

Exhibit 510-2

Talk by Chief Hugh H. Bennett on Wildlife and the Soil Conservation Service Program, February 9, 1938

(The following is provided as a historical perspective of the biology emphasis early in the Agency's history. It contains statements, phrases, and terminology that are not consistent with current civil rights policies.)

WILDLIFE AND THE SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE PROGRAM

By Hugh H. Bennett
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I am very glad to add a word of personal welcome to you on the occasion of your second conference in Washington. It was just two years ago, I believe, immediately following the organization of the Wildlife Section, that I met most of you here. I notice one or two new faces. This I take as evidence that we are gradually completing our wildlife organization.

When Ernest Holt asked me if I would say a few words to you this morning, I at first demurred. I asked him how he could expect me to talk about biology, but he said, "Biology is about the last thing those fellows need to hear from you. Why don't you clear up once and for all some of the misconceptions that still persist in the Service regarding the wildlife phase of the program? Why not tell the boys why we have a wildlife program in the first place, and what you expect of them? And certainly every last one of us would like to know where we are going."

I could see that Holt was right, for notwithstanding the fact that I have made my attitude toward the wildlife program a matter of public record on several occasions, I do realize that some field officers are still lukewarm toward wildlife management. After all, when we come to think about it, this may not be so surprising. It took some of our men a long time to come around even to stripcropping, but they have come around. And perhaps it may be better so, for when a man convinces himself that a certain practice is right he becomes a stronger advocate for that practice than he could ever have been made through coercion.

Well, let us consider some of these questions that Holt tells me have been worrying some of our folks in the field. Just why was wildlife work included in the Soil Conservation Service program? As a matter of fact, measures for the conservation and restoration of farm wildlife were considered right in the beginning when the soil conservation program was first formulated. But why should wildlife conservation have been considered a legitimate part of soil conservation? The answer to that one is relatively simple.

I first started studying soils 35 years ago, and during the intervening years I have, with increasing alarm, watched our topsoil being washed away at a constantly accelerating rate. I have also noticed, as the main reason for it, the accelerated destruction of the natural vegetative cover of the land. And I have watched with regret the disappearance of farm wildlife along with the vegetation. I am not a biologist, but almost as far back as my memory goes I have found great enjoyment in hunting quail. And while disclaiming any responsibility, for I seldom hit one, I do know that they have become increasingly hard to find.

Now it seems to me there is a definite correlation here. With stripping off of the natural vegetation we have lost both the soil itself and the wildlife that found food and refuge in the vegetation. If that be so, then it is perfectly logical that the only real, permanent cure for erosion is a coordinated plan of land treatment, with heavy reliance on vegetation, and that the proper handling of vegetation for the control of erosion will in a large degree restore conditions suitable for wildlife.

To attain anything like adequate control of soil erosion we have to study the entire operations of the particular farm concerned, and make more or less drastic changes in tillage practices and cropping systems. In other words, we have to work out a land use plan for each farm on the basis of the needs and adaptability of each acre of land in that farm. As the Secretary of Agriculture has pointed out, wildlife has a definite stake in a national land use program. Certainly a soil conservation program, concerning itself as it does with the most basic of our natural resources, implies a definite obligation toward resources dependent upon the soil. The Soil Conservation Service has accepted this obligation in respect to the welfare of the wildlife of the farms on which we operate.

It has been said that the Service can do a perfectly good job of erosion control without giving any thought whatsoever to wildlife. It is also contended by some that a farmer need give no thought to wildlife in order to make a living on his farm. And on these premises the question has been asked whether the Service is not placing itself in the position of a simple benefactor of wildlife by making provision in its program for wildlife welfare when this is not absolutely essential to the attainment of its primary objective of soil and water conservation.

The answer is, No.

Whether the farmer realizes it or not, the wildlife of his farm has a very real value. I don't mean that any one farmer can expect to derive any great amount of money from his quail, or pheasants, or ruffed grouse, as the case may be, although some farmers through proper management have earned a pretty penny from such sources. Nor am I thinking of the stupendous sum that the hunters and fishermen of the country spend each year in pursuit of their sport, and how this money will cease to flow into the channels of trade if our wildlife slips much farther down hill.

How many of you who were reared on farms do not find that your most cherished memories are in some way connected with the wild creatures about the old place? How many of you can conceive of a farm home without birds and squirrels and rabbits and other small animals? I don't know a single farmer who doesn't want some wild things around him just for the pleasure of seeing them occasionally. The enjoyment of wildlife is one of the expressions of a fuller human life and as such is above price.

More basic than all, however, is the biologic value of wildlife. We have numerous examples, known to all of you, of the disastrous results that have followed thoughtless destruction of certain animal populations. Animal life not only is intimately interrelated with plant life, but with the soil itself, and our knowledge of ecology is still insufficient for us to assume that we can afford to eliminate any species completely from our fauna or flora. It is only the part of common sense, therefore, to try to maintain the best biologic balance that may be attained under agricultural conditions. That in itself is reason enough for the wildlife phase of our program.

