

NORTH COUNTRY NOTEBOOK

by George Vukelich

The miracle of miracles has come to pass. Another springtime is arriving in our country. Flights of southern-fat mallards are streaming into the newly opened Chain of Lakes sloughs. Along the shore of the Big Stone Lake, you can flash your lantern down into the tea-brown waters where the walleyes are stacked like cordwood. And the melting runoff gurgles like a hundred rivers throughout the moon-filled nights.

The north country never seems so fresh, so alive, so eternal, as it does during this time.

The wind no longer seems hostile. The silence no longer remains unbroken. The winter, in a magic moment, is done with and over.

The breeze of a sudden blows soft and warm and southerly.

The days are balmy as wine and punctuated by the cannon cracks of the huge icefield breaking up and rotting away.

The nights are filled with the promise of warmth, smelling of pine and wet sandy roads.

The northland is coming to life for the millionth time and when you hear the goose music again, it makes you feel as old as this land and yet as new as tomorrow's dawn.

In this season of rebirth, in particular, it is an ironic fact of life that in this America of ours — the greatest, most sprawling civilization the world has ever seen — a blight is sweeping across our land, a blight which may prove as deadly as the plagues of the ancient past.

This twentieth-century plague pockmarks our land everywhere.

It is clogged, stagnant streams piled high with detergent foam.

It is automobile junkyards spreading in cancerous open sores.

It is dead robins, poisoned unintentionally, but dead nonetheless, as a by-product of man's search for the worm-free apple.

It is the chain saws howling in the California redwood grove among trees older than any man or any machine.

It is the bone-tired flight of mallards circling desperately over the newly drained marshes where they splashed down and rested only last year.

It is smoked, choked cities where soot falls like a dirty rain.

We do not wish to belabor the point.

We — we Americans — are polluting our water, our earth, the very air that we breathe.

We are destroying our natural resources at a record, reckless pace.

We may, in a very real sense, be eating and exploiting ourselves out of house and home.

Every person in this country — *whether he realizes it or not* — is touched by this twentieth-century plague. We all live with this waste, this blight, this terrible price of our progress.

America is dedicated to Progress and to Change and America is indeed changing. Whether or not this *Change* truly constitutes *Progress* remains a moot point in some scientific quarters.

But it is our way of life. We are dedicated to Change. The hard conclusion is that America, as we know it, is not only changing, it is vanishing before our very eyes.

One writer has called America "God's Own Junkyard." Secretary of the Interior Steward K. Udall has

written that the waste of our resources has produced "A Quiet Crisis."

To worry about Tomorrow is not the majority attitude or inclination. Yet, someone has to worry about Tomorrow, for Tomorrow, whether we like it or not, will dawn, and it will affect *every living thing on this planet*. We must plan for Tomorrow. There is no alternative.



Karl Schmidt, Special Projects Director of WHA-TV, the University of Wisconsin's television station, has indicated the station's willingness to produce a conservation series to be called "Vanishing America" for distribution throughout the state and the nation.

This University of Wisconsin television series would have as its primary goals *an honest cataloging of our problems in the broad field of Natural Resources and an honest search for the scientific solution to these problems*.

To achieve these goals, the university further proposes that its community of scholars and scientists be permitted to participate actively in the television series.

"The Vanishing America" series will be photographed in Wisconsin, employing the entire state as a "living laboratory."

Perhaps the most incisive observation of all came from a Wisconsin mother who attached this note to her personal check. "I do not hunt or fish," she said, "and I was never concerned with Conservation until my husband said that the way things are going, our small sons might never have a chance to chase a little green frog along the creek bank as he did. Now I am concerned."

If you are concerned, you can help make this series of television films possible by sending your contribution to: University of Wisconsin Foundation, Vanishing America TV Project, Post Office Box 2025, Madison, Wisconsin.