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A SUGGESTED POLICY FOR AN ORGANIZATION OF CONSERVATION RESEARCH
WORKERS IN THE MID-WESTERN STATES

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It is wholly fitting that there should be frank discussions at this initial meeting as to the need and function of a mid-western organization of research workers in conservation. Believing that such frank discussions are in order, the Institute for Fisheries Research is presenting its suggestions as to a future policy of such an organization.

Our suggestions are given under three headings: (1) the need for and the desirable limitations of the organization; (2) the important research work with which the organization should be concerned; and (3) a plan for cooperative bass stream improvement as an example of the manner in which the organization may function in correlating research work.

Many of us have long realized the need for a mid-western organization which would deal solely with the numerous perplexing problems of the so-called "prairie peninsula"*. This region is a well defined ecological unit comprising the western half of Ohio, southern third of Michigan and Wisconsin, the whole of Indiana, Illinois and Iowa, the extreme southern portion of Minnesota and all of Missouri except the southeastern fourth. The region consists largely of slightly rolling and well drained agricultural land under intensive cultivation, of relatively small wood lots and well defined drainage systems. There are few natural lakes, though artificially impounded waters are becoming increasingly numerous. The principal game animals of the region are: ringnecked pheasant,

* Transeau, Edger Nelson, the Prairie Peninsula, Ecology, Vol. XVI, No. 3, 1935, pp. 423-437.

bob-white quail, European partridge, cottontail rabbit, fox squirrel, largemouth, smallmouth and spotted basses (especially the latter two); and such pan-fish species as channel catfish, rockbass, bluegills, crappies and bullheads.

The conservation problems are quite uniform throughout this entire prairie peninsula and many of these problems are in definite need of immediate and prolonged research.

To the north of the prairie peninsula lies another well defined ecological unit. This unit embraces the northern two-thirds of Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota. Here agriculture is of a different type and less intensive than in the prairie peninsula, forest and brush lands are dominant over large areas, streams are colder and many glacial lakes are present. The principal game animals are likewise different, consisting of ruffed grouse, prairie chicken, sharptailed grouse, deer, snowshoe rabbit, brook, rainbow, brown and lake trouts, northern pike and muskellunge. In many respects this region has more in common with northern Pennsylvania and New York than with the prairie peninsula states.

To the east of the prairie peninsula in the upper Ohio river drainage lies another well defined, small, ecological unit composed of southwestern Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio, all of West Virginia and eastern Kentucky. In this hilly section there is much need for research concerning the effects of mine wastes upon fish life, the problems of more unified regulation of fishing and hunting, the possible introduction of a suitable exotic game bird for the barren hills, and the further increase or reestablishment of the more important native game animals.

Certain questions now arise. How limited shall our mid-western organization be? Should it stress only those problems of vital importance to the prairie peninsula? Would it not be better to concentrate on the problems of this region? Should it not discourage within this organization, the consideration of the problems peculiar to the northern portions of the lake states and the upper Ohio

drainage? Might it not be wise to suggest that these northern and eastern ecological units form regional organizations similar to the one proposed here, in order to solve their own research problems?

We feel that our organization should confine itself to the problems of the prairie peninsula. It must cooperate rather than compete with such national organizations as the American Fisheries Society and the newly formed American Wildlife Institute. Unless we confine ourselves to the problems of a small, closely knit ecological unit there is grave danger of duplicating much of the effort of these national organizations and retarding our own local progress in research.

How best can our organization correlate research work of the prairie peninsula region? In attending the usual meetings on conservation matters one cannot help but realize, that while the papers are somewhat grouped in homogenous sections, there still remains a woeful lack of coordination of the papers in each section. Most of these papers tend to go on tangents. Quite frequently one discovers that someone else in another state has duplicated his research. While such duplication is very fine in providing a check upon the work, nevertheless if both individuals had been afforded the opportunity to cooperate, a more complete result would have been obtained. It should be the primary purpose of this organization to assist all workers in conservation research in the prairie peninsula by furnishing the opportunity to direct their research toward the solution of definite problems.

As an example of how such coordination may be effected, we present a tentative plan for interstate cooperation in experimental bass stream improvement. At the outset it might be stated that little of positive value has been accomplished in this field to date. It is our belief that bass stream improvement in prairie peninsula streams is possible and practicable but not by Michigan trout stream methods. The average Michigan trout stream is clear, sand-bottomed, has a sur-

prisingly low flood crest and carries little, if any, glacial silt. The streams of the prairie peninsula normally have silt and boulder stream bottoms, a high flood crest, extremely low water levels in summer and carry considerable silt at most periods of the year. It is obvious that such dissimilar types of streams must receive different treatment.

In order to materially reduce the time and expense required to place bass stream improvement on a practical basis, it is suggested that this organization should agree to allow the research workers of one state to take the initiative on experimental bass stream improvement. The state selected should be vitally interested in either smallmouth or spotted bass or both, and should be reasonably free from frequent disturbing political influence.

The state selected should conduct its own research on bass stream improvement within its boundaries. It should take the initiative in correspondence and in the correlation of this research and function as a clearing house for the exchange of ideas. Each year at the meeting of this organization it should present a general report upon the progress of experimental bass stream improvement in the region, and should indicate the trend and future problems. At this meeting workers from the various state should give the results of their past year's research.

It may not be necessary for this organization to publish the papers presented at this meeting. The publication of this papers may well be left to the state institutions concerned. Our purpose should be to place the results of individual investigations before the research workers concerned as quickly as possible, and at a minimum of expense. This can be accomplished, as indicated above, by correspondence with the central clearing house, and by occasional mimeographed bulletins which summarize the progress of the work.

Such a cooperative plan should accomplish as much in a few years as individual, spasmodic and tabled research could in a much greater length of time. Such

cooperation should consolidate the states of the prairie peninsulas as should be the case where such mutual problems are concerned. This interstate cooperation should tend to stimulate the interest and support of conservation administrators, institutions of higher learning and sportsmen.

This same plan of interstate cooperation can be profitably used in other conservation problems; in game management or ringnecked pheasants, bob-white, European partridge, cottontail rabbit, and fox squirrel; in determining the most practical uses of artificially impounded waters; and in solving the many interstate problems of hunting and sport and commercial fishing in the Ohio, Mississippi and Missouri rivers within the confines of the prairie peninsula. It is suggested that each state be made responsible for one of the problems common to us all.