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# Pennsylvania's Program to Improve Landholder Sportsmen Relations

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because it is not good farm business to summer fallow land that long. In my case for instance, we'll put 100 acres of land in set aside this year; next year that will be our best wheat. It will probably make 10 bushels more an acre than it did before summer fallow. So I think from the agricultural standpoint we won't get away from the present program of using different land for set aside year after year unless we allow brushland to qualify as set aside. That and encourage farmers to plant cover for wildlife.

Mr. Chairman, if I could just say one thing more. It seems to me every state's situation is different: Iowa's situation is different; Tennessee's is different; Oklahoma's is different. There is no way Congress can write a program to fit the whole country. It seems to me the thing we ought to do is to stand on the authority that is in the law and on the finances that are available. We've got to sell the USDA on the idea that this land has a use beyond agricultural use, that the greatest outdoor recreational opportunities in this country are on private agricultural land. The USDA needs to concern itself with the way this resource is developed and utilized, and until we get them to see this we are not going to get anywhere. Congress can pass laws until we are voted out of office. Unless the Department of Agriculture's administrators add people in your state, my state, and Washington, D. C. who understand what we're trying to do, we are not going to get very far. You folks in this room can help us very much if you will just sell the USDA on the idea that here is a tremendous resource and it is up to them to see that it is better developed and utilized. Let's get a wildlife person on each state ASCS committee and in the USDA office.

#### PENNSYLVANIA'S PROGRAM TO IMPROVE LANDHOLDER - SPORTSMEN RELATIONS

Harvey A. Roberts, Pennsylvania Game Commission, Harrisburg

Probably the best place to start would be with a very brief thumbnail sketch of Pennsylvania for those of you who have never been there or have gone through it very hurriedly. The state is roughly rectangular in shape and consists of 45,000 square miles. That makes it about 33rd in size among the 50 states, and we have a human population of 11.5 million people. That makes us 3rd in the nation. So you can see we have people and land problems. One-half of Pennsylvania is forested, and the state is bisected in a northeast-southwest direction by the Appalachian and Alleghany Mountains. Probably we have 1 of the most heavily hunted pieces of real estate in any part of the country. An example of some of the hunting pressure we get is on our primary pheasant range where we have had ongoing studies for a number of years. On a 3,000-acre area, we averaged 220 man hours of hunting each day during the 25-day season. We sell in excess of a million resident hunting licenses and we sell approximately 100,000 nonresident licenses. In both categories we lead the nation.

Historically, Pennsylvania hunters and landowners have never been too prone to erect or abide by no-trespass signs. Even by today's standards the Pennsylvania hunter does not hold a no-trespass sign in quite the same respect or esteem or fear that it is held in other states.

Despite this fact, back in the early 1930's it became rather evident to the people in the Pennsylvania Game Commission that more and more land was being posted and a conflict between the hunter and the landowner was developing. I think a lot of this conflict took the form of frustration on the part of the landowner due to disrespect for privately erected no-trespass signs. The Game Commission realized that the sport of hunting small game on agricultural lands depends on safeguarding the rights of the farmer to a peaceful existence and certainly to protection of his property, crops, and livestock. The Commission devised a plan that experience has shown to be of benefit to both the landowner and the sportsman. Inaugurated in 1936 and known as the Cooperative Farm Game Program, this method of keeping privately owned land open to public hunting currently involves 2 million acres of farm land and 16,528 individual landowners. The program consists of 172 projects ranging in size from a minimum of a 1,000 acres to a maximum of about 30,000 acres. These projects are found in 57 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties. Under the provisions of our game laws, and rules and regulations as developed by our Commission, we can govern the administration and the management of these project areas.

A project area consists of a group of farms and accompanying woodlots that are suitable for the propagation of game and for public hunting. These farms have to be contiguous so that we get a large unit with very few noncooperators scattered through it. To become a cooperator, the owner institutes an initial agreement with the Pennsylvania Game Commission for a period of 5 years. After the 5-year period the agreement automatically renews itself on an annual basis. However, either party can terminate the agreement with 60-days written notice. The Commission has cancelled agreements when farms became unsuitable for hunting due to urban sprawl or other reasons, or the cooperator has sold his land. Some farmer-cooperators became disenchanted with sportsmen or with the Game Commission and terminated after the 60-day written notice.

