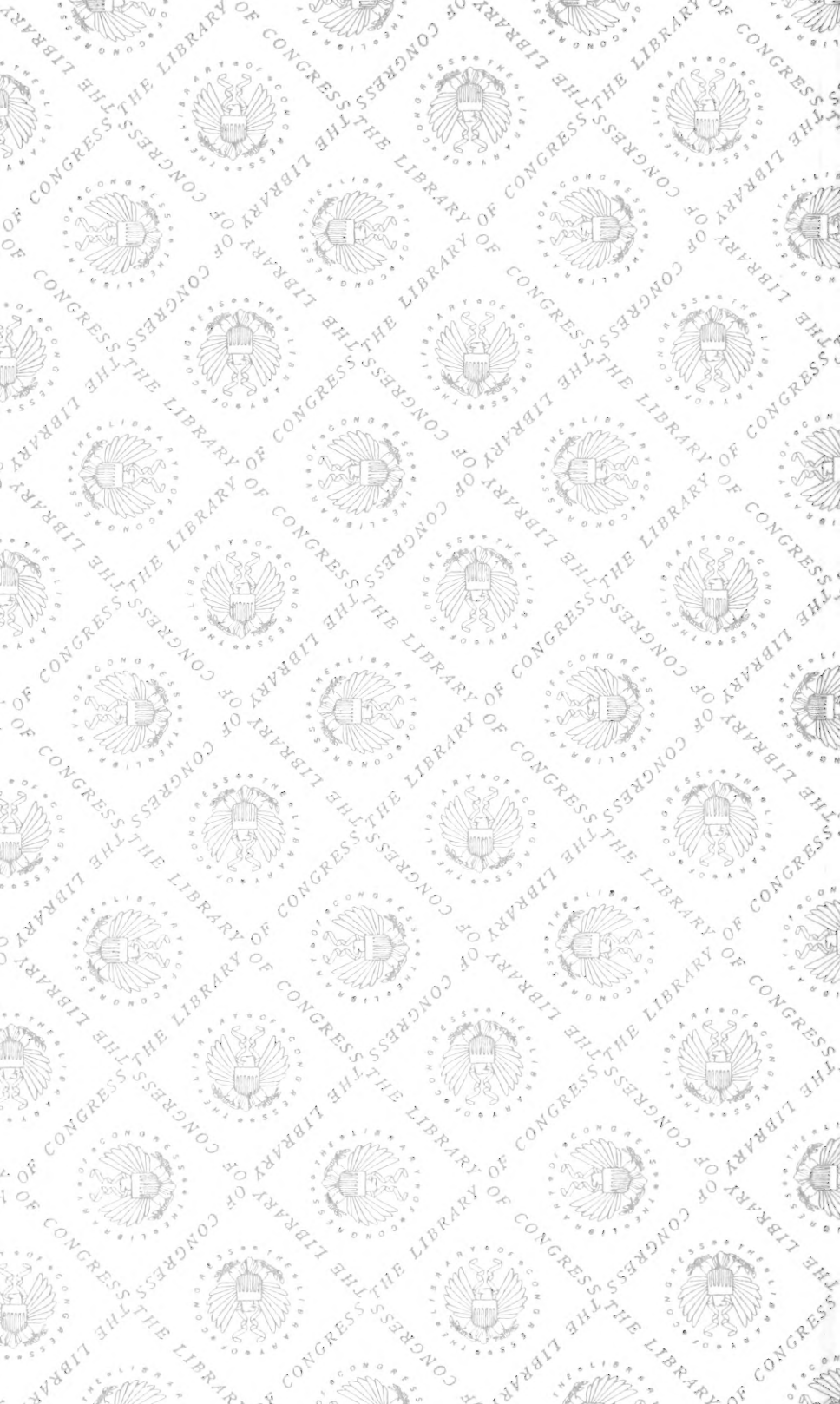
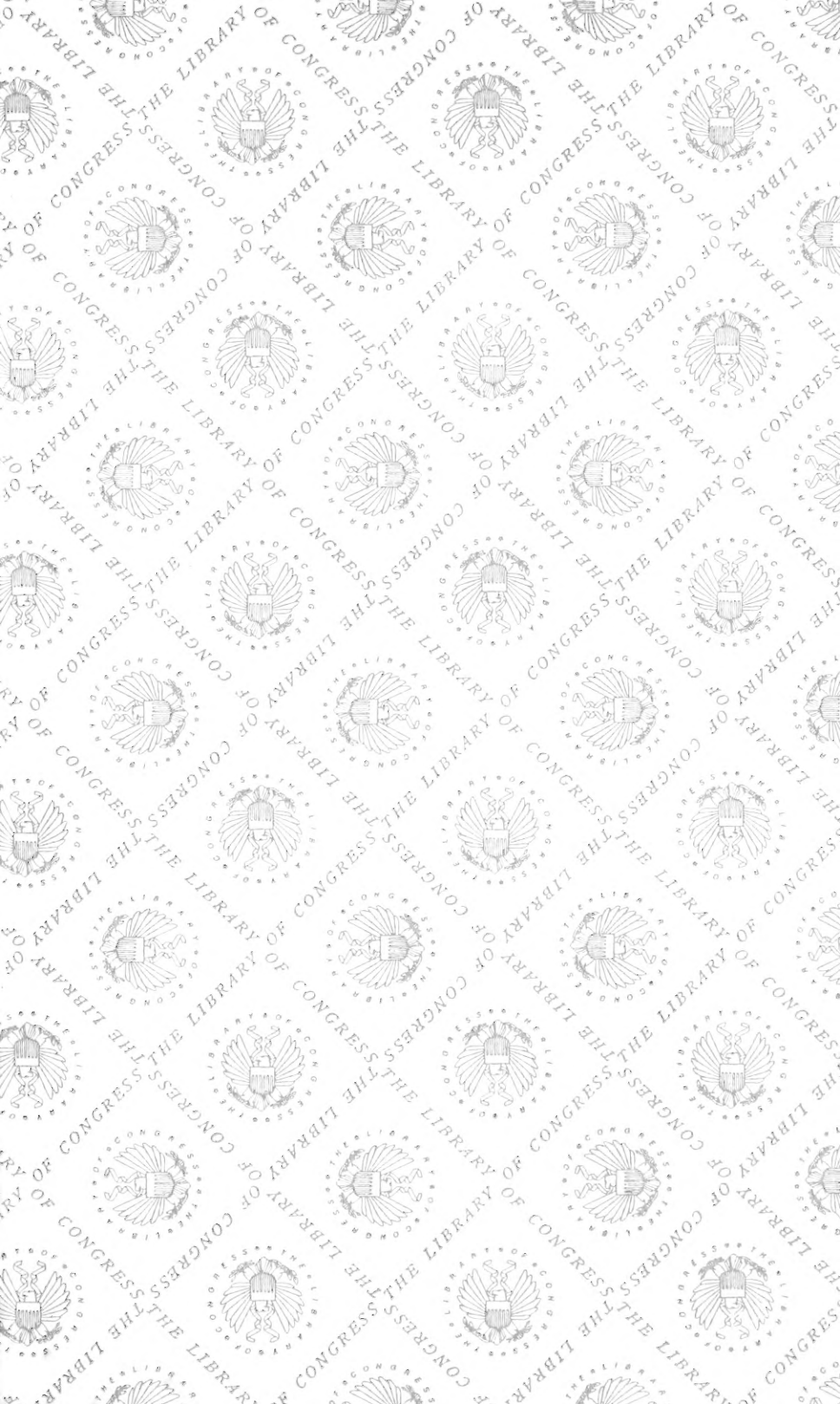


