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Stamp issue prompts reflection

The U.S. Postal Service recently issued commemorative stamps that expounded the theme of saving our natural land forms, such as wetlands, grasslands, mountains, woodlands and deserts. Obviously, this presentation would also include all the other life forms associated with these environments and their interrelationships on each other in maintaining these habitats.

The issue of these stamps makes one reflect upon our responsibility in creating conditions of such serious consequence that it now becomes necessary to consider the very real possibility of extinction of these seemingly inexhaustible natural resources.

In man's quest for social, cultural and economic development, environmental processes and wildlife populations have been drastically affected. Man's efforts to realize these goals have created conditions either beneficial or detrimental. Too often it is the latter and most of the time it is due to a lack of knowledge or of not giving serious consideration to the consequences of his acts.

It is understandable that man's association with and dependence upon wildlife in the past has changed to the point of indifference and apathy of today. In the past, wildlife (deer, beaver, etc.) made important and valuable contributions to his life in the form of food and fiber. Now these factors have become secondary in importance. Hunting game today is a form of competitive, recreational sport.

However, whether man realizes the fact or not, he is still dependent upon wildlife to maintain a balance and control of various natural factors. Spiders control insects; bees and butterflies pollinate plants; snakes, coyotes, hawks and owls control rodents; birds scatter seeds; and it is speculated that the ground disturbing rooting of

javelinas assist the germination of seeds due to better water percolation. Equally important to the environment are the activities of earthworms, dung beetles, carpenter ants and woodpeckers. The individual instances in the ecology of nature are endless.

In man's quest to maintain and improve his lifestyle, he has abused the habitats of the wildlife. Examples of this abuse are strip and open-pit mining, overgrazing, poor farming techniques, misplaced housing projects and careless road construction. In most instances, it is unnecessary to inflict such gross damage to the environment.

It behooves one to weigh the economy of the savings today against tomorrow's loss. The technology, imagination, judgement and vision are available to implement a more harmonious co-existence between man and nature.

Admittedly, many mysteries regarding our natural environment and interrelationships within it remain unsolved. However, with present knowledge and continued quest for enlightenment, man can practice reducing habitat and environment destruction. It is hoped man's knowledge will be enough to prevent or nullify future damage.

Land and water are the two basic assets of our very existence. They should be cherished and respected. This ethic needs to become a way of life, for it is not so much that the land is inherited from our forefathers, as it is the present generation borrowing from its children. The birthright should be passed on undiminished in quality and quantity. Or, as so aptly put by Aldo Leopold: "We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a commodity to which we belong—we may begin to use it wisely."