Of course, all of you understand that whatever we do as a Service must be justified on the basis of its contribution to the conservation of soil or water. Some of you may have felt that this basic requirement has kept you from doing a complete job of wildlife management. That may in a measure be true. Perhaps there are other things we would like to do, such as to control hunting pressure, for example, but those things can be accomplished usually through state conservation departments or by the banding together of groups of cooperators. Your big job is to see that the operations of the Service accomplish the maximum restoration of favorable physical environments for wildlife. In this respect the Service stands in a position unparalleled by any other agency. The farmers of this country absolutely control the future of all wildlife except the waterfowl and the relatively small wildlife populations living in forests.

The Biological Survey has made wonderful strides toward saving waterfowl from destruction; the Forest Service has long concerned itself with scientific management of the wildlife on its holdings; but the six million farms of the country heretofore have been almost wholly neglected.

True, the Extension Service has employed a few biologists, and some of the more progressive state conservation departments are now turning their attention to the reconstruction of farm habitats, but by and large the farmer, who has supplied the recreation for the great majority of the hunters of the country, has received little constructive attention. This is our great opportunity. We have now in force cooperative agreements with more than 53,000 farmers and by virtue of this intimate relation we are in a position to accomplish what no other agency possibly could do. Already wildlife organizations all over the country are recognizing the Soil Conservation Service as potentially the most powerful factor for the conservation of farm wildlife in the United States. This recognition has won to the support of the Service large groups of city people who otherwise would have only an academic interest in soil conservation. It is up to you to see that we do not fail to live up to our prospectus.

I would like to think that you will make of our six million farms six million wildlife refuges—not all closed to hunting, of course, for that would deprive me and a lot of fellows like me of our favorite sport. Perhaps it would be better to call them wildlife ranges. I wouldn't attempt to tell you how to do it any more than I would try to write specifications for the engineers or management plans for the foresters. Yours is a biological job, and we have employed biologists because we want the job done in the best possible manner. I

do think, however, that you have to "sell" a real appreciation of wildlife to our own staff and to the farmers, and I think that you must also "sell" an appreciation of vegetation to them.

There is certainly need for more concession to wildlife in our general farm philosophy. Notwithstanding the high price of land, as in the corn belt, for example, I am convinced that farms would be better places to live if they had a little vegetation about them and a little wildlife to enliven the farm scene.

I know that there are opposing views on so-called "clean farming", but I also know that we cannot have wildlife unless there is vegetation in which it may live and find food. We want more wildlife on our farms, and if it is necessary to make concessions to get it we should do so. I for one am convinced that it is a pretty niggardly farmer who is not willing to allow a few quail coverts to persist here and there, or who won't leave a narrow strip of shrubs and trees along his fences when he understands that these things are essential to wildlife. Perhaps, the idea of conceding something to wildlife should begin right with our own staff. Even some of our own people believe that fence rows and stream banks should be devoid of all vegetation. In some places we are actually pulling out hedges in order to facilitate stripcropping. This is all very well, but what are you doing to see that the men who are writing these provisions in the farm plan are also specifying the reestablishment of those lanes of vegetation by planting the fences relocated on the contour?

I have been tremendously impressed with some of the wildlife work I have seen in the field, particularly where raw, red clay gullies have been converted into patches of wildlife food and cover, and I have been much interested to see how quickly the quail have taken up headquarters in these places. This has shown me how admirably soil conservation and wildlife encouragement can be accomplished by the same operation, and bears out my original conviction that our revegetation program can easily be modified to the benefit of wildlife without the least sacrifice to erosion control. The technical modifications necessary to encourage wildlife are your responsibility, and in this, as well as in all other phases of soil conservation, I have thought it best that the program should be developed in the field rather than in the Washington office. Of course, the Washington office must always determine ultimate policies, but a program developed in the field to meet the needs of the particular region involved is bound to be a better one than we could devise here at our desks. It is your function, therefore, to develop the techniques necessary to an adequate program. The only limitations are the Acts of Congress under which the Service operates, and the necessity of maintaining a proper balance between the different technical phases of our integrated program.

Holt tells me that requests I have made of him for specific data regarding wildlife increases resulting from our operations have sometimes resulted in kickbacks from the field. Perhaps this is one of the misconceptions he was talking about. It seems to me that we must know what results we are getting in our work. These results must be measured, not guessed at. You men must develop the yardsticks, and if the wildlife census is the best one to employ, then I see no reason why it should not be used on selected areas. If we think of censusing in this way, and not as one of the principal functions of the project biologist, then I am sure that there will be no room for misunderstanding, any more than there is for misunderstanding the foresters' timber cruise.

As for where we are going, that is a question much more difficult to answer. In the immediate future our greatest development will certainly be along district lines. This will broaden our influence many, many fold and enable us to spread the gospel of conservation on an unprecedented scale. It is up to you to see that wildlife management is given its proper place in the districts programs. Wherever we go as a Service you may rest assured that our integrated coordinated program of soil and water conservation goes with us. Wildlife management is definitely a part of that program.

Source: This talk was given to the Soil Conservation Service Regional Biologists assembled in annual conference at Washington, D.C., February 9, 1938.