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PROTECTION AND REGULATION OF THE SEAL  
FISHERIES OF ALASKA.

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FEBRUARY 13, 1912.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the state  
of the Union and ordered to be printed.

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<sup>U.S.</sup>  
Mr. FLOOD, from the Committee on Foreign Affairs, submitted the  
following

REPORT.

[To accompany H. R. 20047.]

The Committee on Foreign Affairs, in the consideration of the bill H. R. 16571, which gives effect to the recent convention between the United States and Great Britain, Russia, and Japan, concluded at Washington, July 7, 1911, for the protection of fur seals and sea otter from being killed while in the waters of the Pacific Ocean north of 30 degrees of north latitude, agreed to strike out of said bill all that portion thereof which relates to the killing on land of the surplus young males in the herd frequenting the Pribilof Islands, or American herd, and to present a separate bill to regulate such land killing by officers of the United States Government under the direction of the Secretary of Commerce and Labor.

That committee now reports said bill (H. R. 20047) and recommends that it be passed.

In considering the question of land killing the committee has been actuated by a desire to give every possible protection to the American seal herd and to take every step that will secure the increase and perpetuation of that herd. It has not been able to convince itself, however, that a judicious and carefully regulated culling out of the surplus males at a time when their pelts are commercially valuable, such as has been practiced at least during the American occupation of the seal islands, ever has or will operate to decrease the species or cause it any injury.

The fur seal is a highly polygamous species. One male has been known to fecundate over 100 cows in one season. Two males have been known in one summer to serve over 500 cows between them. Families consisting of one adult male (or "bull") and 75 females (or "cows") are common on the rookeries where these seals breed. At

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a time when there were thousands of adult males present that could not secure any females whatsoever the average ratio between breeding males and females was found to be only 1 male to 30 females.

