

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Conservation and Management — are they the same?

These are difficult times for those of us who are determined to defend and protect our wildlife and wild lands, who would prevent further despoliation of America's natural beauty, who would seek to enhance this country's magnificent wild heritage. On all sides we are beset and besieged by a host of interests, public and private, almost always claimed to be "in the majority interest." Here the highway builders devastate a swath through a forest, there developers annihilate a wetland, here someone proposes one more needless cafeteria in a city park, there a power company alters the natural ecology of a river. Pesticides, power lines, bounties on useful animals, billboards—daily our strengths are divided and often we are conquered. We win a little victory here, and lose a major war somewhere else. Yearly the list of threatened species grows, and the area of wilderness diminishes.

Until recently, we knew who stood beside us in this battle; where our friends were, and that we could count on their support. And staunch among them were the professional conservationists, including those who labor for our state. We could count on the New York State Department of Conservation to take enlightened positions on most subjects, and make forward-looking decisions. We looked upon this department as the guardians of our wildlife, the protectors of our heritage.

But lately, one begins to detect shifts in emphasis in the orientation of this department. There is less talk today of protection and enhancement, and far more talk of population pressure, of recreation, of exploitation, of "management." There have been subtle attacks in the department on the "forever wild" concept that protects the forest preserves from commercial violation, and a growing record of practices which, if they do not legally infringe the forever wild clause, circumvent it in fact.

Presently, the innocent-appearing question has been raised, "Shall the state be allowed to sell to commercial interests timber removed from forest lands to permit better utilization of these forests by deer?"

There are two basic dangers with the proposition. First, bringing commercial interests into the forest preserves, to crop timber for whatever reasons, and however policed, would surely and certainly mean the end of the forests. And second, removing timber to permit greater utilization by deer is management, and managed land is not wilderness. It is the destruction of the wilderness for the benefit of one group—the deer hunters—to the detriment of all others.

This proposal is a symptom of what is happening to "Conservation" Departments all over the country. The reason seems quite obvious. No one wants true wilderness less than a trained wildlife manager, because therein there is nothing for him to do. With more and more of our staffs

college-trained, more and more management would seem to be the trend. Who ever went to college to learn how to leave a forest or a wetland exactly as one finds it? One learns how to "improve the cover" for this species, improve the environment for that; one learns sustained yield and multiple use and a dozen other subjects that all add up to tinkering with nature. The end result is wilderness no longer—but wildlife farms, or game factories, or something. (There are of course, many instances where limited management is desirable: to help a threatened species, to restock a natural habitat area, to preserve a "study area" in static rather than in evolving form, to recreate or improve a deteriorated or destroyed habitat.)

But you conservation experts; leave our wilderness lands alone! If there is a temporary surplus of deer, let it be cropped by hunters, or let nature strike its own balance. Your job is not to manage—but to preserve and protect: from fire, from commercial exploitation, from chemical contamination, from water pollution, from infestations of destructive pests including man. The name of your role is conservation—not exploitation.

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