I think the thing that finally made Christians out of a lot of our sportsmen is the fact that they do respect Game Commission signs. So, part of our service to the landowner cooperating with us in this program is to erect safety-zone signs and various other signs that protect his property. In Pennsylvania it is illegal to hunt within 150 yards of an occupied dwelling or adjacent farm buildings without specific written permission from the owner. So each fall, prior to the hunting season, our personnel erect our safety zone signs around each cooperator's home. They take them down after the hunting season ends. I won't take time now to show you all of our signs, but here is another put up by our people for the farmers wanting hunters to stay out of unharvested cornfields. These signs, backed up by a good law enforcement program, have the attention of the sportsmen and we have pretty good compliance.

In our projects, we try to prevent setting aside more than 0.33 of a project area as a safety zone or refuge. In other words, 0.66 of each project area is open to the hunting public. The landowner retains the right to hunt without a hunting license on his own property and on the two farm properties adjoining his. A landowner may also reserve the

trapping rights on his farm. Pennsylvania has quite a number of farmboy trappers and by erecting this sign it warns people not to trap on this particular farm.

We still do some game stocking in Pennsylvania. I won't pursue that right now, but with approval of the landowner our Pennsylvania Game Commission does give preferential treatment to our Farm Game Project. This has a public relations value; I know a lot of our farmers like to see Commission trucks go by with a few crates of pheasants to put out. So there are a number of benefits to our cooperators in our Farm Game Program. I'll just run through them briefly here: protection of life and property through patrolling and enforcement by our Game Protectors and Deputy Game Protector force; posting of signs; free subscription to our Conservation magazine; advice from our area land managers on management practices beneficial to wildlife; free tree and shrub seedlings that produce wildlife breeding cover; and, as our budget permits, we also cut woodland borders and hedgerows to remove shade from cropland and to create immediate and long-lasting cover for wildlife in these farm areas. Our administrative costs in this particular program run about 25¢ an acre.

I think the key to our whole program is that our semiskilled laborers, the people we call our food and cover force, are born and raised in these project areas. They are farmers themselves. They are grass-roots contacts with our cooperators, and I think that if togetherness is beneficial, this is just what makes this program work.

We have several themes and variations of this program that I will touch on. One we call our Safety Zone Program. You will recall I mentioned in our Cooperative Farm Game Project that we wanted contiguous farms. We have had a lot of people who wanted to get into the cooperative program and for one reason or another they couldn't get in; either we didn't have the money to expand the program or they had neighbors who didn't want to cooperate. So we set up the Safety Zone Program which in many ways is a scaled-down version of the cooperative program I just described. To date we have Safety Zone farms in 66 of our 67 counties, involving almost 14,000 different tracts of land. This has opened 3 million acres of additional land to public hunting. About the only thing we provide to people in our Safety Zone Program are Safety Zone signs which they erect themselves. We do give areas in our Safety Zone Program more law enforcement patrol than we do areas that are posted against hunting. We figure the administrative costs on our second program are about 10¢ an acre.

The newest program was started in 1971 and is called the Forest Wildlife Cooperative Program. Again, this is a version of the Cooperative Farm Game Program. It is designed to keep forest land open to public hunting. The program originated because many forest owners complained about the total disregard for their property by the hunting public. Running automobiles on their access roads when freezing and thawing conditions exist created maintenance problems for these large concerns. Consequently, we set up the program for forest owners. Initially, we had 5 big forest industries signed up in our program. Prior

to this time some of the large forest industries decided it might be wise to lease hunting rights to small groups of hunters and close their lands to public hunting. They really defeated their main purpose because the deer herd was underharvested. This had an impact on the forest re-production that was bread and butter to the big companies. Excessive deer browsed too heavily on forest regeneration. The forest industries soon became disenchanted with that approach and signed up in our program.

