

THE SPORTSMEN'S INTEREST IN PUBLIC LANDS

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In considering what sportsmen want from the public lands, there initially came to mind the report sent home by a Russian visitor to our Congress in Washington, D. C. After viewing a legislative session, he described it as follows: "Somebody gets up to talk, nobody listens, and everybody disagrees." Those of you who have attended sportsmen's meetings, I am sure, will detect a similarity between what happens there--at least sometimes--and what the Soviet observer felt was the way Congress transacted its business.

The difficulty of obtaining a consensus of what sportsmen now want is greatly magnified when projecting into the future. I need some measure of the ability that referred to by an experienced attorney when he was asked by a younger lawyer to indicate what makes a successful practitioner. The veteran replied, "It is the ability to predict accurately from day to day, week to week, and month to month, what will happen in a given set of circumstances, and thereafter speak well enough to explain why it did not."

Initially there is considerable difficulty just in defining who is included in the term sportsmen. Mr. Webster defines a sportsman as a man who is interested in hunting, fishing, horse racing, etc. I do not know what the etcetera was meant to denote, but it demonstrates an admirable foresight and commendable flexibility on the part of the lexicographer. One thing for sure--we know the connotation of sportsman has changed and broadened greatly during the past several decades. What was formerly largely a masculine world is no longer a man's domain. Several days ago I saw a cartoon wherein a feminine hunter had apparently just fired into the brush. Adjacent thereto a badly frightened hunter was lying flat on the ground. The lady nimrod came rushing up, and, trying to make the situation better--without notable success--said, "I'm sorry, I thought you were my husband."

Another change has been the increase in leisure time; this trend will undoubtedly continue. An additional factor contributing to the changing complexion of those now broadly classified as sportsmen is the increasing mobility of our population. At one time it was said that a pedestrian was the man with two cars, a wife and a teen-age son. This is less true than formerly because frequently now even if a man has two cars, a wife and a teen-age son, he also keeps a four-wheel drive vehicle in the back yard which he uses for the dual purpose of going to work and escaping into the hills on weekends.

Speaking in broadest terms, sportsmen want multiple-use in the public domain. Like most cliches, this is a fairly meaningless statement unless amplified. It is not unlike saying, "We believe in democracy." The Viet Cong guerillas can use the same language.

The type of multiple-use that sportsmen have in mind is not the same as stockmen--nor the miners have in mind. Sportsmen feel that in the past they have occupied a subordinate position. They take some satisfaction--with the Ides of reapportionment upon us--knowing that their political muscle will become increasingly apparent in charting the future course of conservation. In the past, sportsmen have been somewhat like the little boy who was with his older brother playing in the snow. Their mother called to the older boy, "Are you sharing the use of the sled?" The older boy replied, "Yes mother, He has it going up the hill and I have it going down." Sportsmen--at least to some extent feel that they have been in the position of the little boy; they have had the sled going up the hill.

Sportsmen desire to play a real and significant role in the management of public domain. This is an area where they can most effectively exert their influence. It has been shrewdly observed that a statesman is a politician held upright by equal pressure from all sides. With reapportionment the sportsmen will be in a highly advantageous position to see that more effective pressure is exerted on their behalf in the future in the management of public land--and that there are more statesmen!

I would like to spend a few minutes discussing what sportsmen expect by way of wise management. In doing so, I am not aware that I perhaps am speaking more from the standpoint of what I would like to see than what sportsmen as a group desire.

First among our needs is a thorough inventory of natural resources connected with public lands. It has been most gratifying to note that the Department of Interior has undertaken a comprehensive program toward this end. As Lincoln once observed, "We have to know where we are and where we are trending before we can know what to do and how to get there."

Next on the list is a truly long-range plan for using these resources. Charles Kettering, one of our Nation's greatest scientists, was once contacted by several colleagues who were disturbed about certain events. He told them their anxiety at the time was nonsense; there was nothing they could then do; that they should have concerned themselves with these problems some ten or fifteen years earlier.

