

WATERFOWL - A RESOURCE IN DANGER

The following is a partial text of an address to the thirty-seventh annual convention of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters in Ottawa on February 19 by Mr. Arthur Laing, the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources:

...There are almost 900,000 hunters in Canada and in 1961 they spent about \$90 million on their sport. To about 345,000 of these hunters, according to the Canadian Wildlife Service 1961 economic survey of fishing and hunting in Canada, wildlife means waterfowl and waterfowl hunting.

One of the difficult things about managing wild animals is that they have little regard for such man-made things as provincial or international boundaries. Migratory birds, our most mobile wildlife resource, range the continent and must be managed in that context. Many species nest and raise their young in Canada and fly south to winter in the United States and Mexico. Surprisingly few Canadians are aware that 70 per cent of the continent's most sought-after ducks nest and raise their young in the southern Prairie Provinces. Perhaps even fewer people are aware that this area, in addition to being a grain factory, is known as North America's "duck factory".

The capacity of the potholes, marshes, and sloughs of the southern Prairies to produce ducks varies from area to area. It depends on the amount of food and cover available, and these in turn depend on water. Some areas hold water only in years of high precipitation. Others maintain life-giving habitat even in dry years, and it is this kind of wetland that carries basic breeding populations through the years of drought.

THREAT OF MAN'S WORKS

Natural droughts are troublesome enough, but more and more of these high-value wetlands are being threatened by the works of man. Competing demands on wetlands for agricultural, industrial, and residential land constitute a problem that is reaching crisis proportions. We have only to look to the northern prairie states to see what will happen unless we move quickly to prevent the loss of the habitat that is vital to migratory waterfowl, one of our most beautiful and valuable renewable national resources.

During the past two years, the Canadian Wildlife Service of my Department has concluded several dozen leasing agreements with farmers in the three Prairie Provinces to maintain their wetlands in a natural condition. Payments to farmers have been based on the area of the wetlands and the value of the surrounding land discounted at five per cent for a 20-year period. During this pilot-programme period, we have tried to find solutions to the administrative problems posed by the different land-tenure systems that we must deal with in the Prairie Provinces. We have also worked out techniques for measuring the extent of the wetlands on an individual's property, and we have learned what numbers of men we must put in the field to do the job. These studies have progressed to the point where I have been able

to recommend to the Cabinet that a large-scale programme to maintain our irreplaceable wetlands be begun in 1967.

CROP PROTECTION

Ducks in agricultural lands have been and can be a problem. At some times and in some places, they feed on and thresh out grain from the swath, practically wiping out the farmers' margin of profit. Methods are now available by which damage to cereal crops can be much reduced. Throughout the Prairie pothole country, where our wetlands-management programme will be centred, we shall continue our efforts to inform landowners about crop-protection methods. The success of our programme depends on creating a real partnership with farmers and landowners.

Although maintenance of the Prairie pothole "duck factory" is of primary importance, the programme which I hope to get under way will also include the purchase or long-term lease of large wetlands not only in the Prairies but also in the rest of Canada as well. Such areas are important not only for production but also because they can provide important resting areas for migrating waterfowl and, in some cases, accommodate wintering populations. Some of these larger wetlands, or the areas around them, will provide much hunting opportunity. I might say that both aspects of this wetlands-preservation programme will be worked out in co-operation with the agencies of the provincial governments which share our interest in this resource.

PRESERVING WETLANDS

The need for a positive approach across the country was brought home forcibly to one of our Canadian Wildlife Service biologists in Nova Scotia last summer. He was just hauling his canoe out of the water after checking the birds on a large marsh when a local farmer stopped to tell him that he had bought the marsh and planned to drain it to grow hay for his dairy herd. The marsh served not only as breeding habitat for black ducks but also an important staging and resting area for geese during their spring and autumn migrations. Although action will vary in degree and kind across Canada, the problem of preserving our wetlands is definitely national in character.

Other areas of Canada besides the southern Prairies are important to waterfowl production. The Northwest Territories and the Yukon, for example, produce most of the continent's geese - snow's, brant, Canada's, white-fronts, Ross' - and many ducks as well.

I know that Canadian sportsmen are concerned about the proposed dam at Rampart Canyon on the Yukon River in Alaska. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service has issued a report condemning the development because the resulting 10,500 square-mile reservoir would remove much valuable waterfowl nesting habitat. I should point out that detailed planning has not yet been started in the United

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