

Suburbia's Farmer-Hunter Problem

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In congested areas, both farmers and hunters suffer from the acts of irresponsible gun-toters. It's in the interests of both to combat the evil.

On opening weekend of the 1958 pheasant season, the Racine county sheriff's office received many calls for help from harassed landowners.

Common complaints were, "Hunters too close to the house, pellets hitting the roof," and "Hunters are shooting at my goats" (or other farm animals.) One woman reported that hunters on her land refused to leave and even threatened her with a shotgun!

Startling? Perhaps, but the year was typical.

A rather excited hunter pulled his car off the road, loaded up and bagged a dandy guinea hen. Luckily the farmer was near and he collected a fee for that mistake.

Another farmer was not so lucky. Thieves masquerading as hunters dressed out three 150-pound pigs and made off with them under cover of darkness. Is it any wonder that farmers post their land and insist on knowing who goes there, out yonder in the pasture?

SANDWICHED IN between Chicago and Milwaukee, Racine and Kenosha counties are part of the fast-growing suburbia which has only one way to expand, westward from the lake. Here the hunter-farmer problem generates the most friction.

Think of it, on the opening date of the pheasant season, 1958, nearly 20,000 licensed small game hunters in Racine and Kenosha counties and many of the 50,000 Milwaukee county hunters all afield with the same object, a successful hunting trip.

Driving out from the cities, hunters find "No Hunting" or "No Trespassing" signs plastered on every available post

and tree. The wise hunter has long before made arrangements with a farmer for his hunt, but in every crowd are those who understand little and care less about property rights. A small minority of hunters still believe that a hunting license is also a trespass license, which it is not.

CHECKING the location of landowner complaints in Racine county, I noted that six out of seven complaints originated in the densely-populated townships nearest to the cities of Racine and Milwaukee.

Paradoxically, some of the best pheasant habitat in Wisconsin is located in this heavily-populated area. Land use here is shifting from intensive agriculture to the less intensive use of suburban development. Home sites here are large lots with grass and weed cover and with shrubby borders. Pheasants and rabbits find this new habitat a welcome change from dodging the hay mower. But hunting becomes more intolerable as houses get closer together. The truck farmer or gardener must decide whether he will allow hunting with possible abuses, or suffer crop damage by game if he prohibits hunting.

Trampling of unharvested crops is another source of irritation to the farmer. The harvest of corn and soybeans in these southeastern counties is about two weeks behind the southwestern and central counties. In the past two years corn picking and soybean combining had hardly begun on the opening day of the pheasant season. A later opening date would ease the problem in the southeastern lakeshore counties, but an early opening is most popular state-wide. Without control over hunter distribution, estab-

lishing a small zone with a later opening date might cause even greater hunter concentrations.

Six of nine towns in Racine county have passed some type of firearms ordinance designed to control the irresponsible hunter. Some of these ordinances restrict hunting within a certain distance of dwellings and schools and most prohibit hunting without the express permission of the landowner.

The town of Caledonia (population of 120 per square mile in 1950) in the eastern part of the county has a firearms ordinance and in addition supplies landowners with posters which read, "WARNING, FIREARMS ORDINANCE ENFORCED, HUNTING WITH PERMISSION ONLY." The town is patrolled and a number of arrests are made each year. While the legality of many of these ordinances has been questioned, they point to the need for better regulation of hunting in metropolitan areas.

Farther out in Racine and adjacent counties, the state public hunting grounds program has eased the hunter-farmer problem. Most of these areas have marsh and woodland cover and they can absorb heavier hunting pressure under the direct control of the Conservation Department.

PURCHASE of lands for public hunting grounds has been greatly accelerated recently. In the past year alone, the department purchased over 800 acres of good wildlife habitat in the western part of Racine county. Similar progress has been reported in many counties.

For many years Milwaukee county has prohibited the discharge of firearms. Pheasant and rabbit populations in the county are high enough to cause considerable crop damage, since the bow is not very efficient as a hunting weapon. Thus when firearms are banned, annual crops of game are wasted, crop damage occurs and hunting opportunities, already at a



More public hunting grounds would help meet the need for a place to hunt near cities. However, since the great majority of game is on private land, it is critically important for hunters to maintain good relations with landowners.

premium, are lost. A very unpalatable situation!

Legislation may be needed to regulate hunting in densely-populated areas. But even without new legislation, existing state trespass laws give the landowner more protection than most realize.

It is unlawful for a hunter to enter the lands of another if cultivated or fenced, with or without posting, or any lands if properly posted. For land to be posted a sign at least 1 foot square must be posted in two conspicuous places for every 40 acres to be protected. The sign must carry an appropriate notice and must be signed by the owner or occupant of the land.

In reply to a perennial question, farmers may post their lands, "NO HUNTING," and then allow hunting at their own discretion for themselves and their friends. Both landowners and hunters should seek a better understanding of the property rights of the individual in our democracy.

IS IT NOT TIME for sportsmen and farmers to come to terms? Action now is better than risking the chance of unfavorable legislation and even the complete loss of hunting opportunities. Insist on better enforcement of the trespass laws and stiffer penalties for violations.

When individual action fails, group action is a necessary approach. Farmer-sportsmen cooperatives offer the chance for regulation of hunting by private groups. Landowners band together and issue club memberships or trespass permits to non-landowner sportsmen. The landowners themselves decide how many hunters they can accommodate. Members

afield are usually identified by distinctive arm bands or similar types of identification. (Some farm groups have asked that all small game hunters be identified by numbered back tags). Reasonable fees charged for memberships pay the costs of posting the area, patrolling, stocking of game and even some wildlife habitat improvement. (Elsewhere some farmers have actually destroyed wildlife habitat just to get rid of hunters!)

The Better Friends farmer-sportsman cooperative in Dodge and Jefferson counties has operated successfully for years. Recently the County Sportsman Club of Racine County has organized 1,000 acres under a similar plan. This is a logical solution for metropolitan areas.

Although hunter-farmer relations are of concern in all areas of the state, the problem in metropolitan areas is most intense and deserves immediate attention.

YOU CAN BE SURE that game administrators throughout the country have given the problem of hunter management much thought, and continue to do so. Many states have tried some type of regulated hunting to protect the landowner and yet maintain hunting opportunities. Most of these systems have had some success, but it is clear that there is no magic answer.

New laws, farmer-sportsman cooperatives, and more public hunting grounds may help solve the problem, but these will require both time and local group aid to be effective. In the meantime all responsible hunters can help, by example and influence, to maintain good relations between followers of their sport and landowners.

Perils of Conservation

Conservation is moving on, there is no doubt about that, but the occasional shoals that delay its progress are formed by that most important facet of human nature—self-interest. We're all most lenient in our attitude toward ourselves, and in justifying our actions. If everyone were allowed to judge himself we'd have few people in our jails, and none in hell.—SOUTH CAROLINA WILDLIFE