On the other hand, the births consist of equal numbers of males and females. Because of the polygamous habits of these species, not more than 1 male out of 30 born is necessary to perpetuate the race. The remainder of the males is superfluous and might be destroyed without in any way affecting the future of the species. From a stock-breeder's standpoint, it would be just as useless to preserve all of the superfluous male seals as to save all of the cocks in a flock of chickens, all of the bulls in a herd of cattle, or all the stallions in a band of horses. The bill provides for a close season in 1912; that only 3-year-old males shall be killed thereafter; and that there shall be reserved from among the finest and most perfect seals of that age not fewer than 2,000 in 1913, 2,500 in 1914, 3,000 in 1915, 3,500 in 1916, 4,000 each from 1917 to 1921, inclusive, and 5,000 each year thereafter to 1921. With the bulls now on the islands this makes 60,000 bulls for breeding purposes at the end of this period. A number large enough for the greatest number of cows that anyone has claimed that the herd would contain at the time the treaty ends.

An important economic feature enters into this matter. Between the ages of 3 and 4 years these surplus male seals have pelts which have considerable commercial value. By judicious manipulation of the market in years past, the price at which the sealskins sell has been raised to an average of \$40 each. From the sale of these pelts millions of dollars have been derived, both in profits to those who had leased the privilege of taking these pelts and to the Government as royalties from those skins taken.

This Government for the last two years has done away with the leasing system, has taken these skins itself and marketed them for its own account. In these two years alone the net profits to the Government derived from the sale of sealskins has amounted to over half a million dollars.

The total cessation of land killing would destroy the market for sealskins and cause the price of that skin to drop to an insignificant figure. As the primary object of the Government's solicitude in the fur-seals is that sooner or later it may derive a handsome profit from the sale of these skins, it is a matter of vital importance that the high market value of these skins be maintained during the years that the herd is being built up by the operation of the treaty abolishing pelagic sealing. During the 15 years that the convention abolishing sea killing of females will be in force it is estimated that, from the taking of the skins of those surplus males not necessary for breeding purposes, between \$10,000,000 and \$15,000,000 in revenue can be derived by the Government, while the herd can be increased to nearly three times its present size. Surely this economic consideration, involving the question of millions of dollars of revenue to the Government, should receive earnest attention.

These surplus males, if killed at all, must be killed at a time when their skins have a commercial value, namely, when they are between the ages of 2 and 5 years. After their fourth year the pelt becomes heavy and the fur deteriorates, from the standpoint of the garment maker, to such a point as to be valueless. It would not do to stop all killing for, say, 10 or 15 years, allow the surplus males to grow to



W.D.S. Keenly  
 maturity and then to attempt to kill the animal and sell the skin. The skin then would be worth nothing and would not pay for the cost of transportation to the market. If killed at all, these animals must be slaughtered at a time when they are young, when their fur is smooth and glossy, and when the hide itself is light in weight and easily made into a garment.

In considering the question of the effect upon the increase of the species of killing these surplus males the views of scientists and those perfectly familiar with the subject have been taken into account. It may be said that of all those who have testified before this committee only two persons were found to be opposed to this killing of the young males, while a much larger number of eminent experts have given their testimony in favor of a moderate and properly restricted killing.

Dr. David Starr Jordan, president of Stanford University, was the head of a distinguished commission in 1896-1897 that visited the seal islands and made an exhaustive study of the seal herd. In the report of this commission, made as the result of this investigation, Dr. Jordan said:

Owing to the polygamous habit of the fur seals, the greater part of the male life born is superfluous for breeding purposes. For the 130,000 breeding cows found on the rookeries of St. Paul and St. George Islands in the season of 1897, 4,418 bulls were adequate, or at least out of fully 10,000 adult bulls ready and willing to serve harems, only this number were able to obtain them. Therefore only 1 bull in 30 is absolutely necessary under present conditions. That this limit could be materially lowered without positive danger to the herd is conclusively shown by the history of the Russian herd on Bering Island, where the observations of the past three years, as detailed by Dr. Stejneger, show that a male fur seal is capable of attending to the wants of between 100 and 200 cows.

Moreover, the removal of the superfluous male life is not only possible but is really beneficial to the herd. As already indicated, the only deaths among adult bulls and cows discovered upon the rookeries of the islands resulted from the struggles of the bulls among themselves to obtain possession of the cows. In the death of young pups also this fighting and struggling of the bulls is a small but by no means insignificant cause of loss. In 1896 the great early mortality among nursing pups was wrongly ascribed to the trampling of the fighting bulls. But while the more complete and satisfactory investigation of 1897 shows another and more important cause, there still remains a considerable loss from this source. This loss is now insignificant compared with what it was in the wild state of the herd. When the number of adult males and females was practically equal, the destruction both among the cows and among the pups must have been enormous.

