The Iowa State Fish and Game Dep't.

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The Iowa State Fish and Game Dep't.

By F. E. Boeckh

One of the greatest factors for the conservation of wild life in our state is the State Fish and Game Department. Not only is the department vitally interested in conserving the wild life of the land, air and water but it is restoring many of the species that are in danger of becoming extinct.

The department is in charge of Mr. W. E. Albert, state game warden, who has four assistants and forty deputy wardens, covering the entire state. It is directly under the control of the executive council, composed of the Governor, State Auditor, State Treasurer and State Secretary of Agriculture.

The work of the department is varied and has many important phases. It has the distinction of being the only state department that is wholly self supporting; that is, all the expenses are met from the revenue received from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and the various other licenses and permits and from the sale of rough fish from the inland streams and lakes. Besides all this, many thousands of dollars are turned over annually to the school fund as all fines imposed on people convicted of violating the fish and game laws go to this fund.

Aside from the enforcement of the fish and game laws, the department is interested in the restocking of fish and game. Iowa has never been a great game state, but is wonderfully gifted with streams and lakes, where fish find a home well suited for their requirements. For the purpose of restocking these waters there are two pike hatcheries, one trout hatchery, and two rescue stations and for the restocking of pheasants and quail there is one game farm.

The pike are hatched at Spirit Lake and Clear Lake in the early spring and distributed from there, the majority going in these lakes, where now the wall eyed pike are very numerous. Each year there are some 60,000,000 wall eyed pike fry hatched and distributed from these two hatcheries. The trout are now hatched at Lansing and another trout hatchery is being built at the Devil's Back Bone Park near Strawberry Point. The northeastern part of the state, with its rugged country, furnishes fast flowing streams ideal for trout, and yearly some 500,000 rainbow, brook and lake trout are distributed from the Lansing hatchery and this number will be more than doubled when the new hatchery is completed.
While these are the only species of game fish hatched now, a bass hatchery is being contemplated and will no doubt be built in the very near future. The other game fish that are distributed are rescued from the land locked sloughs of the Mississippi River. Every year, in the spring, the water overflows the bottom lands along the main channel and the fish spawn in the shallow ponds that are thus made. When the water recedes sufficiently these ponds become land locked and if the fish are not rescued from the ponds and bayous they would be eaten by birds and animals or frozen during the winter. There are millions of small game fish rescued each year by rescue crews working out of Sabula and Lansing. A small part of the fish are brought into the rescue stations for distribution and the rest are liberated in the main channel of the river.

About 700,000 fingerling fish are distributed from these stations each year, consisting of black bass, sunfish, bluegills, crappies, perch, catfish and pickerel. The state has a specially designed car, which is hauled on passenger trains for this distribution work, capable of carrying 50,000 fingerling fish or 15,000 adult fish. Trucks are also used as well as messengers with twenty cream cans filled with little fish, which are shipped as baggage.

This work of restocking the inland streams and lakes has been carried on for a number of years until now almost every stream and lake which furnishes a good habitat for
fish has been stocked and affords good fishing for the sportsmen of the state.

The game farm hatches quail, pheasants and ducks for distribution all over the state and the work has been so successfully carried on that these birds are again quite numerous on our prairies and wooded lands.

The sources of revenue are from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, game breeders’ permits, clammers’ licenses, fish dealers’ permits, commercial fishing tackle licenses and the sale of rough fish from the inland lakes and streams. Rough fish, such as carp, buffalo and sheephead, are undesirable because of the destruction they do to the spawn of the game fish and the feed which they eat that the game fish need. Each year the department allows commercial fishermen to seine out these rough fish from the inland waters where they are too numerous and the department gets 20 percent of the gross receipts. In the year 1924 the state’s share amounted to $11,038.22. The same year the fishing and hunting license sale amounted to $124,320.00 for resident licenses and $2,790.00 for non-resident licenses and this will steadily increase as sportsmen are increasing in numbers each year.

While the department does not lose sight of the fact that its chief purpose is to enforce the fish and game laws as enacted by the Iowa Assembly, it is doing everything

Trout hatchery and rescue station at Lansing. Fish car and trucks for distribution in foreground.
possible to provide good fishing and hunting so that the true sportsman holding an Iowa license can be assured of getting the game he is after. Iowa is not so fortunate as her neighboring states of Minnesota and Wisconsin in the number of lakes and streams, yet much has been accomplished toward making her lakes and streams into good fishing grounds. In fact, in the matter of restocking of her waters, Iowa is far ahead of her neighbors who have followed her in this respect. Our larger lakes, such as Spirit, Okoboji and Clear Lake, are visited every year by thousands of anglers and very few go away disappointed.

The one drawback to the increase of fish in many of the streams is the pollution of the water at our larger cities and until this is stopped it is almost useless to restock certain streams, and no doubt conditions will be bettered in this respect in the near future.

With friendly cooperation on the part of citizens, sportsmen and landowners, the department can assure the people of Iowa that a good sportsman need not return from the field or stream empty handed, and the violators must watch out, for the eyes of the department are many and vigilant.