We provided some special signs and special patrols for these co-operators and in the process opened up 0.5 million acres of forest land that was not previously open to the public.

Now I'm certainly not in the position to prescribe any of Pennsylvania's programs as a panacea for all states represented here. I think the fact remains that we in Pennsylvania have been quite successful with it, and I believe it is certainly worth a try anywhere. One of the many pleasures that came out of my trip here was to find that Oklahoma has started a program similar to ours, and at this time has about 300,000 acres in its program.

Discussion:

Question: What about access; is it on a first come, first served basis?

Mr. Roberts: We do not control hunting pressure on these areas and I think as time goes by this will be a problem. In a sense, it is somewhat self-regulating because after X number of hunters are afield in a given area it no longer becomes attractive for additional hunters. When latecomers see a concentration of hunters they move on somewhere else. So at least to a degree it does regulate itself. The present level of self-regulation is tolerable in Pennsylvania, but in other parts of the country it may be intolerable, I can't say.

Question: Does this program prevent the land owner from leasing out hunting at all; can he charge for hunting on his property?

Mr. Roberts: No, absolutely not. As soon as he puts up his first no-trespassing sign, he is out of the program.

Question: Do you have any type of program in Pennsylvania for people who want to lease their hunting?

Mr. Roberts: The only people we are working with directly are regulated shooting ground operators. As far as going out and encouraging people to get into a hunting and lease program, this is kind of self-defeating, I think, and we ignore these people.

Question: You don't feel there are any possibilities between those 2 extremes?

Mr. Roberts: Apparently there is. Senator Bellmon just spoke of a program that is similar to a pilot study we have going in Pennsylvania that scares us to death, to tell the truth. When it comes right down

to it we're getting something here for nothing. Now the Federal Government is coming in and they are going to pay people for the same thing that we used to get for nothing. I don't know where we're going to go.

Question: If the landowner feels that game is over harvested, what can he do about it?

Mr. Roberts: We have no control over this. Despite heavy hunting pressure in small areas, we have no situations over large areas where we don't have enough brood stock escape to give us a crop the next year. For example, we're killing over a million pheasants in Pennsylvania each year. We do raise and release pheasants in Pennsylvania, but we purposely put these birds in areas of 3rd- and 4th-class range, where they don't survive anyhow, and we hope they are all harvested.

Question: How many law enforcement people patrol the cooperative areas?

Mr. Roberts: In addition to our game protector force of 150 full-time employees, we have a force about 1,500 deputy game protectors. Many of these are farm game managers or day laborers on our food and cover forests, so they serve a dual function. They are not only in close contact with our cooperators, but they are also authorized to make arrests.

Question: You said the contract period was for 5 years; after that what is the dropout rate?

Mr. Roberts: I don't recall the figures now. We have a very high retention rate, and this is a self-defense mechanism on the part of a lot of landowners. They are going to go to the outfit that can give them the most muscle to cope with the sportsmen.

Question: Is there a predetermined fine on each violation, and who gets the fine money?

Mr. Roberts: Oh, yes, our people are allowed to settle these cases on what we call a Field Acknowledgement of Guilt; it's just like getting a parking ticket. This serves 2 purposes: it doesn't delay the hunter; he is free to hunt after he has paid the fine, and it doesn't take a lot of his day's hunt looking for the nearest magistrate. It expedites matters all the way around. The next question is how much of this money goes into the Game Protectors' pockets? It doesn't work that way. The person being arrested gets a numbered receipt, the Game Protector has a stub from it, and that goes into Harrisburg. Everything is closely accounted for.

Question: Do you have any companion programs, or any plans for 1, to work with your cooperators in improving habitat and if so how successful is it?

Mr. Roberts: Yes, with limited success because we lack the funds and manpower to implement this sort of thing. But we produce in our nursery about 5 million tree and brush seedlings annually to create wildlife food and cover, and these are given to cooperators requesting them.