

# The Urgency of Conservation

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All of us who are acquainted with the history of our wildlife should realize that we are rather lucky to be living in such a land of promise at the present time. There is little doubt that here in Saskatchewan you have some of the finest hunting and fishing to be found anywhere on the North American Continent. Waterfowl populations, up to this year, have been extremely high. Sharp-tails, Hungarians and Ruffed Grouse have been plentiful. Even your Pheasant populations have done well. The Game Branch has been begging hunters to take more deer and moose in order to keep their populations within the limits of available browse. Fishing has been excellent, particularly in the northern parts of the province where new areas are being opened up each year.

The question is, however, how long will this mecca last. Most of us take it for granted that the abundance of wildlife we have today will continue with us tomorrow without aid or management. Nothing could be further from the truth. All we have to do is look back a few years in our history to find out what can happen to some of our wildlife species that were, at one time, so thick that they covered the plains and filled the skies during migration. The Passenger Pigeon and the Great Auk are gone. The Whooping Crane and the true Prairie Chicken are so close to extinction that it is doubtful if they will ever come back. The great herds of buffalo are reduced to those now confined to park and zoos.

People who are in the know tell us that by 1980 our human population in Canada will have increased from a present estimate of seventeen million to about thirty-five million. Farms will be larger, more people will move to the cities, automation will make a 30 to 35 hour week a reality. Everyone will be making more money and have more leisure time.

How about all this leisure and prosperity? What are we going to do with it? Yes, we can all say—"boy, at last I'll be able to hunt, fish and enjoy the outdoors all I want." But will you? Just about twice as

many people are going to have the same idea. As our population increases more and more land will come under cultivation. Many of the bluffs that raise your sharptail and pheasant flocks will disappear. Sloughs and marshes, many of which are already being drained, will no longer be available to raise the flocks of waterfowl we have been accustomed to over the past number of years. The clearing of the land, the elimination of the bluffs and wooded lots, the draining of the sloughs and potholes leaves nothing to hold the winter snows and provide an easy and leisurely run-off in the spring. Instead, our spring run-offs will come all at once causing disastrous floods. Lost top soil will flow into our rivers, streams and lakes polluting the fine fishing waters. You may say this will never happen in a civilized country such as ours. The same things were said fifty years ago in the United States and yet today they are desperately trying to buy back wetlands and other areas to provide some measure of protection for their dwindling supply of wildlife. The same thing can happen here in Canada unless we are prepared to plan and provide for our future needs now.

Just to give you an example of how fast a country can grow, let me quote from the Canada Year Book on Agriculture for the Province of Saskatchewan. In 1901 this province had roughly 600,000 acres of land under agriculture—today—50 odd years later—the total acreage under agriculture is in excess of 35 million. With an ever-increasing population can we foresee what it will be like fifty years from now. True, many of us will not be here to see what will happen but we still have an obligation to the generations that will follow us. The natural resources of our country have been given to us in trust, to use wisely, not to pollute and destroy. All of us are somewhat inclined to sit back and say this is a job for the government. They are the ones responsible for the proper management and safeguarding of our natural resources. This is true in a sense but in a democracy such as

ours, just who is the government? The people are—and it is their voice which will shape the destiny of our natural resources in this country. If we are weak in our demands for the necessary safeguarding procedures there is no question that much of the fine hunting and fishing we have now will disappear. If, on the other hand, we come forward with a strong and united voice, coupled with a sound and farsighted program, then there is no reason why we should not continue to enjoy the pleasure of outdoor living such as we have today. A program of wise conservation will in no way curtail the development of a country to its fullest capacity. In fact, the wise use of our rivers, streams, lakes and forests today will benefit development in the future. The prairie provinces of western Canada have always been subject to drought in the past and will in the future.

Any management of our waters that can be done now will do much to reduce the intensity of these drought periods in the future. Drainage of sloughs and marshes into the nearest stream or river will only add to the frequency and intensity of the drought periods, and I might add, cause serious flash flooding. This is being done now and is a serious, unwise and short-sighted policy. From this I do not mean that no drainage should be done. Some drainage is necessary to protect good agricultural land from flooding but even in this, serious thought should be given to the method of drainage used. Oftentimes it is only necessary to lower the levels of an area to protect good lands but in the majority of cases this is never thought of. The quickest way to get rid of water is to dig a ditch to the nearest river. There is little thought given to the carrying capacity of these rivers with the result that when the spring run-off takes place far more water is flowing into the rivers than they can carry resulting in disastrous floods downstream.

Even with these floods occurring practically every year, drainage still goes on and there does not seem to be much thought given to methods of correction. Yet the solution is simple, the costs reasonable and the benefits far outweigh the short term relief received from complete drainage of

an area, when the lowering of levels was all that was necessary in the first place.

Control of run-off waters in the spring and during periods of heavy precipitation is absolutely necessary if our rivers and lakes are to be suitable for fish and recreation for the generations that follow us. Silted and polluted waters are useless and only serve to remind those that follow us that we were remiss in our duties and trust.

The management of our upland game and other is an entirely different problem. Although the harvest of these species can be controlled by regulating the shooting seasons, the habitat so necessary for successful reproduction lies in the hands of the farmer and landowner. The future success and abundance of all our upland birds depends to a large extent on future farming methods. Friendly relationships between the farmer and sportsmen will do much to assure hunting in the future. Despite all that has been lost in the past and man has been blamed as the limiting factor, it can also be added that man can be the stimulating factor through wise and proper management of our present natural resources.

The way we have managed our lands and waters in the past unquestionably has had a great deal to do with shaping today's wildlife populations. How we manage our soils and water resources from this time on is sure to have an even greater impact on our future wildlife regardless of regulated seasons, bag limits and other controls of the game harvest.

We cannot hope to provide anything like the desired abundance of game for a constantly growing population unless we produce more game—And we can't produce more wildlife unless we manage our land resources so as to provide the necessary food, water and cover for wildlife.

#### NOTE TO MEMBERS

New members who did not get copies of the March, 1959, **Blue Jay** may write for a free copy as long as the supply lasts.