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REPORT ON AN EXAMINATION OF THE HURON RIVER BELOW YPSILANTI,  
WASHTENAW AND WAYNE COUNTIES WITH REFERENCE TO THE ESTABLISH-  
MENT OF A WILD LIFE SANCTUARY

On request from officials of the Ypsilanti Chapter, Isaak Walton League of America, the writer arranged a preliminary examination by a group of competent naturalists of the Huron River in Washtenaw and Wayne Counties below Ypsilanti. The purpose was to prepare a preliminary statement regarding the possibilities of this region for development as a wild life sanctuary.

The personnel of this party, was as follows:

Dr. Miles D. Firnie, Director of the well-known Kellogg Bird Sanctuary near Battle Creek (operated by the State College), formerly state ornithologist and a recognized authority on water fowl and sanctuaries.

Dr. Lee R. Dice, Curator of Mammals in the University Museum of Zoology, experienced in the direction of sanctuaries controlled by the University and associated as Regional Adviser with the Committee on the Preservation of Natural Conditions for the United States.

Dr. Jesselyn Van Tynes, Curator of Birds in the University Museums, and an authority on the birds of this region.

Prof. T. L. Hankinson of the Natural Science Department of the State Normal College at Ypsilanti, who has long been engaged in the study and preservation of wild life in this region.

Dr. Carl L. Hubbs, Director of the Institute for Fisheries Research of the University of Michigan (the writer of this report).

Two graduate students of the State College, working under Dr. Fizzie, also accompanied the party.

All members of this inspection party were impressed with the fine possibilities of this stretch of the river, and adjacent lands, as a wild life sanctuary of major importance and interest. The advantages seen in this site may be listed in part as follows:

(1) It is very desirable that a large sanctuary be established in this general lowland region, to preserve the native fauna, especially as this would supplement the Edwin S. George Preserve, being administered by the University, in the upland region of Livingston County. The George Preserve covers more than a township of varied hill habitats and excellently preserves the natural inhabitants of such a region. But that Preserve has no extensive plains and almost no water habitats, and therefore preserves only part of the natural fauna of this region. In passing it may be remarked that the George Preserve is being managed by one of the University naturalists in residence. In this way the maximum benefit from the project is being obtained, from the standpoints of conservation, natural history and education.

(2) The region on and along the Huron below Ann Arbor has always been rich in wild life, and appears capable, on proper management, of permanently sheltering a large population of wild life, especially aquatic birds. Despite lack of adequate protection, the region now contains some fine heronries; ducks in large numbers stepped off here last fall, and the less conspicuous wild life, such as shore birds occur on the area in unexpected abundance both as to species and individuals.

Just how extensively birds would congregate in such a sanctuary can not be accurately predicted, but the indications are that a more or less spectacular success could be anticipated.

(3) Being close to a large center of population, a concentration of water fowl here could be seen and enjoyed by a large number of people. This of course might involve a not inconsiderable economic benefit to the local community in the way of "tourist trade", and would be good and healthy advertisement for the community and for the establishers of the preserve. The fame and attractiveness of the Jack Miner Bird Sanctuary may be considered in this connection.

(4) The proximity of the site to the State Normal College, the University of Michigan and the Detroit colleges would make it possible for the natural history classes to study the water fowl and other wild life under most advantageous conditions. In fact all schools in the region could benefit, for it may be anticipated that visits to such a sanctuary would be made by school parties ranging from kindergarten kiddies to graduate students in zoology at the University.

(5) Proximity to the University would permit of the use of the University naturalists in an advisory way, in the management of the area to the best possible interest of the wild life and of the public. The School of Forestry and Conservation, the Museum of Zoology and the Institute for Fisheries Research would all be glad to cooperate. If it should be decided as advisable that the Sanctuary be put under the management of a competent resident naturalist, the University could probably nominate a candidate, as well as to cooperate with the sanctuary manager after his selection. This cooperation, if requested, could apply to the development of fish and fishing in the lake as well as to the increase in water fowl and other forms of wild life.

The advantages of placing the sanctuary, if established, under definite management, and preferably under a trained naturalist, would be many. This would insure: (1) the fastest possible development of the property in the way of preserving and congregating wild life of all sorts; (2) the balanced use of the sanctuary, if such would be so desired, for recreation and education, without seriously interfering with the main purposes of the sanctuary; (3) the giving out of publicity of the right sort; (4) the use of the sanctuary by the manager-naturalist and by visiting investigators for increasing our knowledge of wild life; (5) the conducting of experiments to determine the most practicable means for increasing wild life of different sorts, including game fish, ducks and pheasants as well as the non-game birds and other forms of wild life. Of course the establishment of a sanctuary here is not contingent upon the employment of a naturalist-manager.

The party of inspection naturally went into no detail in outlining the suggested sanctuary, since the desires of the property owners were not known or expressed. It was agreed that it would be desirable from a natural history standpoint to include in the preserve as many different kinds of habitat as practicable. Thus the mudflats across the river from the Textile Plant should be maintained as a concentration point for shorebirds; most and preferably all of the new Ford Lake should be included to protect the ducks and geese which may be expected to concentrate here (and also some imported geese, swans, etc. if these be desired); the fine river banks along the lake are fine habitats for certain birds such as kingfishers, bank swallows, etc., and could be made very attractive to wild life (and to the landscape) by proper plantings; the lower ravine of Willow Run, in Sec. 19 and 20 of Van Buren Township would make a good reserve to represent the ravine habitat.

Some of the level flats above the lake could be included to advantage, even where farmed; the better of the wooded plots could be included to fine advantage also, especially the fine woods containing a large heronry in Sec. 12 of Ypsilanti Township.

It would be advantageous to make the preserve large. If it would meet with the pleasure of the owners, property further down the river could be included to advantage, either in the same sanctuary or in adjoining or adjacent ones. We were given to believe that the Bennett property lying between the Ford and Edison holdings would very gladly be dedicated as a wild life sanctuary, and that it would make a very desirable refuge or addition to a larger sanctuary. Some previous correspondence would seem to indicate that the Detroit Edison Company would favor a sanctuary on at least part of Edison Lake, Wayne County, and we found some strong local sentiment in favor of such a move.

Whether it would be agreeable or advisable to have a large sanctuary on the Huron covering more than one ownership we of course can not say. Even if adjoining but independent sanctuaries were established, the acreage would probably exceed that specified by law for single sanctuaries. However, it is probable that this legal restriction could be obviated by a special action of the Conservation Commission or by special act of the legislature—~~or~~ by establishing the sanctuary on some other basis than wild life dedication.

Any of the members of the party which made the inspection trip leading to this preliminary report, individually or jointly, would be glad to advise further as to details of organization, plans or estimates for the suggested wild life sanctuary, if the owners of the property should care to request such cooperation.

Carl L. Hubbs  
Director