution. I share with Director Donald L. McKernan a determination that our cooperative programs, particularly on estuaries, be handled at our end as those of a Fish and Wildlife Service effort rather than as separate efforts of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, respectively. In our selection of laboratory sites, a prime consideration was to secure locations which would complement our sister Bureau in the immense and never-ending task of monitoring environments and fish populations.

Finally, we hope to continue our close and mutually profitable association with the coastal universities having strong interests in marine sciences. Again, in selection of our laboratory sites, proximity to such institutions was an important consideration.

I hope you will regard these laboratories as new contributions to the scientific and cultural aspects of their communities, as new allies in the fight to retain the coastal environments which are so vital to both sport and commercial fishing resources, and as new fact-finders that will help to gather basic data useful to everyone working in the Gulf. We want these laboratories and their staffs to be a substantial part of the Gulf economy, sharing with you a belief in the Gulf's future.

To implement my intentions, I have recently taken steps to strengthen and formalize our ties with your Commission. Paul E. Thompson, Chief of the Division of Fishery Research, has been designated to serve as liaison between our agency and the Commission, and Albert H. Swartz, his assistant, to serve as our representative on your biological committees. They are old friends to many of you. I can assure you that they will work closely with you as our program develops.

We look forward to the establishment of even closer ties with the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission than we have enjoyed in the past. You have a legal and moral obligation to provide the leadership and guidance for the programs we will be embarking on. We trust we may continue to depend upon, and merit, your support.

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