Dr. Leonhard Stejneger, head curator of biology, United States National Museum, who has spent a number of years on the Russian seal islands studying seal life, and who was a member of the Jordan Commission of 1896-97, makes the following statement:

It was the unanimous opinion of the American-British Commission (Dr. D. S. Jordan, F. A. Lucas, L. Stejneger, Prof. d'Arcy W. Thompson, J. M. Macoun, and G. E. H. Barrett-Hamilton) that the proportion of 1 bull to 30 cows was so excessive that a number of bulls were ordered killed off. The islands are at present (1897) grossly overstocked with bulls, and yet the average size of the harem is about 30 cows. (Treasury Doc. 1994, p. 22.)

The present ratio of 1 to 40 is consequently a great improvement and, even if it should fall as low as 1 to 50, or even 1 to 60, as it may in 1905, no alarm need be felt, as 1 bull to 50 cows is probably the most satisfactory ratio to be had.

That close killing of males on land may have had an influence is utterly denied. The whole reasoning involved in such an explanation rests upon the fallacy of the assumption that all the male seals "haul out" on land each year. If all the seals "hailed out" and the killing were as close as alleged, there would be nothing but yearlings the next year, and we know, of course, that such is not the case. I need not enlarge upon this theme here, but will only quote the expert commission of 1896-97 to the following effect: "It is, indeed, to be doubted whether at any time the killing

on the islands could by any possibility be made close enough to endanger the supply of bulls, etc."

One of the British commissioners, Mr. Barrett-Hamilton, who in his report for 1896 held similar views with regard to the scarcity of bulls on North Rookery, Bering Island, abandoned them later after his additional experience of 1897.

From what I have stated above, it will be seen that I regard the status of the fur-seal herd on the Pribilof Islands to be as satisfactory as under the present circumstances (i. e., continued, though diminishing, pelagic sealing) it could possibly be. My own policy, therefore, would be to let well enough alone.

I realize, however, that the department may wish to be "on the safe side," and in that case I can see no special reason why the general agent of the islands should not be instructed to see to it that of the older bachelor seals a number satisfactory to him be exempt from being killed in the drives.

On the other hand there should be no restriction as to the killing of the smaller bachelor seals. Only a minor proportion of these "haul out," and the only result of their killing is that the company anticipates part of next year's catch and gets smaller skins than it otherwise would. It should, therefore, be left entirely to the company to decide how small skins they want to take, as the company itself will be the only sufferer.

The taking of these young bachelors can not, by any possibility, affect the status of the herd, and from the standpoint of the Government must be regarded as desirable, in so much as there will be that many seals less for the pelagic sealers to prey upon. The company, therefore, might properly be encouraged to take as many yearling males as they can. \* \* \* From what I have explained in the two foregoing chapters, it may be inferred that I am opposed to any stoppage of the killing of seals on land.

Dr. F. A. Lucas, now curator in chief of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, as a member of the Jordan Commission of 1896-97, reported as follows on this subject:

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY,

*New York, August 17, 1911.*

DEAR SIR: I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of August 14, with its accompanying documents, in which you ask for my opinion regarding the merits of House resolution 277, suspending the killing of fur seals on the seal islands of Alaska for 15 years.

In response to this, I wish to say that I regard such suspension of killing as absolutely unnecessary as well as impractical and unscientific. I have never seen the slightest reason to modify my view that up to the present time the killing on land has had no effect in diminishing the numbers of the fur-seal herd; and there is no reason why a carefully regulated killing should do so in the future.

The suspension of land killing is impractical, because it would result in the absolute waste of many thousands of sealskins and many hundreds of thousands of dollars; this, too, at a time when, by treaty, Japan and Canada are to have a share in the proceeds of seals killed by the United States. Incidentally, I would say that in a period of 15 years every seal now living would die from old age or from other natural causes. Furthermore, it would seem that such suspension would be a direct attempt to evade our treaty obligations to Japan and Canada.

The cessation of killing is unscientific for the following reasons: We have for the first time an opportunity to test the conditions of the seal herd when unaffected by the attack of pelagic sealers, and it is of the utmost importance, for the making of future treaties and regulations, that we should know the exact facts in the case. The arbitrary suspension of killing for a period of 15 years would be extremely unwise, as we know, from observations of seals made on Robben Island and of sea elephants on Kerguelen Island, that a seal herd that has been reduced almost to extinction will so recover in from 5 to 10 years as to yield a large number of killable males.

