IS THE BAG LIMIT ENOUGH?

J. V. K. WAGAR
Colorado State College, Fort Collins, Colorado

The bag limit is usually an expression of quantity. It commonly disregards quality in hunting and fishing. This disregard seems especially marked in recent times. Yet if more discerning sportsmen in the future demand greater quality, unspoiled areas capable of maintaining unusual species and experiences must be preserved. It seems possible to recognize relevant factors and to devise ways and means for creating effective desires for such preservation. Pertinent factors, ways, and means are herein considered.

The mind of man has always relished the division of his existence upon earth into eras or ages. These ages derive their names from equipments, philosophies, or whims characterizing different periods of civilization. Perhaps most familiar are the stone, bronze, and iron ages which indicate the materials from which man's most useful implements have been made.

Man's attitudes toward wildlife may also be expressed in terms of ages; each reflecting his equipments, philosophies, or notions during some significant period. Some of these ages, frequently mentioned, are common knowledge. They, with others more rarely considered, are useful in delineating the premises of this paper. Hence they are used.

The age of dread, during which man's primitive weapons were a sorry match for savage beasts, extended in some degree until the general adoption of powerful breechloading rifles. Unlike today, man had few presumptions concerning predator control. No wonder he at first sought refuge in caves! This period left its impress in tales concerning werewolves and dragons; imaginings probably conjured to keep errant children at home or to explain mysterious disappearances.

Once man possessed adequate weapons, dread vanished while game was still sufficiently plentiful to suggest an age of inexhaustibility. This was in part a whim. Sober realization soon replaced it with the age of realized scarcity. This in turn evolved into an era of almost religious fanaticism developed by some folk into an age of preserve everything. Here again philosophy or whim rather than facts were responsible. The literature created by devotees of this age is well known.

Current is the age of professed plenty; the day of enough game to fill the bag. Great unanimity marks this concept. The public gained
awareness of game population increases through recurring stories of Kaibab deer, Jackson Hole elk, and Pennsylvania's white-tailed deer and doe seasons. There were also Isle Royale moose, necessary porcupine control of the early 1930's, the Sapinero deer area of Colorado, Wyoming's increasing antelope herd, lengthening open seasons, and increased annual kills. This, however, was not all.

Shantz (1937) wrote *Game to Spare* and (1943) *The Hunter, Wild-life's Best Friend*. Sparkes (1944) describes increasing game populations in *The Coming Boom of Recreation*. The Wilsons (1943) contributed *Harvesting the Game Crop*. Day (1943) associated game take with the war effort by writing *Wartime Uses of Wildlife Products*.

These articles were desirable. They broke down the opposition of some, whose minds were still in the age of preserve everything, to orderly harvests of surplus game. They proved need for ammunition releases necessary for game removal. Through them all was something else. They proved the worth of game managers from the political appointee to the most technically able.

Quite understandably, game managers have wished to prove their worth. If uninformed wildlife administrators retained for qualities other than ability can cite observable game increases, however fortuitous the reason, they can ask: "There's more game isn't there? Well, what more do you want?"

Similarly the wildlife technician desires to prove his worth. The public is not altogether convinced that he, rather than nature, is responsible for increasing benefits, although it quickly blames him for failures.

In each of these legitimate objectives, proved through professed plentiful game, quantity was accented. For these immediate ends, quantity was an effective means. Unfortunately much of the public has mistaken for the objectives of wildlife management the means here employed.

Those who have compiled statistics showing increasing populations for game considered in the aggregate, have carefully included information concerning vanishing or problem species. By comparison some interpreters have permitted the impressive figures representing species most responsive to management to obscure less numerous species capable of giving richer experience in their taking. This attitude has added to the growing assumption that numbers expressing pounds of meat or pieces of game are more important than its wildness, its development by and adaptation to its habitat, and the primitive living and travel which characterize its pursuit. One writer (Rose, 1944) has even suggested that sportsmen will appreciate quail, deer, and trout
artificially bred to unusual sizes. Other pronouncements are not far from the typical query of the pothunters: "Got your meat yet?"

