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**Conservation comments**  
 by Paul M. Kelsey

**CONNECTICUT HILL WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA**

Connecticut Hill Wildlife Management Area has been in the news during the last few weeks as spin-off from the Indian settlement in Central New York.

It has been asked that the Hill be turned over to the Forest Service to replace part of the federal land proposed to be given to the Indians. This would insure that the Forest Service has adequate acreage in the area for a full time management operation.

This publicity has raised questions in the minds of many about the difference between a wildlife management area and other State forests. What is the purpose of a wildlife management area and how is it managed for wildlife?

Since Connecticut Hill is the largest, the third one established and, as an upland area, typical of about half of the 40 wildlife management areas statewide, let's look at its history and management.

Connecticut Hill lies astride the Tompkins-Schuyler county line about halfway between Ithaca and Watkins Glen. Its 11,610 acres are characteristic of the gently rolling Appalachian Uplands, deeply cut by streams. Sixty percent of it is covered with natural hardwoods, hemlock, oak or white pine. The remaining area is equally divided between coniferous plantations and partially open areas of old brushy fields or restored semi-open areas created by clear cutting and/or prescribed burning.

Though Indian trails passed both north and south of the Hill, there is

no evidence that they had regular settlements there. The first settlers arrived in 1795, some 16 years after Sullivan's campaign drove the Indians out of south-central New York.

By 1840, two-thirds of the land had been cleared and a fairly prosperous farming community had been established. Farming reached its peak in about 1880, and from then on began to decline, both in quantity and quality. In the early 1900's, though most of the open or brushy land was pastured, very little was in intense cultivation. During the late 1920's, abandonment increased sharply, and woodlots were "mined" to get the final financial return.

In 1928, the Conservation Department committed itself to the purchase of 3,765.5 acres for the Connecticut Hill Forest and Game Refuge with money from the newly established Conservation Fund. This had been increased to 4,388 acres by 1930, when the Hill became the site for a 13-year study of ruffed grouse which has become a classic of wildlife research. Planting started that year in accordance with a habitat management plan drawn up as part of the grouse study, with the planting of nearly half a million conifers.

The depression years, which followed closely, proved to be a boon for the Hill. Federal programs to resettle farmers from sub-marginal farms, and work programs such as the CCC and WPA, made it possible to complete the planting of trees and shrubs required in the habitat development plan, and to acquire additional acreage which expanded the holdings for wildlife development to 10,960 acres.

Not only did CCC crews do a lot of planting, but with ax and saw, they left the battered woodlands in as healthy a condition as possible through extensive timber stand improvement work. As part of the grouse study, they created clear cut areas designed to study their effect on grouse.

After World War II, a second phase of the Hill's management started, that of developing it to produce the maximum sport hunting, particularly from the good deer and grouse populations. With the emphasis on recreation, a field archery course was established which was not only used by hundreds of local archers, but was the site of both State and National Championships.

During the last 10 to 15 years, the Hill and other wildlife management areas around the State have become well-known to all types of outdoor recreationists. This has resulted in many man-days of ski touring, snowmobiling, hiking, camping, bird study and picnicking, in addition to the hunting and fishing for which they had been acquired and managed.

**Blow to free speech**

The First Amendment was mugged again. As a result of two decisions handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court, Americans lost some more of their free speech, which has been increasingly confined during recent years by the judiciary, the very branch of government that should be guarding and extending constitutional rights.

In *Brown vs. Traub*, the court ruled that *The Albuquerque Journal* must disclose confidential sources in the pretrial discovery phase of a libel suit involving an attorney with alleged ties to the underworld.

The significance of this is that it expands the doctrine laid down in the famous *Branzburg* case of 1972 which stated reporters have no constitutional right to shield their sources in criminal grand jury proceedings. Now, for the first time, confidential news sources in civil proceedings are to be exposed as well.

Obviously, sources of information are not likely to disclose instances of crime and corruption if they know in advance they are not to be shielded - that betrayal could bring severe penalties, including death.

The *Albuquerque* case has brought investigative reporting another defeat on an old battle front.

This is punishing to the citizens of this country and to their media, but it is not nearly as alarming and potentially destructive as the court's new flanking attack on free speech in joint appeals, *Mitchell vs. Bindrim* and *Doubleday vs. Bindrim*, surely a landmark case.

Here, the Supreme Court refused to review a \$75,000 libel award against a novelist and her publisher, *Doubleday and Co.* that was won in a suit brought by the self-described, real-life model for one of the novel's fictional characters.

Dr. Paul Bindrim, a California psychologist known as "the father of the nude marathon - a kind of encounter session - maintained in his suit against authoress Gwen Davis Mitchell that he was the recognizable model for a not-altogether admirable character in her novel, *Touching*.

Curiously, the court that awarded Dr. Bindrim his \$75,000 damages in 1977, the California Appellate court, which upheld the award, and the Supreme Court, which refused to review the constitutional legality, overlooked a stark incompatibility in Dr. Bindrim's arguments.

Although suing because striking similarities between himself and the novel's character supposedly put him in the book, Dr. Bindrim said it was the difference between his world of reality and the fictional portrayal that actually constituted libel. Dr. Bindrim's allegations only confirmed Ms. Mitchell's contention that she had deliberately created a fictional character who differed in personality, appearance, and conduct from Dr. Bindrim.

Associations of writers and publishers have warned the courts and a largely indifferent public that the process of creative writing would be "chilled" if novelists could not draw on their personal experiences without fear of legal liability.

Who can doubt it? And, among those cherishing American letters, who cannot grieve over the implications, considering that much of the best fictional writing is autobiographical and always has been?

A mixture of hope and outrage might leave room for some belief that this latest court assault upon the First Amendment is too egregious to endure. But, inasmuch as this is only the latest in a long series of decisions adverse to free speech during recent years, one must wonder in dread if the direction has become irreversible.

And the terrifying part of it is that the average Oswego County resident, just like the average American citizen apparently remains complacent and unaware that the courts are robbing him of his right, once taken for granted, to speak freely, to write freely, and to publish freely.

**Playing safe**

The Nevada board of Health has responded in a practical manner to an illogical political decision by its governor.

Six weeks ago, Gov. Bob List ordered closed a low-level radioactive waste dump near the desert town of Beatty, one of only three such dumps in the nation. A similar facility in Washington also was closed and severe limitations placed on access to one in North Carolina.

List called the dump a potential health hazard. But the hazard resulting from the closing was much more real. Hospitals throughout the country were forced to abandon diagnostic and treatment processes involving radioactive materials, robbing patients of the ultimate in health care.

This week the Board of Health, noting the ability to enforce strict controls at the dump, ordered it reopened. The board acknowledged the assurances of the operating firm that the radioactive waste facility "poses absolutely no hazard to the health and safety of the citizens of Nevada or to the environment."

The political leaders in Washington and North Carolina should also take heed.

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**Guild films**

Opening the new year at the Oswego Art Guild, the next monthly meeting, Jan. 10 at 8 p.m. will feature two films, "Why Man Creates" and "Black Artists". The meeting will be held at the Oswego Civic Arts Center, Fort Ontario Park. Admission is free and open to the public.

"Why Man Creates" is a delightful animated film with such characters as Da Vinci and Rembrandt. This film has won six awards including an Oscar.

"Black Artists" introduces three contemporary artists, a painter, sculptor, and printmaker. Each discusses their work in terms of method and materials. Each film runs about 28 minutes.

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