

SAVING SOME OLD FRONTIERS

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This may be the era for "New Frontiers", but it is also the final opportunity to preserve some of our Old Frontiers, namely those designated wilderness areas in our National Forests, Parks, Monuments and Refuges. The areas would be given formidable protection under S. 174, "A Bill to Establish a National Wilderness Preservation System for the permanent good of the whole people . . ."

Fortunately, the chief New Frontiersman of them all, President John F. Kennedy, recognizing that the America he envisions cannot be without the physical benefits and inspiration accruing to its people from the natural out-of-doors, urged Congress to "enact a wilderness protection bill along the general lines of S. 174."

The former Secretary of Agriculture, now U. S. Senator Clinton P. Anderson of New Mexico, chairman of the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, introduced the bill which would require Congressional approval before any areas in the wilderness system could be abolished. At this writing, a wilderness area can be eliminated by the head of the particular administering agency — by a few strokes (no matter how hesitatingly) of his pen. The proposed law could give mighty support to executive officers of the Agriculture and Interior Departments when they are trying to resist pressures of encroachment — whether to lumber wilderness acreage in a National Forest or to construct tourist facilities in a National Park's wilderness area.

Conservationists were urging Congress to pass the bill at this session. Carl W. Buchheister, president of the National Audubon Society, at the February hearings in Washington, D. C., warned that "Without such a law . . . not even remnants of true wilderness will be left in the United States for our grandchildren to know, to study, and to enjoy."

He predicted the loss of several wildlife species unless remnants of wilderness were preserved. "The spectacular . . . rare, California Condor, one of the largest birds on earth, will stay with us only if we protect the wilderness character of its nesting range in a National Forest . . . In a general way we know why the Bald Eagle is in trouble. It needs a wilderness habitat, and as wilderness goes, so goes the Bald Eagle." To cite what can happen, Mr. Buchheister lamented that "Had we been foresighted enough a few decades ago to set aside a couple of areas of forest wilderness in the Southeast, we might have saved another interesting species, the Ivory-billed Woodpecker."

It is interesting how often New York State's Forest Preserve has been cited as precedent and example for similar protection by the Federal Government as provided for in S. 174. Mr. Buchheister brought it up in these hearings saying that "Had it not been for the foresight of the framers of the State constitution, who years ago wrote protection for the Forest Preserve into the basic law, this wilderness would long ago have been lost to the people of the State who treasure it highly."

But he was forced to admit that "Almost daily the newspapers of New York report new schemes and new pressures to invade and despoil, for one commercial purpose or another, the great New York State Forest Preserve." At the time, the bill that would have leased Hunter Mountain for a privately operated ski slope had caught fire in the State Assembly from where it escaped by a three-vote margin. It was snuffed out in the Senate where only seven approved it. But it was like putting out a brush fire (important as that is) while the forest fire was beginning to rage. Only a third of the Preserve would be left as wilderness under a proposed rezoning that would make the remainder generally available for lumbering and recreation. The bill to implement the rezoning was introduced for study purposes — that is, to authorize hearings that probably will be held this summer at times and places that were to be announced by Assemblyman R. Watson Pomeroy, chairman of the Joint Legislative Committee on Natural Resources. Mr. Pomeroy introduced the bill on behalf of the Committee.

The Committee had opposed the ski bill having, in effect, criticized it as piece-meal as compared to the Committee's comprehensive multiple use view for the Preserve. However, two of the Senators approving the ski bill are members of the Committee: Dutton S. Peterson and Robert C. McEwen. Senator McEwen is vice chairman.

If action is taken by the Federal Government to protect the Golden Eagle, the Federation and its members will have jointly played a major role in the accomplishment. The effort had its start in the request for help from a transplanted Texan, John Alderman, who was serving as a radar expert in the New York City office of Western Electric Co. But he continued the fight for the Golden Eagle he had conducted while a member of the Texas Ornithological Society's conservative committee.

Golden Eagles, which bunch up in Texas during winter, have been the subject of aerial massacres. Texas ranchers, mistakenly believing the eagles threaten their sheep herds, have organized to hire pilots for this hunting. Mr. Alderman reports that the Big Bend Eagle Club of 1500 members was active this winter. Its most successful pilot killed at least 500 Golden Eagles this winter — 149 in one month.

When Mr. Alderman asked bird clubs to urge a letter writing campaign asking the State's U. S. Senators to introduce legislation, bird watchers from all over the state responded. Joseph A. Blake, Jr., Federation conservation chairman, included an appeal in his bulletin to the clubs and himself wrote the Senators on behalf of the Federation.

Senator Keating was perplexed — but, as he said later, impressed — by the deluge of letters urging him to take the lead in saving a bird seldom seen in New York State. Nevertheless, he made a sincere effort to inform himself. There was every indication he would get behind a bill providing for the bird's protection. He assigned one of his staff to handle the "eagle problem." This individual was visited in March by Mr. Alderman in company with the Federation's own Dr. Walter Spofford of Syracuse who for 20 years has spent his summers visiting the aeries of Golden Eagles to study

their behavior. The two also called on some Texas congressmen who were beginning to show concern.

However, Mr. Alderman reported a necessary delay in legislative efforts pending results of negotiations between American State Department officials and Mexican authorities regarding protection of the Flamingo, Wood Ibis and Golden Eagle under the Migratory Bird Treaty. The eagle was added following a conference with a representative of the Mexican Interior Department last March in Washington. He said that the Golden Eagle was considered Mexico's national symbol and that the Government might well be interested in protecting it — a few of the Mexican birds are thought to wander into Texas. Inclusion under the Treaty would, in effect, provide for nation-wide protection of the eagle in America.

Efforts persist to bring about more satisfactory management of Mourning Dove hunting in the south where the seasons are felt to be too long. Two organizations doing important work in Mourning Dove protection are the Committee for Dove Protection, Box 562, Palm Desert, Calif. and Conservation Militant, Box 72, St. Paul 2, Minn.

Thomas A. Lesperance, Keeseville, summed up the situation at the conclusion of his note on ground nesting of these birds, published in the Field Notes of the December, 1960 KINGBIRD: "The Mourning Dove is a protected species in the North, and it would seem that the species should be accorded the same protection in southern areas where it is now hunted. As evidenced by literature sent to banders by the Fish and Wildlife Service, this is a declining species. Its status merits the attention of Federation members in seeking nationwide protection of it as a species."

Bird clubs from throughout Long Island and New York City are joining with other interested groups, including those of fish and game, in fighting the proposed development of 8,000 acres of wetlands in Nassau County near Jones Beach on the south shore. Clubs sending representatives to organizing meetings of the Hempstead Town Lands Resources Committee have been the Baldwin Bird Club, Lyman Langdon Audubon Society, Brooklyn Bird Club, Linnaean Society of New York and the recently organized Huntington Audubon Society. A leader in the effort has been John J. Elliott, vice president of the Federation.

The Resources Committee has been formed to halt contemplated development by the Town of Hempstead of these wetlands for residential and industrial purposes. An engineering survey to implement these purposes has been underway. Support for the opposition has come from the National Audubon Society which issued a press release calling these lands "the heart of a key area on Long Island that is vital to the wild waterfowl of the entire Atlantic flyway."

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