

12 May 1962

The Editor of the New Mexican

Dear Sir:

The spraying program announced for June by the Forest Service for control spruce budworm in the Kit Carson and Santa Fe National Forests has not led to the public concern the plan should arouse. In her letter to the New Mexican on Thursday Miss Brennan pointed out that large-scale spraying operations are very hazardous to wildlife and cited unhappy eastern experience. She asked what conservation organizations exist locally to take up the issue.

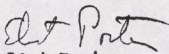
The most active organization in the state is the Wildlife and Conservation Association, but to my knowledge it has confined its concern to the possible poisoning of fish and grasshoppers. Important as these members of the biological community are they are by no means the only ones endangered. The Forest Service assured the W.C.A. that spraying around lake margins and along stream beds would be reduced and that grasshoppers would not be jeopardized because they mature later in the season. That airplane spraying in mountainous country can be so accurately controlled should be questioned.

If the operation is successful in destroying budworms it is certain that it will also kill many other kinds of insects. To shrug off this effect, as the Department of Agriculture has done on other occasions would be to invite ecological disaster. There are at least 25 species of birds that nest within these forest areas including 5 species of warblers, 6 fringillids and 4 or 5 woodpeckers. The peak of their breeding season is in June when they depend on insect food. Either they face starvation, or death from the poison itself which is toxic to birds as well as insects.

The fire ant control program in the south conducted by the Department of Agriculture caused a lot of ~~damage to~~ harm to wildlife because it was carried out without adequate knowledge or preliminary testing. Those who were concerned at the beginning about adverse effects were blandly assured by the department, later dramatically proved wrong, that no harm would come to wildlife. This is not an isolated case of operating in ignorance. There have been others in California and the East.

Studies on budworm infestation in Canada have shown that there is a simultaneous increase in the population of insectivorous birds which acts as a natural control. I have seen spruce budworm infestations on the coast of Maine which have run their natural course without causing noticeable damage to the spruce forest. There is more danger from ruthless operations by a bureaucratic department which sees only one aspect of a situation, in this case timber, and considers other less prominent aspects - insects and song birds - as silly and sentimental, than from the condition it seeks to correct.

Yours sincerely


Eliot Porter