

New Soils Building
October 26, 1934

Dr. W. C. Boone
Ottumwa
Iowa

Dear Dr. Boone:

I have delayed answering your welcome letter of October 8, but I have been thinking hard about the Iowa situation and while, of course, I am out of touch with details, I am anxious to take advantage of your invitation to send you my thoughts in very plain language.

Not knowing the details of recent history, I cannot say either yes or no to such questions as whether the census work should have been continued this winter, or whether the research program has steered a reasonably consistent course. I have no fear, though, that right answers to such questions will be arrived at once the Commission and the research department sufficiently understand each other.

One assertion I can make flatly: Errington may not have worked on the particular things which you thought you needed most, and it might even be that the Commission was right and he was wrong in selecting things to work on, but there can be no doubt that he has delivered results far in excess of the value of the investment, and I hope that the Commission realizes this fact. I am perfectly willing to be held accountable for the prediction that ten years from now the discoveries about game populations which have come out of Iowa in the past two years will be regarded as foundations for the whole practice of game management.

Secondly, I think that both the Commission and Errington should realize that the Iowa set-up loads upon three people an amount of research work which might well occupy a dozen. Several other states maintain research departments, but none of them, with the possible exception of Michigan, regard them as anything but ornaments or propaganda. What I mean is that they do not attempt to base their administrative decisions on research findings. Iowa, to some extent at least, has attempted this and it is a wholly new thing. We started with one man simply because there had previously been no man and because funds were scarce, but experience may now be showing up that this new system requires a larger force than we had bargained for. If there is anything in this thought, then each side of the present discussion should realize the difficulties under which the other is working.

Thirdly, I have been much impressed in the last two years with the fact that all administrative organizations dealing with conservation are loaded far beyond the permanent capacity of the persons involved. I can see

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this clearly in the Wisconsin Department, in the Lake States District of the Forest Service, in the Southwestern District of the Forest Service, in the Soil Erosion Service, and in the CCC. There is small hope that this overload will be more than partially relieved by an expansion of overhead. The only substantial hope of relief is to pass the burden down the line to lower officers, and this is always easier said than done. Frankly, I have been disappointed in the reports which reach me as to the degree to which either the Department or Errington have succeeded in passing their respective loads on down the line. The fact that the lower officers at first cannot carry these loads means not that the scheme is impracticable, but that there must be a constant improvement in their capacity and that schooling facilities must be undertaken. By schooling I mean instruction in a very broad sense. It is possible to construe the present Iowa difficulty almost entirely in terms of mutual overload of higher-ups. It is possible that the main remedy both at Des Moines and at Ames lies in the slow and painful process of warden instruction and warden improvement. I know this is no news to you, but it may do no harm to again emphasize my belief in its importance, and I think that Errington particularly needs to be reminded of it.

In reply to your question about the Bennett set-up, I see nothing improper about attaching a man directly to the Department with duties intermediate between research and administration. There are always a lot of jobs which require scientific knowledge, but which are not research in any narrow sense of the term.

This is, of course, a different thing from transferring the actual research to the Department and also a different thing from severing relations with the research organization in the College, either of which would appear to me as mistakes. In this connection it might be interesting to mention that two states have tried to do research work directly in the administrative department--New York and Michigan. Both have used rather extra well qualified men for the research work. There are no signs of trouble in Michigan except that both schools have also initiated an independent research program, which is, of course, weakened by lack of contact with actual administrative problems. In New York, however, the pressure exerted for too quick results is perceptibly weakening the prestige of the work in the scientific world. I am not sure that the work actually merits this weakened rating, but it is getting it whether it rates it or not. To me it is absolutely clear that neither the New York nor the Michigan set-up is fundamentally as sound as Iowa's.

I have no illusions about this letter throwing any great amount of light on your problem. I am sending it to you more as an expression of my interest than as a key to unlock the door. I of course appreciate the kind and tolerant attitude which is written between the lines of your letter.

With kind personal regards,

Yours sincerely,

Aldo Leopold

In Charge, Game Research