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(possibly Jan. 4, 1974 ?)
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Admin # 395

He put pen to paper for the students at Career Day at In-High School in the spring of (Photo by Ken Gould)

Corson Clamps Muzzle on F&G Sensitive News

By JOHN HARRIGAN

CONCORD, Jan. 4 — From now on, Fish and Game personnel who are asked questions of policy or questions dealing with "potentially sensitive environmental matters" cannot respond to them until the director, Bernard Corson, has seen their response in writing and approved it.

Sources at the department informed the Sunday News of the move this week, and director Corson later confirmed it, saying the measure was caused by "irresponsible statements to the press by department members."

Although Corson qualified his directive by saying that it pertains only to matters concerning official department policy or sensitive environmental issues, and not day-to-day requests for such information as deer kills or rescue operations, the actual inter-department memo contains no such exceptions.

Corson's Dec. 30 memo to all division heads follows:

"I feel it is only responsible on my part to tighten up on the ever-increasing number of irresponsible and isolated statements made to the press by Fish and Game Department personnel. Statements that, more often than not, are made (1) without knowledge on my part of their existence or context and, consequently,

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position.

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(2) without my support or approval.

"The upshot of all this from a departmental image stand-

ing a Concord Monitor article of Dec. 16 stood out in his mind "as a particularly good example." Corson said he had "other examples in mind" but preferred not to detail them.

When asked if he had been prompted to send the directive because of Gov. Meldrim Thomson's reported displeasure over recent statements on thermal pollution attributed to the Fish and Game Department, Corson replied:

"That is absolutely not true. I have had no order from the governor to censor my people. The only thing he has asked me is that any environmental impact statements we prepare be sent to him so he has a chance to see them before they're released."

Sources told the Sunday News that Edward Thornton Sr. of Manchester, a member of the Fish and Game Commission appointed last year by Governor Thomson, had been angered by the Bow discharge article and other statements attributed to Fish and Game concerning such topics as the Onassis oil refinery proposal of last year and the Seabrook nuclear generating plant and possible effects on the environment.

Thornton confirmed his displeasure with the Monitor article and said he is indeed concerned with "leaks" and "self-serving statements" by members of the department concerning sensitive environmental or policy issues.

"Frankly, I came to conclusion that some people up there (at the department) were just shooting off their mouths too often," said Thornton. "The basic facts of the Bow story didn't bother me, but the way the article was done did."

"I didn't know about Mr. Corson's directive, but now that hear of it, perhaps it's a good thing. I'm sure we'll discuss it at the next commission meeting."

"I agree, and I have often defended this, that the gathering of news in a free manner is an absolutely necessary thing. But I also feel that partial or self-serving statements are not helpful."

The Concord Monitor article referred to by Corson as an example of "irresponsible

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"The upshot of all this from a departmental image standpoint is disappointing indeed. Instead of presenting a cohesive, best-foot-forward approach to the public, a rash of ill-planned and impromptu chattering can (and usually does) portray an outfit whose very basic thrust is not particularly well thought out or even aimed collectively at a common target.

"In order to reduce these fractured attempts at statement of policy, please consider the following points effective immediately:

"Each division chief is responsible for knowing who on his staff is about to say what to the press.

"Any such statement cannot be ad-libbed, but must instead be prepared in written form, and submitted to me for approval before any release of any kind is made.

"I apologize to you again for what I know must strike you as an action which is unduly harsh, but I can only justify it once again by making clear to you that such policy is the only workable means we have to reduce the inexcusable number of misquotes and non-jiving department policy statements being made in increasing numbers each day."

When asked by the Sunday News for examples of the "ever-increasing" number of misquotes, Corson replied that

concerned with "leaks" and self-serving statements by members of the department concerning sensitive environmental or policy issues.

"Frankly, I came to conclusion that some people up here (at the department) were just shooting off their mouths a lot," said Thornton. "The basic facts of the Bow story didn't bother me, but the way the article was done did."

"I didn't know about Mr. Corson's directive, but now that I hear of it, perhaps it's a good thing. I'm sure we'll discuss it at the next commission meeting."

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The Concord Monitor article referred to by Corson as an example of "irresponsible" statements appeared on the front page and concerned thermal pollution by the Bow generating station of Public Service and possible monetary difficulties for P.S.C. & N.H. should it have to adhere strictly to Fish and Game's recommended thermal discharge limits in the Merrimack River.

The lead paragraph of the article said: "The N.H. Fish and Game Department has charged that the Public Service Co. of N.H. is 'not even close' to meeting heat pollution standards at its generating station on the Merrimack River at Bow."

The article went on to quote a fisheries research biologist as saying that discharges were 13 degrees warmer than surrounding river water and could endanger planned Atlantic salmon re-introduction next spring.

"This article quoted our own personnel, and I didn't even know what was being said," said Corson. "I don't like my staff ad-libbing to the press on things like environmental impact or department policy."

Corson said he regretted having to take the measure, but added that "it's not all that unusual to have a problem like this when you've got a department with 200 or so employees."