Finally, as has so often been stated, there is not the slightest danger of exterminating animals like the fur seals where their breeding grounds are guarded. How much less is the danger when the actual killing can be regulated year by year according to the numbers present.

The sole suggestion I would make would be that in the event that pelagic sealing is actually ended, a smaller number of males be killed for two or three years to come. But this is a matter for the fur-seal and advisory boards to consider.

I remain, very respectfully, yours,

F. A. LUCAS.

Dr. F. W. True, for many years head curator of biology, United States National Museum, now assistant secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and special investigator on the seal islands in 1895, says:

It does not appear to me that any serious concern need be felt as regards the condition of the herd in 1903 and the prospects for the immediate future. It appears that in the breeding herd in 1903 there was approximately 1 bull to 42 cows. Should the increase in bulls and increase in cows continue in the same ratio in 1904 as in 1903, there would be approximately 1 bull to 54 cows. I think that the decrease in bulls might proceed until there was only 1 bull to 100 cows without menacing the welfare of the herd. If this view is correct, there is time for many years' observations before it would be imperatively necessary to take steps for the preservation of the herd from extinction.

The following extracts are taken from the report of the Bering Sea fur-seal investigations, by David Starr Jordan, assisted by Leonard Stejneger, Frederic Augustus Lucas, and George Archibald Clark, 1897. (Second Preliminary Report, Treasury Doc. 1994).

The investigations of the present season have only served to confirm the conclusion reached last year, that killing, as practiced on land, has no connection whatever with the decline of the herd. Such killing is, and has been for half a century, confined to superfluous males, whose removal is a benefit rather than an injury. It would have been better for the herd if land killing had not been limited by the *modus vivendi*. The rookeries to-day are overstocked with adult bulls, which in their struggles to gain possession of the females tear them to pieces and trample their offspring.

The only way in which land killing could injuriously affect the herd is through a reduction of the male life to a point below that required for propagation. The records of the islands show that there was never anything approaching a dearth of breeding bulls on the rookeries. The mere fact that 14 years after the islands came into the possession of the United States approximately 100,000 seals were taken each year without difficulty shows that the usual birth rate was maintained. That the land killing was not connected with the decline of the herd at its beginning—about the years 1882-1885—may reasonably be inferred from the fact that in the years 1876-77 only 175,000 males were killed, whereas the total for 1875 and 1878 was 215,000, and for the five years preceding and succeeding a like proportionate number was taken. (This included pups taken for food in the fall.) The 40,000 males thus saved out in 1876-77 were of breeding age in 1882, and were still in their prime in 1885 and the subsequent years of decline.

Dr. Charles H. Townsend, director of the New York Aquarium, for many years naturalist on the Fisheries steamer *Albatross*, member of the Fur-Seal Commission of 1896 and 1897, and for nine seasons special investigator on the seal islands, says:

My last visit to the islands was in the year 1900, when the number of surplus of nonbreeding males was much larger than it is now. At that time and for years before the number of large nonbreeding males in the rear of the breeding grounds was so large that I advised a closer degree of killing by the lessees than had been the custom. The slaughter of females by pelagic sealers had been for years very heavy and the relative number of breeding males was on the increase. The lessees were then taking only the skins of what we were accustomed to regard as 3-year-olds, weighing perhaps 9 pounds or over. As the younger class of males, unlike the breeding males, wander away from the islands at times to feed, I advised that the lessees be permitted to take the smaller 4-year-olds. This was for the double purpose of increasing the catch by the lessees and decreasing the sea catch. This has naturally resulted in lessening the relative number of nonbreeding males.

I am well acquainted with the present Government agents on the islands, having had them associated with me for several seasons while making the annual counts of both male and female seals present. I accept the figures which they furnish, knowing that they come from conscientious and careful observers.

Your statistics show that there is still a margin of over 500 young idle bulls. This surplus has occurred naturally, and shows that the policy of close killing of males has been a safe one.

As this surplus is decreasing from year to year, the time has evidently come to make provision for the saving of more breeding males. I would advise that the number taken

by the lessees annually be curtailed and that the catch on land consist, as in former years, of practically 3-year-olds; it may be possible to add to this number a few of the larger 2-year-olds; certainly none of the larger size, i. e., those whose skins weigh over 9 pounds, should be taken.

Your statistics do not show what proportion of the land catch consisted of seals over 3 years old. Your agents can furnish you that information.

Indeed, if you wish to secure an immediate increase in the number of surplus males, you might restrict the catch absolutely to 3-year-olds. This will cover the number required for food, and will give the lessees a chance to continue operations for two or three years on a small scale.

