MANAGEMENT OF NORTHCENTRAL AND NORTHEASTERN FORESTS FOR NONGAME BIRDS

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Foresters have begun to recognize their responsibilities for nongame birds, but that concern must manifest itself through professional management rather than preservation. The key to success will be diversity of habitats, which can only be achieved with advanced planning and knowledge acquired through research.

Four years ago, I participated in the first National Symposium on the Management of Forest and Range Habitats for Nongame Birds. The same thing that impressed me then impresses me now. As I told that audience in Tucson, the most significant thing about that symposium was its being--the fact that there was a national symposium on nongame birds. It was a first--a milestone in forestry-wildlife relationships. As John Gottschalk pointed out, this was the "opening skirmish in a revolution." "History will record what has been said here and by whom," I told the group, "and I am proud to have a small part in it."

That symposium in 1975, as well as this workshop today, represent a long-overdue recognition of our responsibility for all living creatures. But, as I told that audience then and will say again, let's meet our responsibilities fully and enthusiastically, but let's not allow this concern for nongame birds to play into the hands of those who would deny the use of all renewable resources

There is a growing and widespread philosophy that would prohibit the taking of any wild species, even the cutting of trees. This "reverence of life" philosophy is sincere and well-meaning, but it is a misdirected effort that will not achieve what its proponents seek. Nothing is so sure as the dynamics of nature. Change is inevitable. We can slow down, speed up, or guide that change, but we cannot arrest it at any given point in time. Preservation, as many would apply it, is actually counterproductive to those values they cherish most. We, as professionals, must preach the doctrine of "wise use" and resist the growing movement that would deny wildlife harvest to all and place most public forests into preserves and refuges.

As a forester, I am proud to see my fellow professionals taking an active role in this workshop. It shows a concern that we all feel even though it might now have been too evident in the past. Here are rough-and-tumble woods foresters talking about songbird habitats. That's progress!

Foresters have learned many valuable lessons, but, admittedly, have made many mistakes in the past. We are concerned about all wildlife, about the total ecosystem, about game and nongame species alike. We will <u>not</u> repeat mistakes of the past--massive clearcuts, careless logging, destruction of fragile sites. Forestry operations of the future will avoid unstable soils, high alpine types which cannot be quickly and successfully regenerated, and damages to streams and watersheds.

Recently, I heard an industrial forester describe most clearcutting of the past as "commercial hygrading," characterized by standing cull trees, broken trees, worthless species, and a tangle of logging slash. No wonder there has been great public outcry about this kind of clearcutting! His own operation in West Virginia utilizes total tree chippers--everything is used. It is a clean operation ready for replanting or natural regeneration. Maximum size of any clearcut is 25 acres and all are fitted into the landscape in an irregular pattern.

Even-aged management is good silviculture for both hardwoods and conifers. It has a definite place in our forestry future, but it must be less offensive and better planned than much of what we have seen in the past.

How do I see the role of the resources professional in nongame bird management? Essentially the same as his role in timber management or wildlife management for game species. I have been outspoken on this subject in the pages of American Forests, so this will not be new to most of you. But, here is my formula:

1. Probably the greatest need is diversity. We must provide and maintain variety of habitats. The importance of edge is well known to game managers, and it has equal value to nongame species. Too much of anything is not good, for man nor beast. I sympathize with those who express growing alarm over pine monoculture in the South or massive clearcuts in the West. Yet, I support judicial application of both practices. There is truth in the old Chinese proverb that the "excess of any virtue is a vice." Let's retain all management practices in our arsenal of tools, but let's maintain variety in their application.

2. The key to diversity and variety is planning. If we want to benefit nongame birds we must plan for their habitats. Too much of our resources planning in the past has been single purpose, for trees or game species, seldom for both, and almost never for the total ecosystem, including nongame birds. Opportunities are almost unlimited if forestry and wildlife professionals provide for all resources in their initial planning, not as an afterthought, but as equal partners in objective.

3. The key to planning is knowledge, or facts, and the only way to acquire them is through research. What do we know about nongame bird habitats? A lot more than we apply, I am sure, but not enough. The thing we don't know is how to optimize timber management, game management and nongame management, all on the same lands at the same time. Foresters have done excellent research on silvicultural methods to maximize timber production. Biolgists are experts on ideal habitats for game species. And, I am sure we know a lot about nongame birds, but what do we know about the combinations? How much research has been done in northern forest habitats for renewable resources in total? Too little, I'm afraid, but I hope this workshop proves me wrong.

So my formula is diversity, planning and research. Until we achieve all three, nongame bird habitat management will be largely token or accidental. Sure, we will continue to burn some jack pines for the kirtland warbler, but what are we doing elsewhere? Do we really know what to do? There's a book I have been wanting to read on the passenger pigeon by A. W. Schorger. Everything I have heard about this vanished species was that we slaughtered them to extinction when they migrated in vulnerable flocks. According to Schorger, however, harvest had little to do with the disappearance of the passenger pigeon. We destroyed him when we changed his habitat. Maybe we created favorable habitat for another species, but wouldn't it be better if we had known before we did it? To me, that's what this workshop is all about. We've got to find better ways than we have used in the past. And, we have got to instill in all resource professionals a real sense of obligation and responsibility to all creatures, large and small, game and nongame, and nonprofitable as well as those that make us money.

Perhaps you have noted the overtone of professionalism I have injected in this keynote speech from the beginning. That is the one thing we must defend with all our strength. If we do not do our job as professionals, properly, we will lose the opportunity. The wave of preservation I spoke about earlier is born of fault and neglect. The protectionist is not pleased with our past performance. What he fails to realize, however, is that there is no substitute for applied management that only a professional can supply. What he seeks cannot be achieved by a "hands off" directive. His protective love can destroy the very thing he wants to preserve. But, we've got to convince him by action, not words. If we fail, then resource management decisions will be made by courts, by legislators, and in the ballot box rather than on the ground, the only place they can be made properly.

It should be obvious to all of you that I am not a nongame bird expert. I have little to offer this workshop except encouragement and motivation. Since I retired three weeks ago, I probably have lost any influence I might have had on legislation and appropriations. But, if I have a message it is a plea for tolerance and professional responsibility. Let's respect the beliefs and concerns of others, but let's also make sure we get our own house in order. There is a job to be done in recognizing, protecting, and improving the habitats of nongame birds. Let's be sure we do it, and do it right, or someone else will take over.