

PROBLEMS IN RESERVE MANAGEMENT

In a recent radio broadcast the Chief Warden of Fauna, Mr. H. B. Shugg spoke on the problem the litterbug is to the reserve manager.

Herewith is the text of Mr. Shugg's address:-

"A wildlife reserve is a farm - of sorts. It produces plants and animals and it needs careful and trained management. While the reserve manager shares many problems with his farmer neighbours, he also has unusual ones.

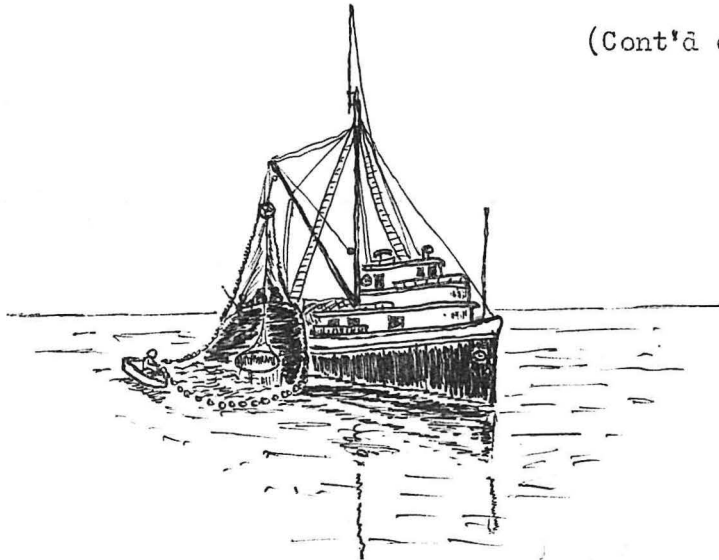
A farmer knows his farm, his stock and crops, intimately and precisely.

Not so the reserve manager. More often than not he does not know what plants and animals are on his land nor what they need to survive. He has no proved techniques of stock husbandry and has great difficulty in ascertaining whether his stocks are increasing or decreasing or are about to become extinct.

Research work being undertaken on the Tuttanning Fauna Reserve east of Pingelly is aimed at overcoming these problems but it is also revealing unexpected ones. This reserve is an outstanding one because its flora and fauna are so diverse. We know that if it were left to look after itself it would deteriorate and many valuable forms of wildlife there would disappear.

Because native animals must have ground cover and dense shelter belts, some farmers, understandably, look askance at the reserves and expect them to be burnt every year or two. But this is quite out of the question. Different plant associations needed by the animals take many years to recover and too frequent, too big, or too hot fires would be quite disastrous. The structure and type and age of the plants required to support the diverse fauna are governed by the nature of the fires. Consequently, these have to be most carefully planned and controlled.

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PROBLEMS IN RESERVE MANAGEMENT (Cont'd)

Besides the fire problems, the reserve manager has many other problems. Because he controls public land a whole miscellany of people expect to be allowed to satisfy their legitimate needs there. These include photographers, campers, egg collectors, bird trappers, pet food shooters, hungry Australians - old and new, scientific collectors, sportsmen, boating enthusiasts, and so on. Even if they can be allowed to operate on wildlife reserves, their activities must be controlled and everyone knows how difficult people are to control.

Finally, the reserve manager has to cope with the litterbug. There are two species of this pest. The worst, the dumping litterbug, hoards his rubbish at home and then carts it to a reserve and dumps it there. The second, the wandering litterbug, discards his rubbish as he picnics or passes through. His specialties are empty bottles, cartons, cans, packets and tins.

Litter is ugly - but it is worse than that. En masse it eats up wild land which means that more of our wildlife is lost for ever. Rubbish dumping introduces pests and weeds into reserves and creates additional fire hazards. Rubbish has to be disposed of and those responsible for getting rid of it naturally look to wild lands because they are available. Much of our richest area, our lakes, swamps and marshes, have already disappeared under avalanches of rubbish and covering sand fill.

This is the age of the disposable container. More and more manufacturers are being forced by fashion and economics to turn from returnable to disposable ones. "Disposable" means you throw it away. So someone else has to pick it up or it lies there to litter the countryside. Either way the general public, not the litterbug, pays. Existing alternatives are to pay more rubbish tax for cleaning up, or lose the beauty and utility of the countryside to laziness-induced litter.

There is a simple solution. Impose a special tax on all non returnable containers and packages.

Such tax would have a double effect. Firstly, it would make the use of disposable containers less attractive and returnable ones more economic. Secondly, it would provide funds for distribution to local authorities to meet the costs of keeping their districts clean.

It would be a moral tax because those who cause the problem would pay the cost of the cure.

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It could be applied on a sliding scale to all potential rubbish, from match boxes to car bodies. It could be raised like sales tax and would yield millions of dollars.

Such a tax would finance the purchase of the revolutionary new treatment plants which convert rubbish into saleable fertilizer, the proceeds from which can be most lucrative.

If I have strayed from the subject of reserve management, I am sure that everyone who has seen and thought about this litter problem will forgive me. Our wetlands and other wild areas are now too rare and precious to sacrifice to rubbish disposal whether or not it is done under the pseudonym of reclamation. In any case all districts must, eventually, run out of such areas and find new disposal methods. Our remaining wild lands and reserves must be saved for they bring beauty and variety to our countryside and variety is the spice of life."

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