



DANIEL BOONE IS DEAD!

By Dr. James C. Krill

Before I begin this column, I received a phone call from Wallace Klussman, a long-time friend and colleague. He wanted to chide me for the column I wrote entitled: "Trophy Hunters Are Evil."

If you read that column, you may remember I referred to someone holding up a *Journal of the Texas Trophy Hunters* magazine and saying some derogatory things about the publication. Wallace was that person, and he took exception to what I reported.

So, here is what he sent me: "First, I must indicate that you completely missed my point. What I said was, 'I have pulled the TEXAS TROPHY HUNTERS magazine from the coffee table reading material in my hunting cabin.' Many young hunters pass through my cabin each year, and I do not want them to see such a deer as the epitome of a mature trophy whitetail buck."

He went on to say deer were not meant to look like the "freaks" portrayed in the magazine, and that whitetails were meant to have "8-10 points with good age, mass, spread and height." He did repeat to me on the phone that he felt the Texas Trophy Hunters Association (TTHA) had become a "deer breeder's magazine." He also pointed out I needed to get my facts straight.

I appreciate Wallace's views and attitude. Much of recent debate on these issues has become personal and few argue philosophic points without remaining friends. Wallace qualifies as the consummate professional and my friend. But, I pointed out he also needs to get his facts straight. So, for the record, I reviewed all advertisements in that magazine issue.

Breaking it down:

- 24.2 percent were for hunting ranches and operations
- 11.5 percent were for feeders
- 6.9 percent were for breeders
- 7.9 percent were for public service announcements, including gun rights and safehunting
- 6.5 percent were for TTHA in-house programs and offerings
- 6.1 percent were for hunting equipment
- 4.0 percent were for hunting stands and blinds

The remainder was for everything from vehicles to consulting services. Since there were more ads for public

service, I hardly believe TTHA has become a "breeder's magazine."

That said, let's move on to this column.

That's right, Daniel Boone is dead, and no matter how much we long for a return to those times when wild, unexplored lands abounded, not one acre of land exists on this Earth that has not been altered by man.

A couple of years ago, I was fortunate to return after 30 years to the lush rain forests of the Rio Negro, Brazil. My wife Susie and I accompanied Jerry Johnston, Gene Riser and their wives to fish for peacock bass. It was a long-awaited homecoming to the land where I spent



DR. JAMES C. KRILL PHOTO

considerable time as a young biologist. To my surprise (and horror), it was nothing like the land I had known! Villages once inhabited by aboriginal hunters now contained satellite receivers, televisions and electricity. Native peoples, who seldom had seen a white man 30 years ago, knew about Santa Claus and were watching soap operas. Gazing up through the canopy, you could see periodic contrails of jetliners.

Truly, there is no place left on the Earth to completely escape modern civilization. The days of wild lands and Hawkin rifles are gone forever. And, if we want to have wildlife and game for hunting in the 21st century, we will have to manage the land for these wonderful experiences.

There is a raging debate among wildlife biologists, agency biologists, researchers and policy makers about how deer are to be managed in this century. The focus of this debate is squarely on the concept of habitat. Yet, there is little understanding about what habitat is, and how we go about assuring wildlife have quality places to live.

So, in the next two issues, I will be discussing the important issues relating to this debate. Hopefully, you can then make up your own mind about these issues.

I often am amused to hear folks talk nostalgically about their favorite area in Texas. "There's nothing like the Brush Country," a fellow will say. "It's a wild and natural place." But, wait a minute. Is it really? Let's take a look at what the early Spanish and American settlers encountered as they traveled across the vast landscape of the Lone Star state.

The land occupied by the first Texas natives was far different from what you see traveling down IH-35 today. A great deal of the land and its plant communities had been shaped by natural and manmade fires.

Natural fires resulting from lightning strikes burned most of the landscape even before men arrived on this continent. The American Indian was a "pyromaniac!" He knew full well the

positive aspects of fire on game habitat, and considered it his duty to set fire to the land whenever he could.

Longleaf pine, one of the most beautiful of pines once existed only in a small area of what is now Florida. Fire spread this fire-tolerant species westward into eastern Texas.

For other trees, however, fire was an enemy. Bottomland hardwood species could not tolerate burns, and seldom ventured into the uplands as a consequence. So, much of our state was characterized quite differently by the early white explorers.

In 1848, Abbe Domenech traveled through the Hill Country region north and west of what today is Castroville. He reported, "...I soon reached the highest point, on an immense plateau overlooking that chain of mountains...and the prospect it commanded seemed to extend to infinity. It was covered with flowers, some of which were surpassingly beautiful from the brilliance of their

colors. "The trees were few and stunted, for the north wind, which continually sweeps these summits, prevents luxuriant vegetation...All these hills and mountains, which lay between me and Castroville, were cut up with deep ravines hollowed out by the tropical rains and were, for the most part, impassible."

One year later, Dr. Ferdinand Roemer traveled through the area just north of New Braunfels. He was impressed by the landscape, describing it as: "...the hilly country north of New Braunfels, however, at no place were the slopes as steep and precipitous toward the undulating land as there. Sparse forests of post oaks and isolated live oaks predominated here.

"Toward the north, extending as far as the eye can see, rectilinear, barren hills arose above each other, which, with their dry, yellow grass covering,

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conjured up impressions of desolate loneliness."

