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The Sportsmen's Hopes for the Future of Hunting on Private Land

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THE SPORTSMEN'S HOPES FOR THE FUTURE OF HUNTING ON PRIVATE LAND

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First of all I think we have to realize that the farming situation has changed in the last few years. This is a quail symposium, and that poses some special problems about hunting on private land. I think there are some kinds of hunting for which we can provide a fair-to-midling type of hunting on private lands, but quail hunting poses another problem altogether because it requires quite a few acres to provide ample territory to hunt in. For that reason I think the Open Acres Program described by Senator Bellmon, also called REAP, is not going to be as helpful as we hope it will.

Most of the farming operations today, and I happen to be a farmer, have changed considerably in size. We no longer have the little family-type farms. Small farms supported the quail populations we had 30 years ago. People farming today are using 4- to 6-row equipment. There are very few fence rows left, and that little brush patch that used to exist for quail is no longer there. There are still some places on farms suitable for quail nesting and occasional dusting, but they are not as plentiful as they used to be.

Paying a farmer \$3 an acre to put his land into various types of practices, such as planting certain types of crops to enhance the game population, is a drop in the bucket. In the first place farmers are fairly affluent people and I think they are going to consider carefully before they open their land. If the program is going to work they may carry it on; but if they do, they are going to hunt over the place themselves. They can lease hunting rights to people from the city and probably get a lot more out of it than \$3 an acre. So I don't think this is going to solve the problem of public access to private land. I don't know that anything else can solve the problem, but I sure don't think that REAP will.

We read about some of the problems that bring about the no-hunting signs and the no-trespassing signs, but I don't think I should pass the opportunity to say that 1 of the biggest things hurting us today is the bad hunter. I constantly read in the magazines like Field and Stream and Outdoor Life, and various other publications of this type, that the type of hunter I am going to describe is in the minority, perhaps representing less than 5% of all the hunters who go on the land. I think that figure is much too small. I'm talking about the so-called slob hunter. He does everything in the book that he shouldn't do and antagonizes the landowner. Then some poor unsuspecting soul comes along and asks the farmer to hunt. He is in trouble to begin with because of what the slob caused. I think that the number of slobs has increased; it must have, because the population has increased.

Back to quail hunting, I don't know if there is any answer to this thing, but I think first of all there are some current programs that offer more solutions than the REAP program. In Arkansas we have several opportunities. For instance, in the western-most part of the state there is a large military installation that has about 75,000 acres of

land, and it is used periodically by the National Guard to train during the summer. For the most part, during the hunting season there are no people on this land other than a small force to maintain the buildings. The reservation could provide some recreational opportunities for a large number of people.

There are several problems with this situation. First of all there is a long-time cattle lease. The cattle are competing with the wildlife for available feed, especially with the deer. Cattle are grazing everything down to the ground. Some of the range is pretty well eroded and deteriorated. But we do have an agreement with this installation signed, I believe, by the Governor of Arkansas and the Department of Defense. It is hard to have a program for wildlife there because of the cattle. The problem is to get the agreement worded to guarantee enforcement of grazing restrictions and provide enough habitat. Then I think public hunting would be much better. We have spent 3-4 years trying to do this, and we still haven't been successful. I think you have some opportunities like that here and in other states.

This is, of course, public land. I would also like to point out something else. I am sure that some of you are familiar with the Alabama trespass law. If you are going to hunt on someone else's land in Alabama, you have to have a signed piece of paper in your pocket saying you have permission to hunt. If you don't have, the owner can turn you in and you are in deep trouble. As a result, a great deal of the land in Alabama, I guess the majority of it, is leased to people that want 5 or 6 thousand acres. That excludes the public from the land. I think the acreage under lease agreement is increasing.

At 1 time in Arkansas, a bill was introduced in the Legislature to impose Alabama's type of trespass law in Arkansas and make the Game and Fish Department enforce it. Game officers would have to spend more than 0.5 of their time enforcing no-trespass laws. This really disturbed folks in Arkansas. This could happen, and it could happen as a result of sportsmen simply not using good sense. I think that sportsmen could do much to help eliminate some of these feelings, and I'll give you an example. As a farmer, I know that on opening day of bird season I've got some territory that is real good, and when you people talked about 2 birds per acre, my mouth watered. There is a limited amount of this habitat where I live that will support that. The reason it will is that the Arkansas River got on a rampage back in 1943 and broke over a levy and dumped sand over some of this land that used to grow 2 or 3 bales of cotton per acre. It won't grow 3 bales of cotton an acre anymore, but it does produce much of what we call beggar lice or tick clover. The area has a lot of weeds, partridge peas, and cottonwoods, and the birds can find cover. You can hardly kill them out.

