

January 13, 1988

Dear Art:

I have your letter and article. I'll try to give you my reasons why I think you are wrong about habitat being the prime limiting factor.

In your first paragraph I think you have hit the nail right on the head when you say "~~Now it is the reverse,~~ Regulations have become so permissive, special seasons, zoning, etc. - that managers are afraid to even broach the subject of restrictive regs, and especially a closed season". You go on "You can drum up a lot of support for habitat programs, but proposing highly restrictive regs is like playing with fire as you well know," etc.

Management should be trying to learn the truth about "What will rebuild our vanishing waterfowl population."

Aldo covers this subject on pages 38 to 42 of Game Management. There are many factors which can control the population of a given species and he says "Of factors operating on a given species at a given time and place, one often far outweighs all the others in the extent to which it pulls down the unimpeded increase rate. Where this is so it may be called 'limiting'. The limiting factor is one which has to be removed first and usually the one to which the application of a given amount of effort will pay the highest return."

Later he says "management consists largely of spotting the correct limiting factor and controlling it. It also consists of knowing when to stop and what other factor to turn to."

Of the factors presently controlling the increase of waterfowl, beyond possible doubt the number one must be a lack of nesting birds on the nest areas. You tell me of your recent flights in Canada. Nowhere do you report a good population of nesters. Delta may be among the poorer areas, but if that is correct it would have to be because its former nesters are no longer alive! Has it become a sort of "shot out" marsh? Anyway, there are very few ducks there compared to its capacity to accommodate them.

In no area do you report enough ducks to utilize the capacity. I feel sure this is because when the big winter concentrations are disbursed over the presently available nest areas they are spread so thin that we have our present problem.

How can you avoid the conclusions that the way to get more ducks is to stop man's kill? This can be accomplished by season control and can be greatly helped by killing less ducks around refuge areas. Presently few refuges provide enough food inside the refuge so that the ducks must run the gamut of a circle of commercial blinds. A very low grade of sport.

You tell me that on your recent flights to Minnedosa the situation there was not nearly as grim as at Delta. Could you find an actual comparison between now and the '40s at Minnedosa? If you succeed in finding the old records and also had recent records it would be important. Maybe even conclusive?

If the Delta area is now equivalent to "A Burnt-out Marsh", isn't that a sure sign that too many ducks were killed before they could migrate? If so, isn't the cure to shoot less ducks rather than improve habitat as a limiting factor?

Now to your article which I have read carefully. First off, woody populations are in good condition because of special restrictions on the kill!

In your second paragraph you agree to a recent drop in numbers, and you hope, through innovative and intensive management on private and public lands and greater efforts, to preserve nesting habitat and by changes in land use and agricultural factors. You go on to say, however, despite these foreseen limitations, goals for the year 2000 in the Plan call for (and should say hope for) increases over current levels in all prairie-nesting sport ducks. I would have not even a ghost of such a hope from these plans! They are just a continuation of habitat improvement!

Your third paragraph on the woodies in the '80s indicates productivity equaled mortality. Don't forget that their recovery was the result of further limitations of kill, not habitat improvement.

I enjoyed reading the wood duck portion that came next and your figures as to my numbers are okay.

On Page 8 you say "Every management tool available must be used," and I could not agree with you more! Let's stop killing ducks.

On Page 89 I quote "Protection from shooting was effective in the early years of closure but became less effective when an open season in the early '80s resulted in a rise in kill from 140,000 in the early '60s changed to over 900,000 in 1983. Aren't you looking the wrong way? On page 8 I quote "In '62 the daily limit was doubled to two, and the kill rose from 140,000 to 340,000 in '63 and '64. Since then the kill crept upwards to more than 900,000 in '83. Your next paragraph is also appropriate as a reason for reducing our kill!

Summing up, our differences of opinion come as being due to differences in Aldo's basic teaching of what factors management should use in their effort to raise population. To my mind the limiting factor is unquestionably ^{is} we need first of all more breeding birds to produce more young ducks. ^{is}

We are wasting our time and money by continuing the ~~pursuit~~ of habitat improvement as we have seen by the failure of that plan to produce more ducks.

As I have said many times before, the big money in D.U. plus other groups who provide lots of money for ducks like the national and state programs, and not ~~least a~~ host of interested people whose income depends on these sources. I can't blame this group, but their interest should "give way" to the more important objective of *Saving* our waterfowl resources which are now dangerously threatened.

Fred
The Iowa Conservationists for January reports the \$7 total
from various sources for the protection of fish and fowl over \$2
1 billion dollar

As I have said many times before, the big money in D.U. plus other groups who provide lots of money for ducks like the national and state programs which the Iowa Conservationist for January reports the '87 total from varying sources for the protection of fish and fowl exceeded One Billion Dollars. The group whose income is provided by these contributions has a stake in their continuation and, therefore, are hesitant to interfere with the present status quo. I can't blame this group, but their interest should "give way" to the more important objective of saving our waterfowl resources which are now dangerously threatened.