As a part of long-range planning, there should be increased emphasis on research and experimentation. In Nevada, the legislature, unfortunately, has not always turned a sympathetic ear towards these subjects. Many sportsmen do not realize how limited our knowledge is in the fields of biology, botany, and ecology. We are told that 80 per cent of the scientists who have ever lived are alive today and that our knowledge is in all probability doubling every ten years. If this is true generally--it is probably not true in the field of wildlife management and resource conservation--where we lag behind, comparatively speaking.

One need only look at some of the problems that are apparent in my own state. Take for example the sagehen. Although most native Nevadans view sagegrouse with sentiment growing from long association, we, in fact, know comparatively little about the specie. We are aware that it goes through cyclic periods of population increase and decrease. We are not able to raise them in captivity for subsequent release. We are not sure what relationship there is, if any, between mountain meadow areas and sagegrouse population.

Another good example of deficiency in our knowledge is found in the field of deer herd management. While it is one of the curious psychological facts of life that the mere purchase of a deer license seems to give many sportsmen a feeling of superb confidence on all questions concerning the raising and managing of deer herds, the unfortunate fact is that we are still woefully ignorant on many facets of this subject. In Nevada there was a tremendous increase in deer population starting in 1920 and continuing up into the early 1940s. During the last several years deer hunting has not met with the fabulous success of the previous decade. I am confident that our game technicians will agree that we do not have the answers to the numerous problems involved. Nor is Nevada's experience unique in this field.

Another area where sportsmen anticipate difficulty in the future is maintaining adequate rights of way on and to public lands. There is a philosophy--held by some--that we should make every effort to dispose of public lands and put the property on tax rolls. In public land states, criticism of Federal bureaucrats for holding and managing large portions of land never goes out of fashion. One of the dangers in wholesale disposition of public land without sound long-range planning lies in the fact that sportsmen may find that they are left without access to areas with present or future recreational use.

Another area where sportsmen have a legitimate concern is the number of agencies involved in the administration of public lands. I recently heard the Director of our State Fish and Game Department state that his department has official contacts with some 34 other Government agencies, each of which has some problem in common with the State Fish and Game Department. It would be remarkable, indeed, if there is not some overlapping and duplication of effort.

Let me touch briefly on another subject where we feel additional emphasis should be placed, namely law enforcement. Statistics daily recite that crime is on the increase. If there has been a deterioration in moral fibre--and a monotonous series of studies seem to support this proposition--there has probably been a similar disregard of laws important to conservation. Unfortunately, even law-abiding people occasionally seem unable to withstand temptation when in the field. The result is an excessive bag limit, litter-bugging, or damage to private property. Perhaps they are like the meek little man who was brought before the Judge for hitting his wife. The Judge inquired, "Why did you do it?" The little fellow said, "Well, Judge, her back was turned, the broom was handy, and the door was open." Maybe some sportsmen are like the person of whom Oscar Wilde said, "He can resist anything but temptation." Someone else has aptly observed that "conscience is the little voice that says, 'don't do it, somebody is looking.'" With more emphasis on law enforcement, there will be more people "looking"--fewer breaches of the law, and better conservation of resources.

A recent development which has been gratifying to most sportsmen is the entry of the Bureau of Land Management into the field of managing game habitat. This will bolster what have generally been inadequate state programs. However, some of us recognize the possibility of a problem in this development. How much control will be exerted by the Federal Government as a result of its investment? Will this control frustrate legitimate state goals? Historically Congress has been reluctant to vote money for Federal activities without retaining in some measure, the right to direct how the money is expended.

Before concluding I would like to say just a word about a responsibility that rests upon the shoulders of professional workers in the conservation field. This is the importance of doing a thorough and comprehensive job in the field of information and education. If sportsmen are going to accept the challenge and responsibility facing themselves, they must be well informed, if they are to be effective. While everyone has a right to his own opinion, no one has the right to be wrong on the facts. Unfortunately we sportsmen frequently are. However, the better the information and education program is, the more likely we are to limit these errors.

The sportsmen have a great responsibility--and a great opportunity in the years ahead. I believe it was John D. Rockefeller who said, "Every right involves a responsibility, every privilege an obligation, and every possession a duty." The sportsmen do not expect professional conservationists to carry the ball for them in the future.

I am certain that professional conservationists realize that they need a political support that sportsmen are capable of furnishing. By close cooperation we can work for and achieve a well-balanced and progressive conservation program.