This is a very different description of the Hill Country than one would record today. This same area is now choked with Ashe juniper (cedar) and live oak thickets. Only the ravines remain somewhat similar, in being inhabited by thick growth of various tree and brush species.

When the early German settlers first visited the area around Fredericksburg, they were impressed by the lush grassland, which they referred to as "meadows." Subsequently, these same settlers imposed heavy grazing pressure, first by horses, then cows, then sheep and finally goats on the land. The result was a totally different landscape. Try even seeing for a great distance north of New Braunfels today. The view is obstructed by thick vegetation.

The fabled Brush Country of South Texas was also very different in those

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days. In 1849, an explorer named Moore traveled southward across the many rivers that dissected the Rio Grande Plain.

When he reached the area just west of Corpus Christi, he recorded in his journal: "...The southern portion is level. The middle and northern parts are broken by undulated ridges of a moderate elevation. The streams are fringed with narrow belts of woodland, except near the coast, where the whole country is entirely destitute of trees..."

Although some areas populated by brushland were reported, the vast majority of the southern Texas region was inhabited by grasslands, deserts and savannas. A savanna (called meadow by early explorers) is a grassland with scattered trees.

By the late 1800s, grazing and protection from fire had totally changed the South Texas plains. Brush pockets spread and coalesced first into mottes and then into massive expanses of

brush. Grazing spread species, such as mesquite and huisache, and robbed the soil of moisture for herbaceous plants. By the 1920s, the Brush Country emerged over 10 million acres or more.

East Texas has also changed dramatically. My colleague Dr. Mike Legg and I spent time in the 1970s trying to determine what that region looked like in the early days of development. To our frustration, when asked, most old people had no idea what the land looked like around the turn of the 20th century.

One day, we stopped for a soda at a small store near Milam. Two old black men were sitting on a bench outside the store. We introduced ourselves and sat down to chat. "If you don't mind me asking," Mike said, "how old are you men?" Although they did not look it, both were over 90 years old.

Our next question was about what that country looked like at the beginning of the 20th century. "Nothing like this," one man offered. "There were not as many trees and there was almost nothing under them."

It turned out both men had worked as boys for the first logging teams in the area. Their job was carrying grease buckets for the crews. The trees being cut most were loblolly pines, with some longleaf ridges. Today, a really big loblolly will be 20 or so inches in diameter. In those days, it was common for pines to be more than 30 inches! A single tree could contain 1,000 board feet of lumber.

In researching this column, I ran across a reference by Francis Moore Jr. in 1840. He described the area around San Augustine County as: "The whole surface is gently undulating, and generally supports a heavy growth of timber. There are two or three small prairies in the western part... This county closely resembles the adjoining county of San Augustine..."

To the south of San Augustine lay the area known as the Big Thicket. There is a good reason why it is called that. After

traveling virtually unimpeded through towering pines from Texarkana to the Neches River, explorers encountered an immense tangle of understory shrubs. The area is extremely flat and the soils are often saturated from high rainfall and poor runoff.

As a consequence, the fires that shaped the pine savannas could not invade the area, allowing lush shrubs and understory trees to thrive. This was the land inhabited by bears, ivory-billed woodpeckers, red wolves and mountain lions.

Today, much of the Big Thicket is gone, falling to modern pine timber management, but there are a few remnants included in the Big Thicket National Biological Preserve.

As man changed the land, the affect on wildlife species was profound. Would you be surprised to learn that buffalo, pronghorn and prairie chickens once inhabited the area adjacent to Galveston Island?

The Hill Country contained few whitetails when the Germans arrived. Vast flocks of wild turkeys were easy pickings for the settlers, along with other plains game. In eastern Texas, resident Indians relied mostly on fishing for protein, since there were few deer in that part of the world. There were vast highways over which the Indians traveled to what then was Post Oak Savanna to hunt deer. That region today is nothing more than dense monocultures of post oak clogged underneath by yaupon holly.

One Spanish explorer described seeing what he thought were massive herds of wild horses that turned out to be deer! Turkeys were also abundant among the savannas that once extended from just east of Dallas southward to Luling and Gonzales.

So, you see why I am so perplexed by debates on protecting habitat. What habitat are you talking about? Are you referring to the original habitats that supported much different wildlife populations or the unnatural ones produced by misuse of the land? As I noted above, Daniel Boone is dead; and,

his world is no more!

But, there is an even more insidious force affecting wild places: fragmentation. Texas leads the nation in loss of rural land. The unfortunate truth is a person no longer can support a family through farming or ranching.

The modern Texas, even South Texas, has become a patchwork quilt of smaller and smaller properties. Cattle, sheep and goats are disappearing from the landscape. The only thing standing in the way is wildlife, particularly game animals, such as whitetails.

We may not like having to pay to hunt, but that is the only way we can guarantee there will be wild places and undeveloped land for our children. Hunting is a \$3-plus billion industry, and something that creates no pollution and protects habitats of every kind. Yes, we would like to have ol' Daniel back, but he indeed is dead!

The private landowner is the key to saving natural places—no matter how much we wish otherwise. The alternative is for government to take the land, which we are seeing at an alarming pace.

Remember, in the formative days of this nation, Benjamin Franklin argued to have the wild turkey as the national bird. He noted the bald eagle is a bully bird that makes its living taking from others. Of course, he did not prevail, so the bald eagle became the national symbol. The hunters got the wild turkey and the government got the eagle. Today, there are millions of wild turkeys and the bald eagle is an endangered species!



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