I am not willing to admit that the danger point is reached until all idle bulls adjacent to the rookeries disappear.

A complete cessation of killing would remedy such a condition very rapidly, but in order that your department may be provided against criticism, I would counsel an immediate curtailment in about the manner above described. A total cessation of killing would increase the number of males more rapidly than is necessary, and would simply add an important number of valuable male skins to the pelagic catch.

As above stated, as long as there is a surplus of any kind the breeding grounds are safe. If there were any lack of adult males in the rookeries the so-called half bulls adjacent to the breeding grounds would at once be absorbed by the rookeries.

This subject has received the most thorough study at different times during the last dozen years at the hands of the foremost biologists of this country, spending months on the islands. I don't believe that the natural history of any wild animal of commercial importance is as well known as that of the fur seal.

The diminution of the fur seal is due to pelagic sealing. It is worse than idle to attribute it in any way to our management of the islands.

I am not in sympathy with the measures set forth in the Senate bill referred to. It is not necessary to entirely cease killing males on land, for the reasons stated above. I would not for a single instant be party to any proposed killing of females. It would be an utterly immoral proceeding. We have no right to destroy the source of supply of anything useful to man simply because we can not control all the output.

Negotiations looking toward the cessation of pelagic sealing is the only logical and moral cure for the decrease of the seal herd. The killing of females on the islands must never be permitted. (Townsend, in letter to F. H. Hitchcock, Mar. 7, 1904.)

George A. Clark, secretary, Stanford University; secretary fur-seal commissions of 1896 and 1897; and special investigator (for the Government) on the seal islands in 1909, says:

I do not see that Mr. Elliott's contention that the land killing has yet endangered the breeding herd, or is likely to in the near future, is worthy of serious consideration. The very fact that the herd has supplied a quota of from 20,000 to 15,000 skins each year since 1896 is in itself proof that there has been no lack of breeding males for the rookeries. That there should be a decline in the quota must be conceded, but the cause of this is naturally to be sought in the killing of breeding females, with the attendant loss of young through starvation and otherwise due to pelagic sealing. (Clark in letter to Hitchcock, Dec. 30, 1903.)

No naturalist has enjoyed better opportunities for studying fur-seal problems than has Dr. Leonhard Stejneger, head curator of biology in the United States National Museum. After living for several years on the Commander Islands, where he carefully studied the Russian seal rookeries, he again returned to those islands in 1897 as a member of the fur-seal commission and made very exhaustive investigations on the rookeries and hauling grounds. He also visited and carefully studied the Japanese seal rookeries and our own seal islands. No one is better qualified by ability as a biologist or by experience to speak authoritatively on the various fur-seal questions.

From Dr. Stejneger's official report on the rookeries of the Commander Islands, season of 1897, page 16, in speaking of the action of the Russian managers of the Pribilof Islands in 1835, when they prohibited all land killing of males under the mistaken idea that thereby they could increase the species, and an identical action of the American Government in dealing with the same herd in 1891-1893, says:

What was the result? A single additional female on the rookeries? No; loss to the lessees and the Government of the bachelors spared; a corresponding gain to the pelagic sealers; a deplorable superabundance of bulls on the Pribilof rookeries, and numerous pups trampled to death soon after their birth. America has thus paid very dearly for her blunder. Are the Russians going to repeat it?

Edwin W. Sims, United States attorney for northern district of Illinois, Solicitor Department of Commerce and Labor, and special investigator on the seal islands in 1906, says:

That the decrease in seal life on the Pribilof Islands is due solely to pelagic sealing can not be seriously questioned. "Owing to the polygamous habit of fur seals," states the report of the Jordan Commission, "the greater part of the male life born is superfluous for breeding purposes. For the 130,000 breeding cows found on the rookeries of St. Paul and St. George Islands in the season of 1897, 4,418 bulls were adequate, or at least out of fully 10,000 bulls ready and willing to serve harems only this number were able to obtain them. Therefore, only one bull in thirty is absolutely necessary under present conditions. That this limit could be materially lowered without positive danger to the herd, is conclusively shown by the history of the Russian herd on Bering Island, where the observations of the past three years, as detailed by Dr. Stejneger, show that a male fur seal is capable of attending to the wants of between 100 and 200 cows." (Report of Fur Seal Investigations, 1896-97, pt. 1, p. 119.)

These quotations might be multiplied to show the belief of these gentlemen that abstention of land killing of surplus males is not an advantage to the herd, but is a positive detriment in that it increases the fighting amongst the adult bulls, causes an increase in the death rate through the crushing of the newly born, and the tearing of cows to pieces in endeavoring to snatch them from other harems, and involves a great money loss to the Government represented by the value of the pelts which could have been taken. Enough has been given, however, to show that such action on the part of this Government would be useless and without reason.

