

FORT NIOBRARA GAME PRESERVE,
VALENTINE, NEBRASKA.

QUARTERLY REPORT

From

January 1, 1937

to

March 31, 1937

By: Geno A. Amundson,

U. S. Game Management Agent.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEY

FORT NIOBRARA GAME PRESERVE
VALENTINE, NEBRASKA

IN REPLY REFER TO

R.
Niobrara
Reports.

March 31, 1937.

Chief, Biological Survey,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

Quarterly report from January 1, 1937 to March 31, 1937 on
the Fort Niobrara Reservation, Wildlife and activities appurtenant
thereto:

I. Report on Wildlife observed during the period:

1. Buffalo. - The main herd of the buffalo are still in
the east pasture, which is on the south side of the river south of
their big pasture which lies north of the river. There are sixteen
buffalo left in the north pasture that broke away from the herd when
we made our annual roundup last November. In this small band of
buffalo there was a real old cow that died this late winter. The
balance of the little herd are getting along satisfactorily, but are
not in as good flesh as the main herd that has been eating hay since
the middle of the winter.

The main herd of buffalo in the east pasture have been
eating hay daily and are in good condition. Different Stockmen who
have seen them marvel at their condition on a short pasture and having
been fed hay only with no concentrated feed. Of course the buffalo

are much more prolific. I expect a good calf crop again this spring and plan to retain them in the east pasture and feed them hay until grass gets a good start in the north pasture.

2. Elk. -- The elk herd is about evenly divided in the big buffalo pasture and in the east pasture. They are all in average condition this season of the year. The large old bull elk in the north pasture showed signs of being blind along the late winter and early spring before he shed his antlers, since then I have not come across him. The elk in the exhibition pastures here at Headquarters apparently suffer no ill effects from ranging in the small pastures.

3. Antelope. -- At this writing there are no antelope on the Refuge, the last remaining ones having died from lumpy jaw and the coyotes during the past quarter. It certainly is hard to take to have these little animals die after having spent a lot of time trying to get them grown to maturity. They become so affectionate and fearless of a human being and make such nice pets when raised on a bottle. I do not believe the hand raised antelope can stand as much hardship as the antelope grown naturally. Several of the fawns died from the cold weather. They apparently froze to death right in their beds laying in a natural position. They are very susceptible to lumpy jaw and as this country is what you might term infected with it, a number of them died from it. It seems probably the main cause is the needle grass in their hay that injures their mouth and permits the germ to take hold and start multiplying. They live a very short time after the jaw becomes swollen. Some of them die for no apparent reason whatsoever.

I hope to secure some additional antelope fawns this spring and make another attempt because I believe if we can once get a fair sized herd established we will have no trouble as this was formerly their native country and only a few years ago they were running wild here.

4. Deer. -- We still have the two mule deer bucks in the north pasture, but do not have any does there so they will not multiply. However, it is hoped that we will get some fawns from the Custer State Park in South Dakota again this spring. This time I plan to raise them in another pasture as two of them last year drowned in the ponds by breaking through the ice.

The white tailed deer in the pond pasture are about the same. We have the old doe, two yearling fawns and two two year old bucks. (5) ✓

5. Texas Longhorns. -- The longhorn herd came through the winter in nice shape and I believe there will be a hundred percent calf crop. It was necessary to start feeding them soybean cubes in the last part of January in addition to the hay they were being fed. This improved the appearance of all of them and when the first calf was born it certainly was a lively, thrifty animal. I removed the bull and steer from the four heifers, and will not return them until the proper time, which will bring the next calf crop starting about the first of May.

Because the longhorns thrive and do so well in this section of the country I really believe we should get additional animals from the Wichita Refuge so that we will have a fair sized herd here to graze on our land that is fenced with stock fence, this would seem to me as

advisable because if it is our intention to perpetuate the species we would be in a better position to do so if we had two herds instead of one.

