

A Brief History of Wildlife in America

Wildlife Management by Native Americans

- America before Europeans was not “pristine”
- Hunting
 - Pleistocene “overkill” hypothesis
- Setting fires
 - increase game populations
 - favor certain trees (like oaks)
 - improve agriculture

Traditions Europeans Brought

- Policies & attitudes
 - Fear of wilderness and predators
 - Need to tame & control wild things
 - Wildlife = property of land owners
 - Wildlife = economic commodity

1600 – 1850: Abundance

- Unregulated market hunting
- Start of wildlife decline
- First local wildlife regulations
 - 1630 Massachusetts Bay Colony, bounty on wolves
 - 1639 Newport, Rhode Island, deer season

1850 – 1900: Rapid Depletion

- Rapid increase in human population, economy, & technology
- Extirpation and extinction of numerous species
 - passenger pigeon
 - Labrador duck
 - Carolina parakeet
- Near-extinction of plains bison, turkeys, pronghorn, several whales
- 1872 – Yellowstone = first National Park
- 1896 - Geer vs. Connecticut
 - Established **Public Trust Doctrine**
 - Wild animals are property of the **STATE**

Passenger Pigeon

- Probably the most numerous bird on earth in mid 1800's (billions & billions)
- Last wild colony reported in 1885
- “Martha” died in zoo 1914
- Major factors
 - Unregulated market hunting
 - Railroad, telegraph, repeating guns
 - Cutting down nest trees
 - Low fecundity (1 egg / pair / year)
 - Group breeding

Plains Bison

- Estimated 60 million in 1860
- 150 left in the wild by 1889
- Major factors
 - Unregulated market hunting
 - Tongue
 - Hides & leather
 - Technology
 - Railroads
 - Telegraphs
 - Repeating rifles
 - Army killed bison to deprive Native Americans

1900 – 1933: Preservation & Production

- **Preservation**: hunting restrictions, predator bounties, refuges
- **Production**: populations replenished through captive breeding & stocking
- national legislation
 - 1900 - **Lacey Act**

 - 1918 - **Migratory Bird Treaty Act**

 - 1929 - **Migratory Bird Conservation Act**

1900 – 1933: Preservation & Production

- Gifford Pinchot (first head of Forest Service, 1898)
 - Conservation = “wise use”
- Theodore Roosevelt (president 1901-1909)
 - avid hunter & outdoorsman
 - created National Wildlife Refuges
 - first = Pelican Island, 1903
 - 52 refuges during term in office
 - set aside millions of acres of land as “reserves” for forestry and mining

1933

- Aldo Leopold, the “father of wildlife management”
 - made Wildlife Biology a new profession
 - 1933, “Game Management” first textbook
 - Wrote “Sand County Almanac”, “Thinking like a Mountain”...
 - Conservation ethic: conservation is a moral obligation
 - **Habitat & ecology are key**
 - Shift in perspective on predators

After 1933

- Increased funding for wildlife management
 - 1934 - **Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act**

 - 1937 - **Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act**
“Pittman-Robertson Act”

 - 1950 - **Federal Aid in Sport Fishing Act**
“Dingell-Johnson Act”

1960 – present: Environmental Awareness & Activism

- Public concern for environmental issues
 - 1960 Rachel Carson, “Silent Spring”
 - ended DDT spraying, saved many bird species
 - 1970 first Earth Day
- Population shift: rural to urban/suburban
- Increased interest in conserving nongame wildlife and predators
- Greater research in ecology & conservation biology

1960 – present: Environmental Awareness & Activism

Some key legislation and policies:

- National Environmental Policy Act 1969
- Endangered Species Act 1970
- CITES 1973
- National Forest Management Act 1976
- Conservation Reserve Program 1985

Things to Remember:

- Human wildlife interactions in North America before Europeans arrived
- Wildlife management after Europeans arrived
 - consequences of unregulated market hunting and habitat destruction
 - influence of technology and social factors
 - changing management strategies over time
 - important people
 - important laws