On the other hand, as has been stated, the only persons who oppose land killing are Messrs. Henry W. Elliott and Dr. W. T. Hornaday. The committee has not been blind to the fact that the former, Mr. Elliott, has for years urged an aggressive campaign against the practice of killing seals on land, and in urging his contention has shown such a deviation in his views as to make him an unsafe adviser. Dr. Hornaday, it develops, has never been upon the seal islands, and therefore has not had that opportunity to equip himself with facts gathered from actual observation as would make him a competent witness on the subject.

From all this, the committee must conclude that land killing of seals not required as breeders, properly regulated and safeguarded by the assurance of an ample supply of young males to survive to serve the females, is not only justifiable but expedient. It has taken into view the experience of the Russians when in 1835 they stopped the killing of female seals on land, and increased the herd vastly in a few years while at the same time killing a limited number annually of young seals. It has considered that the abstention from killing these seals in any numbers by our Government in 1891-1893 did not in any way increase the number of breeding seals but merely provided thousands of surplus and idle adult bulls, whose skins were valueless, whose presence was a positive detriment, and which died finally of old age without ever having had a female consort. From all these considerations it feels justified in reporting this bill which, without absolutely abolishing land killing, curtails it within limits that leave no possible ground for fear of the safety of the herd, now that pelagic sealing, which has been the sole cause of the great decrease in the herd during the last 20 years, will cease, and provides that before any killing whatsoever is done on land, a breeding reserve from the finest and most vigorous young males be established and thereafter rendered safe from all killing on land.

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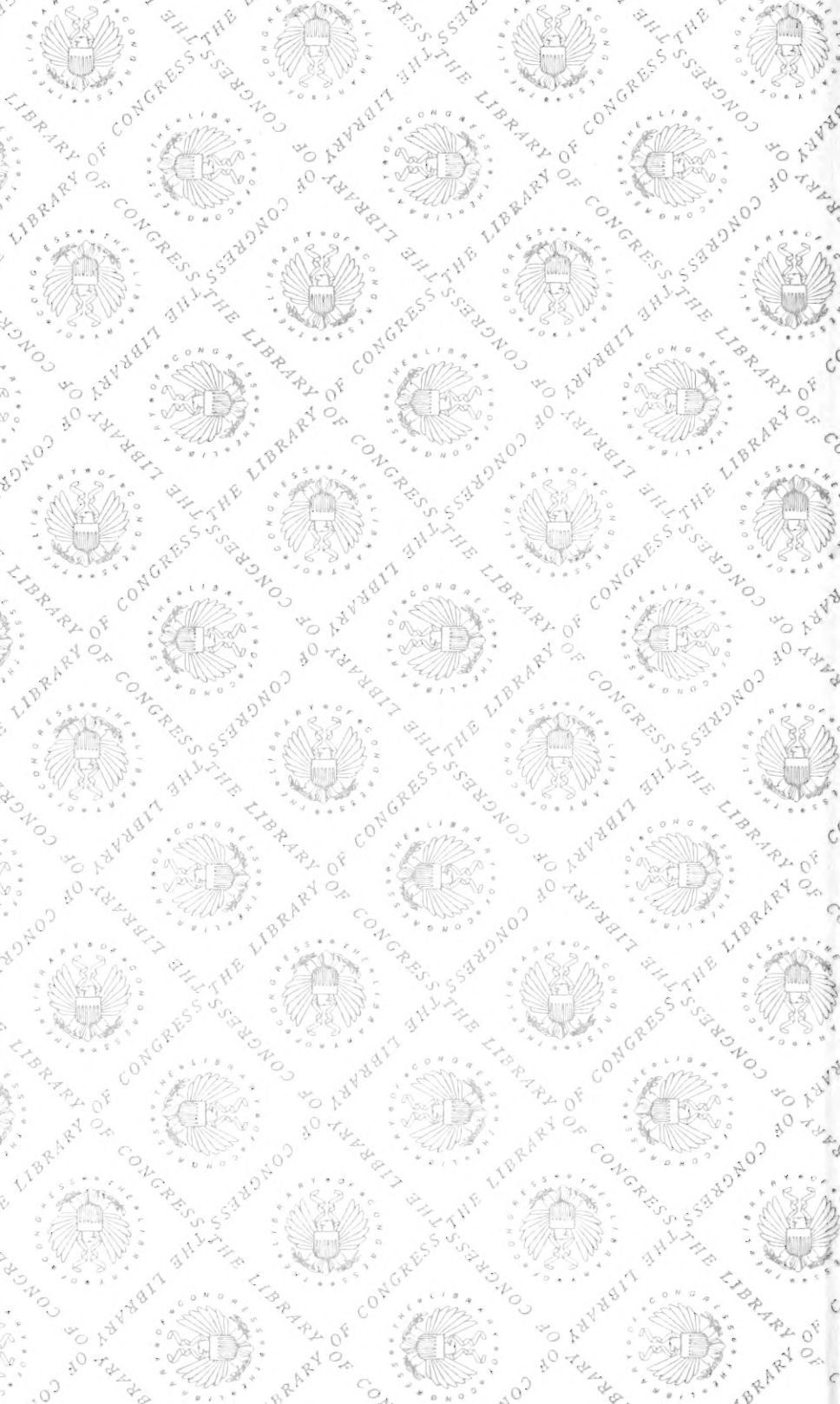