6. Predatory, fur bearing, and rodent mammals.-- nThe coyotes have been very numerous on this Refuge during this quarter. During the latter part of February six coyotes were seen in one day on the Refuge. Hunter Boultinghouse came to the Refuge the fifteenth of March and was able to shoot and trap a few of the pests, and I hope by the end of his stay, the fifteenth of April, he will have them discouraged from trying to den on the Refuge.

The small predatory animals are too numerous again this spring especially the raccoon, mink and skunks, and I shall observe closely next bird nesting season for damage they might do. Last spring their numbers were well under control and there was an improvement in bird nesting over the year before.

During the past three years at intervals there has been a wild dog roaming the Refuge. He has been seen at long distances several times and his tracks are very noticeable in either snow or dust. I have noticed no damage done by him, but he must eat and what his main food is I have been unable to learn. He is as wild as a coyote.

The muskrats have increased again on practically all the ponds on the Refuge and it will be necessary to control them again and reduce their numbers because of the danger of them tunneling under a dam and causing it to wash out.

7. Reptile Life. -- As a general rule there is nothing to be reported on reptile life during this quarter, but on the 9th day of March a rattle snake was killed in the west end of the north buffalo pasture on the east side of Coon Creek. Some of the WPA workers found him while gathering rock for use in erosion control. Apparently there is a new den of rattle snakes or this one was unable to get clear east to the den at the lookout tower before cold weather overtook him.

Jan-Mar 1937
8. Birds. -- This quarter there was an average of 150 mallard ducks staying on the Refuge, and during the severe weather they came for their feed daily in the pond pasture. There were a few mergansers and two golden eyes that wintered also. A great blue heron wintered on Crooked Creek pond where the spring kept the water open on the upper end. How this long, lucky bird managed to survive the cold weather I do not know, but in the latter part of March, after the weather turned warm I found him dead. I took particular notice of his toes as I expected them to be frozen off, but there were only the tips of two toes that had frozen.

The eagles increased on the Refuge the latter part of February and are still here at the end of the quarter. This winter they have been feeding mainly on jack rabbits. The first pintail ducks from the south were noticed on the west arm of the Refuge the 10th of March, and in a day or two the other species began to arrive. The Great horned owls are too numerous over the Refuge as they are very destructive to both the young ducks and young geese. There was a large flock of robins wintered west of here, occasionally one would see a yellow shafted flicker and in the latter part of March large flock of waxwings migrated through.

Prarie chickens were numbrous on the Refuge this winter, there were more of them than grouse. A flock of twenty-three did most of their feeding just west of Headquarters, these were all prarie chickens. The pheasants apparently wintered in nice shape but I did not see a quail all during the quarter.

II. Other Activities:

1. Grazing.-- During this quarter grazing was very poor over the Refuge and all the animals in the exhibition pastures, and in the east pasture were fed hay. Very little snow came during the quarter to improve grazing conditions.

2. Protection. -- During the quarter the Refuge was patrolled adequately and no indications were found of trespassers. We had WPA crews working at cleanup work at various places over the Refuge which helps keep check of conditions. The fire prevention and protection system is in working order and has been developed as much as possible.

3. Improvements. -- Quite a number of items of improvement were carried on and completed even though this quarter is our worst winter months. A bridge over the mouth of Big Beaver Creek was completed with the exception of a guard rail which will be completed next quarter. A four inch irrigation pipe system was nearly completed. This is an extension of the system put in under ECW and permits us to irrigate along the road leading to the highway.

The nine CCC barracks were removed. Four of them were transferred to the Valentine Lakes Refuge, four of them were wrecked and the material salvaged and stored in the big barn and one of them was moved north into the antelope pasture set up on a foundation and

is used for the storage of equipment and machinery. This building was needed very much as the former storage building is now filled with lumber and wood.