To get back to my story, on the first day of bird season I could almost get elected Governor, I think, just by inviting in people that like to hunt on this kind of area. Initially it was that way, but it's not any more. I don't post the area, and on the first day of bird season I usually get up and drive down there before daylight and park with my dog and gun. You have to be there before the sun comes up or

you are going to be hunting behind some other folks if you don't. They don't come ask you if they can hunt, they are there waiting. So this year I went through the same routine. I got there before daylight and was sitting there waiting and heard folks start shooting. I have no idea how they could see a bird, because it was dark! Now this isn't going to help any and we all know it. So I think if hunters want to hunt on private land they should go see the farmer before the opening day.

One of my duties as a private citizen is serving on the local school board. As a board member one of the responsibilities you have to assume is looking at the tax records from time to time to see that every 1 is paying his share of the ad valorem taxes that support the public schools. While I was checking these records with another school board member, we found 175 acres of untaxed land that had been set aside for hunting by a farmer. We went back and got the old plats of that area and found that it had been listed as a navigable lake. In Arkansas, areas such as this become public land if no taxes have been paid on them. So we checked a little further and went to the State Land Commissioner and found out that part of it belonged to the state and part of it to the Federal Government. The Land Commissioner happened to be quite a hunter himself and was sympathetic with us. We contacted the Attorney General and asked him to give us an opinion as to whom the land really belonged, and what the possibilities were of turning this land over to a suitable state agency to administer.

We've gotten a sort of off-the-cuff favorable decision. It hasn't been written up yet, but it will be. In looking at this particular case we can look around and find thousands of similar areas in the State of Arkansas that are in the same type of situation. They are public lands and there should be public access to them. I think that by researching the records we can find a lot of land that can be opened up to public access. I assure you that we are going to do a much better job of re-searching records in Arkansas.

I don't know what the answers are. In our state the attitudes differ greatly from the northern part to the southern part. Some people in the southeast and northeast know that hunters can provide extra income. This philosophy has not yet reached the northernmost counties. I think their attitudes will change in the near future, and they will realize that there is money to be made from hunters. So for our own good, I think it behooves us to do a little bit better job of public relations with the landowner, and help him feel hospitable to hunters.

Comments from Members of the Audience

1. All my life I have preached that wildlife is a crop and a farmer should sell wildlife just as well as he sells his hay crop, cattle crop, or any other crop. Because conditions in the U.S. today are such that land values, taxes, and everything are increasing, the farmer has to take advantage of everything that he has at his disposal to be able to stay in business. Wildlife is a crop for us, and when you compare the money we get, we also raise purebred cattle,

we can make a heck of a lot more money in our wildlife program than we ever can from cattle. It is much more enjoyable because I like to do it.

2. Here's another idea on this idea that a farmer has a social obligation to open his land to everybody else. Let's forget it, because the farmer is subsidizing you. I've been in the cow business for 30 years and got out of it because I was selling cows for the same price 3 years ago that I was selling for 25 years ago. I can prove that since 1847 the price of corn per bushel has not varied more than 10-12%. The American city person today is paying less of his earning capacity for food than does a person in any other country. This is a matter of record, but somehow the idea has developed that farmers get rich. Another viewpoint is that farmers should furnish wildlife to hunters simply for the asking. Our problem here goes back to the original premise that in a pioneer country a man could put his gun on his shoulder and go anywhere because the game belongs to the people. Migratory game does, but when the landowner determines by his habitat management whether there is game or not, then the situation changes.
3. I'm from Oklahoma and there are a few of us who are trying to open our property to leased hunting. I've opened my property to quail hunting about 3 years now. I have a group of construction workers from Oklahoma City that pay for a hunting lease so that they don't have to hunt after someone else. I also lease to professional people. To me this proves that there is a place in this whole scheme for all of these programs you are talking about. To me I see no reason why there can't be a place for people to pay an in-between price if they can't afford to pay the big price. One thing I can't understand is the reluctance on the part of the Wildlife Department to encourage all phases of these. I don't see that I necessarily has to work against the other. For various reasons, there is going to be the man who has such small property or poorly arranged property he can't develop it for good-paying agriculture. At little expense to the Wildlife Department they could lease these for public hunting, open up an additional acreage that we evidently need for quail and other game, and thereby relieve pressure on public hunting areas. I can't see where I program necessarily works against the other.

NOTE: Most of the questions and answers after Mr. Apple's presentation were too indistinctly recorded by the tape recorder to be transcribed accurately.

TECHNICAL SESSION I

PROBLEMS AND METHODS IN BOBWHITE MANAGEMENT

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