

## EDITORIAL NOTES

### *The 1968 Wildlife Report — Its Implications for N.Z. Forestry*

All who regard wildlife as part of our heritage will support the aspiration of this latest report on "Organisation of Wildlife Management and Research in New Zealand".\* It is most cogent in its clear statement of the needs, and in its recommendations for unified control of management, research and administration; but it will not be a popular report — it runs across too many entrenched interests. Nevertheless, it is unexceptionable in the principles accepted as a basis for further reasoning, viz.:

the comprehensive definition of wildlife, to mean "all animals living in a wild state" (p. 75);

acceptance of the premise . . . "that the flora and fauna of New Zealand are national assets and not the exclusive preserve of sporting interests" (p. 38);

that "wildlife management . . . entails the scientific control of animals and habitat in combination" (p. 71);

that "The essential prerequisite for co-ordination of wildlife policy is jurisdiction over the whole field by a single authority" (p. 91);

and in the eminently practical conclusion that ". . . conflict of interest is unavoidable and the proper course is to see that it is always capable of being resolved on its merits in the public interest. The statutory independence of a wildlife agency would . . . be as good a guarantee as any that conflicting interests could be reconciled . . ." (p. 83).

It is proposed that there should be established by statute a National Wildlife Commission of three permanent full-time members appointed by the State Services Commission, and responsible to a Minister-in-Charge of Wildlife. A representative Wildlife Advisory Council would advise both the Minister and the Commission. The executive arm would be a National Wildlife Service, staffed by rangers from Internal Affairs and the acclimatisation societies, as well as research scientists from the Wildlife Research Section of Internal Affairs and from Animal Ecology Division of DSIR, and freshwater biologists from Marine Department. This service would be a separate division of the Department of Lands and Survey; but it is recommended that noxious animal research and management should continue to be carried out by the Forest Service, as the Commission's agents.

In reaching these recommendations, much emphasis is laid on the matter of conflict of interest, particularly in relation to the disadvantages of affiliating the new Wildlife Service with the N.Z. Forest Service. Most foresters will be shocked at the

---

\*Report of the Commission of Inquiry, dated 29 November, 1968. 203 pp. Govt Printer, Wellington.

strength of the opposition to such an affiliation, and they will be puzzled too — in their own awareness of the great traditions of forestry as a profession that involves comprehensive management of renewable natural resources, and as a calling that has produced some of the world's foremost authorities on soil, water and wildlife conservation, they will indeed be puzzled. The opposition is attributable to two factors: firstly, to an almost complete failure, by both this Institute and the Forest Service, to communicate to the people what forestry means in its broadest sense of multiple use management; and, immediately, to our having defaulted on this Commission of Inquiry — *viz.* the statement "Forest Service was the majority choice of the National Research Advisory Council, but without benefit of receiving public submissions. We found few supporters but many ardent opponents of this choice" (p. 127).

Nowhere in this report can we find mention of the fact that fire is the greatest destroyer of wildlife and its habitat, and that the Forest Service has for many years been the primary agent in fire-prevention and control as measures of conservation. Likewise, it is briefly mentioned that noxious animal control is a means of floristic and habitat preservation, but this is far outweighed by the reiterated emphasis on "extermination". Lands Department and private owners are credited wholly (p. 85) with managing swamps, lakes, streams and rivers as wildlife habitat; but there is no mention of the longstanding Forest Service provisions for protecting streams and waterways in all logging operations, nor of the fact that reduction of river aggradation and scouring are primary objectives in Forest Service watershed management (there is a brief reference to "catchment studies"). Nowhere is there mention of the many examples of native forest successfully regenerated under management, and the ecological studies that support this (both well documented in the literature) — it is reported, instead, that the Forest Service "policy in regard to cut-over bush was to plant it in exotic trees or clear it for farming". Working plans are referred to in an extract from the Forest Service submission, and they are held up as a model for the new service to emulate, but there is no appreciation of just what provisions have long been made in such plans, even for exotic forests — *e.g.*, for the reservation of scenic strips along highways, for the preservation of pockets of native bush, for the construction of fire-ponds (and duck habitat) in many waterless areas, and for recreation — *e.g.*, the development of tracks, picnic-spots and lookout points. Prescriptions in indigenous forest working plans are fundamentally based on protection, conservation and regeneration.

These omissions are not surprising: the Commission was evidently not informed. Hence we may read such statements as that — "control of forests and wildlife often go together overseas . . ." but "their forests are understood to be held for protection, preservation, and recreation, whereas large tracts of our forests are for timber-production as well. Consequently in New Zealand there is a certain conflict of interest, not so apparent in other countries . . ." (p. 77). This is, of

course, quite incorrect: multiple use management is almost universal in forestry, and it usually includes timber production. The real reason why wildlife management is so frequently linked with forestry is that, of all forms of land-use, forestry is most compatible with the maintenance of wildlife habitat, and with stability of the ecosystem. In fact, much of the forester's work has traditionally lain in repairing the damage wrought by other forms of land-use and habitat mismanagement, from coastal sand-dunes to the mountains — need we enumerate the many examples, ranging from the introduction of noxious animals, and overgrazing by domestic stock to the land-use practices that have resulted in accelerated erosion, aggradation of our rivers and eutrophication of our lakes? One of the most glaring omissions from this report is any mention of the damage to wildlife and habitat that has been committed on the 23% of New Zealand's land area that is locked up in Pastoral Leases. We find this particularly galling in view of the acclimatisation societies' reported opposition to the Forest Service (pp. 78, 127).

If the recommendations of this report are implemented in full, it will herald an era of narrowing horizons and more restricted responsibilities for New Zealand forestry. The consequences of accepting, as one must, that wildlife and habitat should be administered in co-ordination as a single ecosystem, are glimpsed at various points in this report, *e.g.*:

- (1) The "dichotomy" indicated between National Parks under Lands Department and State Forest Parks under the Forest Service (p. 86). The major advantage of State Forest Parks is their multiple use management; but as recreational demands increase, and as New Zealand's timber economy becomes wholly dependent on exotic plantations, the less valid will this distinction become.
- (2) . . . "the objective some day may be to keep the deer population down (enough) to protect the natural cover and prevent erosion" . . . yet . . . "concede the sporting and commercial interests in their conservation". This "would restore much of the original case for including and controlling deer as 'wildlife'" . . . and would . . . "de-emphasize the Forest Service's exclusive interest in the 'noxious animals'" (pp. 69, 70). Moreover "Lands Department would have, on forest acreage, an even greater interest than the Forest Service in stopping the deprecations of noxious animals" (p. 128).
- (3) "The Wildlife Service we have in mind . . . would add a new dimension (*i.e.*, habitat) to the control of wildlife ecology and be the first phase of a still larger concept — a National Parks and Wildlife Service" (p. 138).

Taken in conjunction with the establishment of the School of Range Management at Lincoln College, one may foresee the ultimate cogency of transferring all watershed management on Crown lands to the same department that controls and manages wildlife. The Forest Service would then be pri-

marily a commercial department, locked up in the business of managing the softwood plantations; and foresters would have to content themselves beneath the aegis of *Pinus radiata*.

The Commission of Inquiry was itself aware of many of these implications (*viz.* ". . . the split in wildlife control can be narrowed only at the cost of opening up splits elsewhere" p. 37), and it has made a good case on the evidence presented to it. We wholeheartedly support proposals for a strong and unified Wildlife Service, under a politically independent National Wildlife Commission, but we hope that it will be possible to devise closer and enduring links between it and the Forest Service.