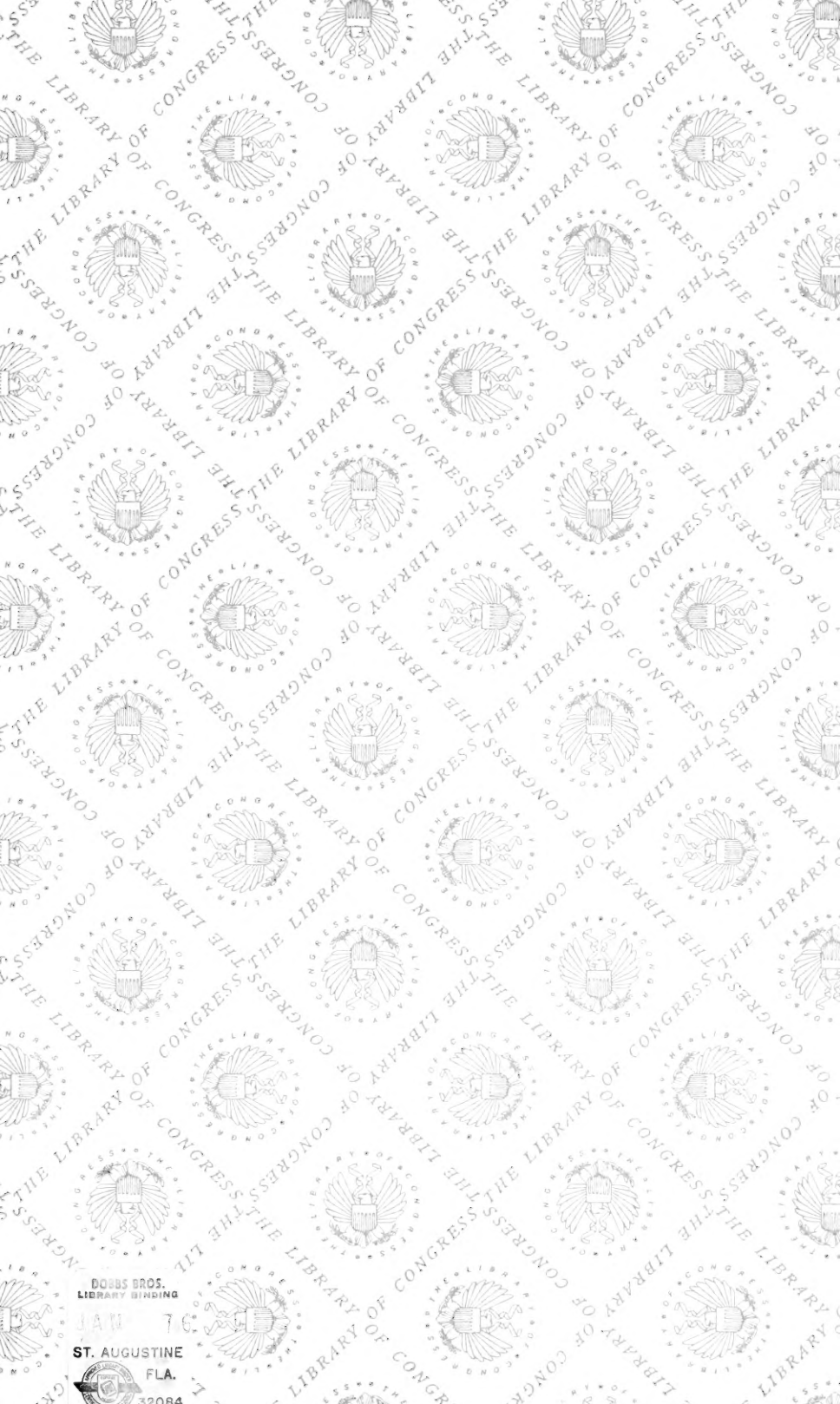












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