

CONSERVATION

Our Last Wilderness

Priceless wildlife is disappearing now as our 49th state seems to be making the same mistakes in caring for its land and creatures as were made in continental United States.

By BENITA TALL

CITIZENS of the state of Alaska, joining the United States in 1959, could be living in the world of 1859.

Like the rest of the U.S. 100 years ago, Alaska is a pioneer land rich with natural resources. Many of its citizens have the same drive and spirit that inspired the settlers of the western U.S. It is developing its resources at an increasingly fast rate. People are going to Alaska to see what it is like to live in a pioneer land and, perhaps, to stay.

But along with the pioneers, comes destruction.

In the wake of this migration and building comes the same potential for misuse of land and death to wild animals and plants that followed the westward movement across the continental United States. The same mistakes that brought dust bowls and added to the roster of extinct wildlife can be repeated.

Ten years from today, five years or even next year may be too late to begin to take the needed steps to protect what has been described as virtually the only "authentic living wilderness left for humans."

Wilderness: Practical and Esthetic

As a growing, up-and-coming state, Alaska needs water for power, land for its citizens, minerals, lumber, fish for its fisheries industry. Right now, many of the area's mineral resources are depleted and its salmon fisheries overfished. Fires destroy tens of thousands of acres of forests. Conservation and careful management of existing resources can provide for the new state's current and future needs, however. A problem arises when Alaskans come in conflict with their wilderness.

Wilderness, primitive, untouched land and its plant and animal life, cannot be managed. It can only be protected against man's misuse. The history of the United States is filled with descriptions of what the land was once like, of how flocks of migrating birds darkened the sky. Alaska still contains some of this "once-upon-a-time land."

There is now a bill, H.R. 7045, up before the Congress that would preserve a part of the wilderness as an Arctic Wildlife Range. There is also opposition to the bill. Alaskans apparently welcome legislation to protect Indiana's sand dunes, for example, but resent legislation designed to protect part of their own "unique and irreplaceable" land.

Fisheries, wildlife, tourists and related industries will make up most of Alaska's estimated 1962 income. Fisheries and wildlife alone are expected to contribute \$150,000,000.

Without protection, these fisheries and

wildlife cannot long continue to contribute to the new state's income. Tourists will soon stop coming when Alaska's "wilderness" is invaded by towns, industry, airplane landing strips and highways.

In a very practical sense, Alaska's future depends upon her keeping a part of the land as it was before man came.

H.R. 7045 is a bill which, if passed, would authorize the establishment of an Arctic Wildlife Range close to 9,000,000 acres in area—larger than the state of Maryland. (This is still only 2.4% of Alaska's land.) The boundaries have been set with the purpose of keeping intact an "ecological whole."

The 9,000,000-acre tract, commonly called the Brooks Range, has been only partially surveyed. It is a unit so far as wildlife is concerned. Here animals can move at will, unrestricted by man-made boundaries. Prey and predator live together as they have for centuries. The land, if left completely alone, can support its animal population, if man does not tamper with it by additions or over-protection.

The actual mountain range itself, a northwest extension of the Rocky Mountains, was named after Alfred H. Brooks, chief Alaskan geologist for the U.S. Geological Survey from 1903 to his death in 1924.

Caribou and reindeer are dependent on reindeer moss, a lichen, for their food during the critical Arctic winters. Both these animals are severely reduced in numbers: the caribou now total about 20,000, a loss of more than a million in the past 20 years

largely as a result of fire destroying their range. Several years are needed for a range to recover from just one passage of a feeding herd across it.

This Brooks Range area is also the only place in the United States where polar bear den up for the production of young. Dall sheep, grizzly bears, wolverines, ptarmigan, black-tailed deer are found here. Mount Michaelson, 8,000 feet high with its unusual Arctic glaciers, is included in the wildlife range.

Alaskans oppose the bill that would preserve this range with one main argument: Its passage would mean the loss of some \$600,000 in Federal road funds.

Answers for Opponents

Those who recommend passage point out that, under the public law, millions of acres in Alaska have already been withdrawn by the Federal Government. Establishing the Arctic Wildlife Range would mean an anticipated loss of only \$275,000 in these road funds. Furthermore, efforts are being made to restore to the Public Domain approximately 20,000,000 acres held by the Navy, while making adequate provision for future conservation.

If steps are taken now to keep the Brooks Range area in its wilderness state, there will be no need to disturb any community since no one lives there except a few natives, who would remain. They would be free to live on the Range and hunt and fish as they have in past years. As the conservationists point out, protecting the land now would involve no disrupting of communities. In a few years it is probably that people will be moving into the area, setting up camps and generally establishing permanent homes



WILDERNESS WOLVES—An important role in the wilderness world of the Alaskan range is played by these wolves, photographed here by naturalist Herb Crisley. In some areas man's overhunting of predators, such as the wolves, has resulted in huge populations of deer which cannot find enough food. Thus man's interference leads to an upset in the natural balance of life.

and businesses. In the past such communities have presented a serious problem when land was to be set aside as national parks, wildernesses or similar places.

National defense would still be maintained, since land can be set aside for this purpose by executive order.

Since these 9,000,000 acres are a range, not a refuge, they are not closed to mining, oil and gas leasing. As Theodore Stevens, assistant secretary of the Department of the Interior, said: "We do want to permit the proper exploitation of any mineral deposit found there and necessary for the development of Alaska." This can be done by using particular mining techniques that do not unnecessarily disturb the land surface.

Passage of H.R. 7045 is uncertain. What is certain is that without such a law, Alaska and the rest of the United States will suffer an irrevocable loss.

Science News Letter, September 5, 1959

PHOTOGRAPHY

Prize Photo Shows Bee Collecting Pollen

See Front Cover

MEDICAL and scientific photography were the subject of a meeting in Montreal, Canada, of the Biological Photographic Association.

A new method for studying unstained, living bacteria, cells and other specimens by color phase "optical staining" was reported. A new technique for photographing vocal cords in action was also described.

Various prizes were given for the best photographs in several categories. The photograph on the cover of this week's SCIENCE NEWS LETTER was an award-winner in the natural science, monochrome prints category. Taken by William P. Nye of the U. S. Bee Culture Laboratory, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Logan, Utah, it shows a bumble bee collecting pollen from the Caragana or peatree.

Science News Letter, September 5, 1959

Questions

ARCHAEOLOGY—What is the new technique for dating prehistoric rocks and pottery based upon? p. 148.

PLANT PHYSIOLOGY—How does a Russian scientist claim to have made plants drought-resistant? p. 147.

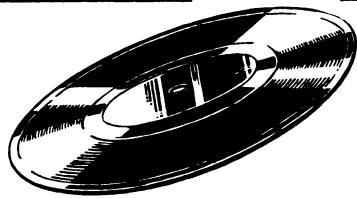
TECHNOLOGY—How have synthetic sapphires been made? p. 152.

Photographs: Cover, Biological Photographic Association, Inc.; p. 147, Climax Molybdenum Company; p. 149, Pitney-Bowes, Inc.; p. 153, Smith Kline & French Laboratories; p. 154, Herb Crisley—*The Living Wilderness*; p. 160, Furlong M.A.P. Co.

Do You Know

The melting of *ice* along the Antarctic coast in the summer causes a rapid decrease in the saltiness of the neighboring sea.

The incidence of *Rocky Mountain spotted fever* shows a marked decrease in the mountain and Pacific States where once more than 99% of cases occurred.



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