Writers are not alone in accenting quantity more than quality. Sportsmen have likewise chosen. Men who would irrigate western deserts state that pheasants will provide more shooting than sage grouse. Those who would dam western streams promise more fish of other species than there are now trout. In other western lands to be "developed," deer and elk can provide more shooting than present moose and sheep. Hatchery-reared trout and birds can provide more meat than will natural production.

Some, sentimentally interested in high quality natural areas, believe a limited number are sufficient to satisfy man's needs for quality in outdoor recreational resources. These assume that the national parks are adequate—realizing neither the limited areas of the national parks nor their restricted contributions to outstanding outdoor experiences. Here the attitude seems to be: "We've set aside the national parks. Now we can raise hell with everything else." Such assumptions interfere with the retention of quality in nonpark lands.

Still others believe that all wild scenes will eventually vanish before a human ant heap and think it enough to freeze within museums and zoos evidences of man's former freedom and vigorous living.

Recording quantity is much simpler than describing quality. It is easier to photograph six dead deer upon a pole than two deer grazing with heads down and in poor light. To record quantity demands little intelligence or skill. Any amateur can snap a picture of dead game upon a string but there have been few Frederick Remingtons, Philip Goodwins, or Martin Johnsons whose pictures reveal the richness of wilderness living.

It seems unnecessary to define before wildlife men the meaning of quality in respect to hunting and fishing. Leopold (1933) has eloquently asked if we are not able to keep the land pleasant to behold and desirable to live in, and has stated that recreational values of game are in proportion to the naturalness of its origin. "Ding" Darling, in public utterances exceeding even the vigor of his writings, has accent these things. Reid (1943, 1944) in his condemnation of inadequately planned dams was as much concerned with the recreational values of game as with its weight. Indeed, a vast literature written over many decades has portrayed natural values without which humanity will be mentally, physically, and spiritually impoverished. Somehow the age of professed plenty must be crossed into whatever lies beyond.

The demands of sportsmen form the key to the entire problem of preserving high quality outdoor experiences. Ironically this is because
their satisfactions among outdoor scenes are most frequently expressed in measurable (or weighable) quantities for which they can vigorously contest. Many sportsmen are beginners enticed by easy transportation, leisure time, increasing game of some kind, and the homage civilization grants outdoorsmen. Most beginners have few standards. They are akin to the freshman girl at her first college ball—the music is divine. Every pimple-faced swain is a Lochinvar. Later she becomes more discerning. Compare the inexperienced hunter's standards of conduct with that of American or British gentlemen, of great experience, long schooled in outdoor courtesies.

Intelligence, too, affects conduct in the hunting field as well as in the drawing room. The difference is that experience and intelligence are permitted domination of social manners and standards more frequent than is true of outdoor manners. Askins (1910) and others have defined standards but perhaps some Emily Posts are needed to advise upon hunting and fishing matters.

That education and experience are needed is obvious. However, experience is something the individual must gain for himself and without education, may merely repeat past mistakes. These are not new thoughts. Wildlife literature is chock-full of recommendations for educating sportsmen. Lectures, pamphlets, motion pictures, and directors of education have all been tried. Educational mottoes to be posted along streams and at hunters' camps have been suggested.

A spontaneous self-education is needed among sportsmen; one that will banish the cobwebs of assumption and easily established standards. The better informed sportsmen will need to take leadership.

Much enjoyment in the outdoors is related to small, impromptu audiences. Standards for future performances are set among such gatherings. The pothunter needs no audiences, but the game hog cannot exist without one. The task is then to be a kindly but nevertheless questioning and constructively suggesting audience. Some have been trying this with gratifying results.

To the deer hunter who brags about having his buck back in town by noon of the first day the question is asked: 'Couldn't you have stayed longer?" Comments are made about October in Colorado being the finest time of the year in the woods. There are no mosquitoes and the gold of aspens stripe mountainsides green with conifers. By hurrying back to town the chance was missed to hunt coyotes along the canyon rim while one's deer cooled in camp. The prize for the first deer brought to town, offered by a sporting goods proprietor who doesn't hunt, is often a shoddy thing, and sometimes goes to hunters who bring in deer with eyes suspiciously sunken and blood dark and dried.

