

NATURAL RESOURCES

Oil Fouling U.S. Coast

Tankers dumped oil sludge too close to port, endangering wildlife and forcing small resort towns to close. Agreement against dumping does not cover U. S., Gloria Ball reports.

► PROHIBITION of oil dumping by tankers in coastal waters was one of the hottest issues at the 26th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference held in Washington, D. C.

The problem is that tankers have been cleaning their tanks and dumping the sludge too close to port. The oil washes to shore and taints or kills oysters, clams and crabs, and covers shore birds with such a thick coating of oil that they cannot fly and eventually die.

Oil on beaches has forced small resort towns to close down at a loss of up to \$50,000 per day.

The problem is international, and in 1954 an agreement was proposed whereby a participating nation could prohibit oil dumping by other participating nations within 50 miles of its coast. The limit could be lessened or extended another 50 miles if the individual country desired. Britain, for example, has extended its limit because ocean currents carry in oil from much farther out than 50 miles.

Thirteen countries have signed the agreement, but the United States is not among them. A Senate bill aimed at getting the U. S. to participate was introduced more than a year ago but it never got out of committee.

C. R. Gutermuth, vice president of the

Wildlife Management Institute, said that "apathy" probably was the main reason no action has been taken.

Dr. Lloyd Meehan of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service cites a different reason, however. The bill is involved with the unwillingness of the U. S. to subject this country to the World Court, which would occur if the U. S. signed the agreement and became involved in an infringement of rights dispute.

Whatever the reason for inactivity on the bill, wildlife experts in the U. S. apparently believed some outside prompting was needed.

They called Parliament member James Callaghan, chairman of the coordinating advisory committee on oil pollution of the sea, from London to speak at the conference.

Mr. Callaghan said that as long as the U. S. refuses to sign the agreement, it has no control over foreign dumping along its coasts, and has little control over its own tankers' practices.

Another international meeting is being planned for sometime in 1962, at which time participating nations will make a strenuous effort to obtain the signatures of more countries, the U. S. included.

Eventually, the international committee hopes to prohibit dumping even on the

high seas. But it would be very easy for a vessel in open water to dump its wastes into the ocean on a dark night, Mr. Callaghan said.

One method of making it profitable for tankers to dump only into receptacles at port is to find a use for the sludge, such as in construction of macadam roads.

As if the tanker problem alone were not enough, oil from other sources is fouling U. S. coastal areas. Dr. Alfred L. Hawkes, executive director of the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, Providence, said that about a third of the oil pollution comes from shore installations. There is much spilling at refueling stations. Fuel holds of ships may be leaking a slight but steady stream, and ship disasters, groundings and sinkings, release a flood of oil.

In the Gulf areas, drilling operations cause oil pollution. In Cuba and California, natural oil, distinguishable from spilled oil, seeps from the ground.

Dr. Hawkes said the oil presents a fire hazard and endangers the water supply that soon will be coming from converted saline water.

In one duck-wintering area, more birds were killed by oil than by hunters. The oil also acts as a repellent to fish, and not only changes their migration routes but keeps them out of their breeding marshes as well.

Some animals, Dr. Hawkes said, are not killed by the oil. The quahog, a large clam, survives, but "tastes like a can of motor oil" when eaten.

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ORNITHOLOGY

Sandhill Cranes Bagged In Historic First Season

► THE FIRST open season on lesser sandhill cranes has ended in an even draw between man and bird. Hunters bagged only 300 birds, but also succeeded in scattering the cranes enough that their pillaging of field crops will not be so hard on farmers in any one area.

During the month-long hunting season in January, shooting was allowed only in the eastern tier of counties in New Mexico. This particular time and place were picked because the rare whooping cranes and greater sandhill cranes are safely out of the area at this time.

For several years, lesser sandhills, about 200,000 to 250,000 in number, have been eating so much wheat and sorghum that United States and Canadian officials agreed an open season should be declared.

Elliott S. Barker, wildlife consultant and New Mexico delegate to the National Wildlife Federation meeting in Washington, D. C., said about 45,000 of the cranes had been scared out of the shooting area into Texas and western New Mexico.

The 500 hunters who took advantage of the season probably got only 300 birds because the sandhill cranes are very wary, he said. They are big, about three feet tall, can stretch their necks to look over the grass and are difficult to surprise.

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VANISHED CANOE—Canada's National Museum, Ottawa, is displaying the world's largest and only birch canoe of a vanished type. It is 36½ feet long and three feet high in the center. An 82-year-old Chippewa Indian, the only living authority on this type of canoe, spent three years building this exact replica.