

## CONSERVATION NEWS

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Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall has written an excellent, but curiously titled book, "The Quiet Crisis." It's true that the fight for conservation is seldom allotted the banner headlines that give the effect of clamor to the top of the front pages. This is not because conservationists are quiet. They find it difficult to be heard.

Perhaps you have had that nightmarish kind of dream when you were pursued by some shadowy culprit. You were screaming for help, yet nobody could hear you. It was as though your outcries were grabbed and muffled in silence the instant they were gotten out so that you were pushed back into that helpless sensation of not even being able to hear yourself crying for help.

At the risk of some figurative exaggeration, that could best describe the stunned reaction of conservationists on Long Island following the permission granted by the U.S. Army Engineers to a company to help themselves to 800,000 cubic yards of fill from a mucky treasure chest of marine productivity. This fill, from a wetlands area called Garrett Lead off Oceanside, Long Island, was to be used to raise the level of nearby land for a housing development.

The surprise was not so much over the decision itself. The Army Engineers Corps has been used to granting such approval unless the proposed project was shown to result in a navigation hazard. The surprise was over the fact that it came so immediately after some unusual circumstances, some of them almost bizarre enough to be nightmarish.

The Sunday night news special had barely started when the telephone summoned the attention of Cornelius Ward (he's the illustrator of the new book, "Birds of the New York Area"). A phone call after 11 o'clock makes you wonder as you pick up the receiver. Mr. Ward heard the "come on, we'd better check that dredging" words of Rod Vandivert, chairman of the Hempstead Town Lands Resources Council. Within a half hour the pair were themselves shadowy figures sludging across the marsh until they could hear the dredge in operation as the rich muck was being sucked through the long pipes. The clattering sounds from within the pipes were thought by the two to be clam shells from this prime wetlands area.

What was so unusual about this dredging operation then in process? The Army Engineers had not yet given approval. After public condemnation by Mr. Vandivert the next day in The Long Island Press (a newspaper that is giving "voice" to conservationists in its pages), the Corps ordered the operation halted. About ten days later the Engineers gave its approval. It was like your finding an enterprising character helping himself to all the best vegetables in your garden. You tell him to stop. Then a few days later you go and tell him to take the vegetables. It could only leave conservationists wondering whether the dredgers weren't pretty sure of themselves.

The Corps' decision was particularly discouraging because it was made despite protests from many conservation groups, including the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In fact, the latter Federal agency has to be consulted in such cases under the Federal Coordination Act of 1958. Their recom-

mentations are supposed to be given equal consideration. The law recognized the need for the expert voice of aroused conservationists to be heard and heeded in projects affecting natural resources. It is amazing that so many projects are allowed to go ahead without the advice of biologists, ecologists, etc. But the Engineers' decision dramatically revealed that although this law may have the conservationist's growl, it lacks the molars, cuspids and bicuspid to make itself felt.

At this writing the Hempstead Town Lands Resources Council was planning to appeal for a presidential review of the Engineers' action and for an order that in effect would make the Coordination Act have equal importance. The precedent could be all-embracing — leading to a conservationist voice in any proposal that would affect natural resources, whether that project be under Federal, State or County jurisdiction.

We don't have to wait for laws to implement this principle. Even if we have to be like the relatives who have come visiting without being invited, we should give our advice anyway. I am thinking particularly of pesticides which many communities indulge in, too often without much more expert advice than that of the pilot of the plane.

This doesn't mean that every Federation member can qualify as a chemist or wildlife biologist. But we, as birdwatchers, are aware that if you are freed from mosquitoes in your backyard, you might be freed from the song of birds in your trees or from the joy of fishing in some stream. This much we could tell communities, especially ones that might not have anyone else around to warn them. Who knows? A local citizenry might be grateful sometime that they were thus rescued from the consequences of their own ignorance.

Now that spring is upon us people will start thinking more and more of raising fruits and vegetables that are blemish free or of having to face another summer slapping at mosquitoes. Perhaps some club members would be willing to "bone-up" on the pesticide problem — not to the pointing of getting a Ph.D. in the subject. But they could then be in a position to be asked by a club to represent the view of caution at a public hearing (even calling for one in the face of a proposed spraying program), or at a town council meeting where they could ask to be heard, or even sitting around a table with the city fathers in an office and presenting the hazards to them. Also, as much as possible, trained professionals at any nearby colleges or institutions could be asked to volunteer the testimony when needed.

The article written for *The Kingbird* By Dr. Walter Spofford and Dr. David Peakall is an excellent background paper, easily read, that can be used by anybody preparing a case for caution in a proposed pesticides program.

The voice of the conservationist is too little heard and heeded in this land that was once so rich in forests, wildlife and other natural resources. Somehow that voice must be made legally binding. Otherwise we ourselves must be ready to try to make the voice of the conservationist heard "loud and clear."

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