He who smugly admits always killing the full limit of rabbits and
pheasants is asked if he has ever experienced the thrill of killing charging game: "No? Well that’s too bad. There’s no thrill like facing game that wades towards you shot after shot. Of course that takes wild lands and unusual game. I was lucky enough to have experienced it a few times."

After one has done it a few times it isn’t difficult and is surprisingly effective to tell the fellow who boasts of shooting protected grouse for camp meat: "I always figured that if all of us would leave them alone, they’d become numerous enough so that all could hunt them."

The fellow who is not an outdoorsman comfortable among primitive surroundings must hunt from cabins and cars. Camps and pack trips are not for him except under constant supervision. Naturally he shoots whatever is handy and yearns for quantity in lieu of quality unfamiliar to him. He needs to be shown the pleasures of properly equipped camps. He needs to ponder upon acquaintances who will not shoot deer from roads and who prefer hunting under the most natural conditions available.

One cannot bludgeon his way through this kind of contact. Needed is the safe-tipped foil—not the broadsword. Some people should never attempt this method. But I have seen confederates in this art change thoughtless game grabbers into outdoorsmen of the highest order.

Just as carelessly acquired individual assumptions need alteration by effective counter measures, assumptions by those active among the incompletely explored and complicated wilderness of public planning needs scrutiny if not criticism. For example, much is being said about making the finest areas available to the ill-to-do. Are those who will view rare scenes only after the way is made easy, capable of realizing much more than that the grass and trees are green, the air unburdened by smoke, and that they, too, can boast of having been to Mecca? Pearls of great price have traditionally entailed sacrifice and effort. The biblical alternative has been pearls before swine. Here no censoriousness is intended, and fortunately some methods of primitive travel are the least expensive once one has served enough apprenticeship upon lesser areas to gain the priceless ability to travel anywhere.

Marco Polo did not delay his journey to the orient until he could travel by China Clipper or Greyhound Bus. Dissenters state that more can now enjoy the Orient, diluted as it is and will be by easier travel. True, but it may be wondered if Polo’s fellow citizens of Venice did not then essay upon many little journeys highly fruitful to them and never before inspired. And still beyond them, to tempt other adventurers who could return with additional inspiration, lay an orient visited but unmodified by the man for whom Ovis poli was
named. Within our own time Franck (1917) has adventured magnificently, on foot.

One more effective type of education could exist. Many grade-school teachers are likeable women who have not enjoyed altogether normal living. A surprising number of them live within the age of preserve everything in respect to game. Children, realizing that their teachers' standards concerning hunting and fishing are incorrect, reject them and evolve their own or adapt those of the nearest men they know. Perhaps more of civilization's ills than those concerning wildlife can be partially solved by the employment of more school teachers with normal concepts.

The antithesis of quantity is the combination of wildernesses and wilderness game. Those schooled in the economies of production complain that natural areas supporting the less productive creatures cannot produce as much game per acre as can more responsive species upon modified lands. If productivity overshadows all else, it should be remembered that wildlife management cannot compete with animal husbandry. Where, between the extremes of wilderness and wilderness game and shooting livestock over corral fences or catching fish directly from rearing ponds, will one draw a line separating quantity from quality? Where the line is eventually drawn must rest upon the fate of a final assumption; the assumption that more and more men will have fewer and fewer outdoor pleasures until nothing but men have no outdoor pleasures at all. Before that time someone may ask, just as folk in parts of the West are asking how many elk are desirable: "How many men do we need?" When this question is answered, the line may be drawn.

In the meantime at least four steps can be taken to prove that the bag limit is not enough and to create demand for greater quality in outdoor experience:

1. Publications giving proof of wildlife management's ability to produce increased quantities of game need always to be supplemented by information concerning gains and losses in the quality of outdoor pursuits.

2. Effort can be expended upon the task of rendering understandable to more sportsmen the abstractions depicting enjoyment upon perception and intellection levels.

3. A spontaneous self-education among sportsmen, coupled with other means of education designed to question restrictive assumptions, can be used to establish higher field standards of sportsman conduct.

4. Land and water modifying projects should be scrutinized as much for their effects upon quality as upon quantities of outdoor recreation affected. If maximum quality in outdoor experience is to
be retained, natural conditions must be maintained upon more areas than designated national parks, monuments, and wilderness areas.

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