

## ORGANIZING THE FEDERATION AND ITS EARLY YEARS

by Hon. W.J. "Bill" Cleveland

In 1938 a group of New Orleans sportsmen, realizing that our Pelican State, as a "Sportsmen's Paradise", was fast loosing its reality, and feeling that if the men and women who hunt and fish and loved the out-of-doors would band together, ~~perhaps~~ something could be done to protect our natural resources. Led by the late Fred J. Mc Cormac, the New Orleans Sportsmen's League was formed. Some of their hunting associates at Donaldsonville Dr. Spencer B. Lake and Captain O.J. Daigle decided the idea was a good one, so they met with the New Orleans League and from that meeting the Louisiana Sportsmen's League was formed.

The Donaldsonville Sportsmen's League, which Messurs. Daigle and Lake quickly organized fast became known not only for their conservation efforts, but also for their "eatin'-meetings" which featured such choice foods as rabbit-spaghetti and fish courtbouillon. Several sportsmen from Baton Rouge were invited to Donaldsonville for one of the League's meetings. Fred Mc Cormack and Henry E. Cabaud, Jr. then president of the New Orleans Sportsmen's League were there and talked the Baton Rouge delegation into organizing the Baton Rouge Sportsmen's League. This was immediately done. Other clubs were formed that year, and it was determined that some of the older existing wildlife clubs wanted to affiliate but did not want to change their name to "Sportsmen's League". So it was decided in the spring of 1940 to have a convention in New Orleans and organize the Louisiana Wildlife Federation, Incorporated, which would band together the various conservation clubs in Louisiana.

The Federation was organized at a statewide widely represented meeting in New Orleans on October 27, 1940. At that meeting, Governor Sam H. Jones urged everyone interested in conservation to enter into partnership with the State of Louisiana in promoting an outstanding program of conservation. The charter of the Federation was filed on October 30, 1940 and the subscribers to the article of Incorporation were Messurs. Fred Mc Cormac, Henry Cabaud, Jr. , Paul Mc Ilhenny, Roger Stone Ulisse M. Nolan, Angus Eason, Jr., and James O. Grout.

The Federation was a success from the very beginning. Word was spreading thru the hills and bayous that hunting and fishing in Louisiana would improve with such a "watch dog" and "conservation team" as the Federation. Soon the Federation had 30 clubs affiliated with a membership of several thousand. The founding fathers were so busy shaping the growth of the Federation that the rumbles and war clouds in Germany and Japan were hardly noticed.

In 1941, Robert "Bob" Learnard of Baton Rouge was elected President of the Federation. He was contacted by the Board of Trustees of the Rockefeller Foundation who offered to turn over to the Federation the administration of the 83,000 acres in Vermilion and Cameron Parishes known as the Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge. The Federation would be expected to improve the property, keep it policed and patrolled, and the revenues over that needed to manage the Refuge could be used by the Federation. A meeting of the Board of Directors was called at the Capitol in Baton Rouge but since the Federation didn't have enough money even to hire a warden to patrol the Refuge the Federation's Board was afraid to undertake the administration of the refuge. The offer was refused.

That decision can now be classified as the biggest mistake the Louisiana Wildlife Federation has, or ever will make. No one ever ever dreamed how valuable the property would become in a short time. Had the offer been accepted, we would have been the richest wildlife federation in the world - in one year alone the refuge yielded the tremendous sum of 40 million dollars.

After that William J. "Bill" Cleveland of Crowley was elected President and before his term of office was over World War two had engulfed the national of the world. Soon the sportsmen of Louisiana, like so many others, who were used to hunting were called into the military service, and experienced the horrors of war. No convention was held during the war years - only an occasional committee meeting. It was not until 1946 that another convention was held, and new officers and board members elected. In 1946, the convention re-affirmed their position of creating a board or commission to manage Louisiana's Wildlife Resources.

The objective of creating a Wild Life and Fisheries Commission or board was not to be finally realized until 1952 although it had been one of the goals of the Federation since 1940. Actually, under Governor Sam Jones a Wild Life and Fisheries Board was created and did function for about six months. The Governor appointed Fred Mc Cormac as one of the members of the Board. Originally the Federation was pushing their constitutional amendment as a separate bill, but on the insistance of the Governor permitted it to be incorporated in the Governor's reorganizational bill. As you probably know the Supreme Court of Louisiana ruled shortly thereafter the reorganizational bill was unconstitutional and the Wild Life and Fisheries Commission then, once again became a part of the Conservation Department.

"The Growth of the Federation and Its Present Status" will ~~now~~ in a few moments be presented to you by Lloyd F. Abadie, president of our Federation now. But before Lloyd takes over, I see some familiar faces in our audience, some of the old timers in the Federation, some of the founding fathers, and some of the ~~original~~ members of the original board of directors of the Louisiana Wildlife Federation, Inc.

I wish each and every one of them would step forward, appear before the microphone, and introduce themselves....

(Introduce the ones you know by name, let the others introduce themselves).

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Let's give them a rising vote of applause for doing such a grand job of laying the foundation of the Louisiana Wildlife Federation.

Thanks!