The big game fence was improved upon in various places by adding new gates and corners. The big game fence was moved and replaced in places to improve capturing of game animals. Considerable work was performed on the buffalo corrals by construction of additional catwalk and fences making return chutes. Gates were constructed at the new scales in conjunction with the corral so that game animals can be weighed when they are corraled. The old antelope pasture fence north of Headquarters was restored to its former position and the fence was removed from around the abandoned CCC camp.

We completed and hooked up the underground power cable extending from a pole west of the highway underground to a pole at the pumphouse. In addition the underground telephone cable was connected up and all the over head telephone and power poles and lines were removed. This made a great difference in the appearance of the Headquarters site.

4. Public Relations. -- There were no activities along this line during the last quarter.

5. Miscellaneous Activities:-- At the first of the quarter we had a 100 man WPA camp on the Refuge. However, this was abandoned on the 15th of January, and to take its place I was given 25 WPA men from Valentine and have been transporting them back and forth morning and evening all the past quarter. I have had one hundred percent

cooperation in WPA activities from Carey H. Bennett, State Director and I have been able to accomplish and complete considerable amount of work that I had been wondering how I was going to complete after the abandonment of the CCC camp. Apparently I will have work for the 25 WPA men for months to come. At the first part of January we had a very severe flu epidemic among the WPA workers then housed in the barracks and after sending a few to the hospital the doctor from the CCC camp at Valentine Lakes came and gave us instructions and medicine to care for the men. His cooperation was appreciated very much.

The ice gorge was the worst this year of any year since I came here in 1930. However, it finally all left without injuring any of the bridges over the river. It did however pile up and get onto the banks and break down a number of trees as it passed through the Refuge.

Transplanting of native trees was carried on during the quarter, some nice native oak, elm and hackberry were set out at the Headquarters site and quite a number of cedar trees were set out along the road to the highway northwest of the house for wind break and at the new office and Museum building. It has been learned that transplanting of small cedar trees ranging from height from ten to sixteen inches is not a success nineteen out of twenty of them die, while larger cedar trees from two to three feet in height will invariably live.

I had two large frames constructed for placing the new Refuge map under glass and plan to use one of them in the office at Headquarters and one in the Museum.

Started hauling and feeding hay to the buffalo and elk the latter part of January and I had the crew continue to haul each day

and stack it in the hay yard in the east pasture where we have the 200 tons of bailed hay stored. It is easier to haul the hay from the sandhill area of the Refuge while there is frost in the ground.

The old black mare purchased by Mr. Dille fell into a ditch that had been covered with snow and was dead when we found her.

Mr. Rudolph Diefenbach came to Valentine this quarter and I took him over the Fort Niobrara Refuge and we made a short visit to ~~the~~ Rosebud Indian Agency.

Some cedar trees were taken up with a ball of earth on each tree and wrapped in burlap and shipped to other Refuges by truck. Four of them went to Crescent Lake Refuge, for ornamental purposes at the house and fourteen of them to the Valentine Lakes Refuge.

The wind and dirt storms started on February 13th., and have come at intervals since that time. They not only pile a lot of weeds and debris against the fences but in places they cause large drifts of soil. However, there is no big game fence that is being buried since we changed our fence system on the north table by constructing a low fence back of the big game fence.

Mr. George Mushbach arrived at the Refuge February 25th for a short visit while on his way to the Wichita Mountains Refuge where he was transferred. I took him over the entire Refuge, showed him as many of the improvements and developments as possible. After his arrival at the Wichita he asked for a blueprint of the buffalo corrals as they now have been developed and having a larger drawing of the corrals than the old blueprint I filled in the improvements and additions that were made the last few years and sent the drawing to him and he made a tracing and blueprint copies.

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It has been a problem to get this report out because of the other office work and WPA program therefore it is brief but this quarter of the year is the slackest of them all. I appreciate the cooperation I have had from my Superiors during this time.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Geno A. Amundson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Geno" being more prominent.

Geno A. Amundson,

U. S. Game Management Agent.

GAA/CA

