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Game Management in a National Forest

By MARSHALL THAYER, '36

"WILL you accept an appointment as Assistant Game Conservationist on the White Mountain National Forest? The salary is very good."

Naturally, I landed in Laconia, New Hampshire, on schedule, feeling somewhat overexposed and spottedly sensitive after the 1500 mile motorcycle journey, and, incidentally, a bit excited and worried about my new job.

"Oh yes, we've been expecting you. Don't know what you're going to do or how we're going to pay you. Can't understand it—our appropriation's cut, employees furloughed, and they keep hiring new men!"

I felt like apologizing for having accepted the job. But after completing a week's inspection trip and writing a report on wildlife conditions, I was thoroughly enthused about the work, and in my eagerness to get something done, I must have goaded a somewhat dormant feeling of interest among my associates, for their willing cooperation in wildlife problems convinced me that the realization of practical game management on a National Forest was far from being a singular or hopeless task.

IT HAS been only in recent years that we have come to the realization that our forests must be managed on the basis of multiple use. These uses have been slowly developing from the days when the protection, growth and management of the timber resource was practically the only objective of the Forest Service. Since then, we have seen the successful administration of grazing, soil conservation and recreation. Now we are rapidly progressing toward the management of our wildlife.

The forester of today must specialize. But even in his specialization he must clearly conceive of the forest as an inter-related community of living organisms. Each resource must be managed in harmony to bring the greatest good to the greatest number of people in that particular locality.
The correlation of forestry and wildlife management has recently become a much discussed subject. It has been conceded, by most of those who have actually made a study of it, that the problem of correlating the two into an economically feasible program is entirely possible; in fact, only slight modifications of present forestry practices, and similar modification in the viewpoint of and practices advocated by biologists and conservationists, will be needed.

Many of our forests, especially those in the west, now have wildlife management plans of some sort. It must be realized, however, that the plans made in this early stage of development are only theoretically sound. It will take years of practical application, study and research, to even approach a plan that is applicable to practical sustained yield.

It would seem then, that our immediate problems will take the form of research. And so it is research that is the primary duty of the wildlife technician of today. However, we must not let this phase of the work over-shadow practical application of what management we already know is feasible and immediately necessary.
A TYPICAL sequence of activities initiated by a game conservationist in a National forest might be as follows:

1. Inspection trip to become familiar with the flora and fauna in general.

2. Selections of an area for management studies. (Later, other areas can be selected and the results of studies on each incorporated in a final management plan for the whole forest.)

3. Detailed survey of the management area to determine the location and size of the food and cover types, based on previously gained knowledge of food and cover habits of the most important game species.

4. Wildlife census by game drives or sample methods to determine populations.

5. Determination of species to favor under management.

6. Research methods in determining food and cover preferences of each particular species in that particular locality by use of stomach and feces analysis, and food utilization studies.

7. Determination of maximum carrying capacity for each species and type by measurement of available food, correlated with its respective nutritive value.

8. Studies of the predator and rodent problems, and the compatibility of species.

9. Studies in the conflicts and correlation of wildlife with grazing, farming, silvicultural practices, etc.

10. Collection of biological data concerning life cycles of each economically important species.

11. Studies of disease and their control.

12. Regulation of fish and game laws to protect or remove portions of each wildlife population in attempting to arrive at the computed carrying capacity and still maintain a favorable biological balance.

13. Suggestions and recommendations for the modification of silvicultural methods and cutting allocations to sustain suitable food and cover areas.

ALL these things, and many more, must be incorporated in a management plan. It is not hard to realize, therefore, especially in the light of our present meager knowledge of wildlife cycles and behavior under controlled conditions, that the problems to overcome in reaching a practical sustained yield are many and complex. Still, it can be done, and it is logical to believe that the Forest Service can best do it.