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USDA-Extension Wildlife and Fisheries Educational Programs 1978-2000

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Abstract: This paper provides a brief overview of the history of USDA-Extension wildlife and fisheries programs at the national level, with emphasis on the years 1978-2000. Portions of the earlier history of Extension wildlife and fisheries programs at the national level can be found in previous proceedings of these National conferences and in other publications (see Miller 1981). This review of programs conducted or influenced by the National Program Leader (NPL) during the period is a brief snapshot in time regarding the presence of an experienced and motivated professional serving in the NPL wildlife and fisheries position.

Key Words: Extension, fisheries, history, National Program Leader, overview, wildlife

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Introduction

Impetus for development of a national presence in Extension wildlife and fisheries educational programs originated in the mid-1930s (see Smith 1936) and periodically was highlighted but largely ignored by Extension Service, USDA, until some wake-up efforts by state Extension wildlife and fisheries specialists, who began conducting the first of these national meetings in 1972. This growing impetus was followed by a landmark meeting in 1977 (for which, unfortunately, we have no recorded proceedings) that helped achieve increased nationwide support from other state and federal natural resource agencies and conservation organizations, resulting in congressional support for expanded natural resources programs in Extension.

Passage of the Renewable Resources Extension Act (RREA) of 1978 (not funded until 1981) had a major impact on Extension educational program delivery through providing the impetus for establishment of a Natural Resources Unit within Extension Service, USDA. The first Deputy Administrator for that Unit was a seasoned and experienced natural resource professional, Merrill L. "Pete" Petoskey. Petoskey immediately proceeded to reshape and strengthen the agency's support for natural resources programs present and future: he proactively advocated expanding Extension natural resources programs at the state and national levels within a system that traditionally had looked at natural resources as adjunct to agriculture; he recognized that many Extension audiences had expressed interest in dedicated efforts in wildlife and fisheries educational programs since the 1930s; and that there was a significant amount of support within some of the major conservation organizations and agencies for expanded Extension natural resource programs. "Pete", as we all came to know him, quickly revamped and reorganized the existing Natural Resources Unit within Extension Service, USDA, and filled the position of National Program Leader (NPL) in wildlife and fisheries. This position had been established in 1936 but only filled for two years (1936-37 and 1969-70) until 1979, when I was encouraged by Petoskey to leave my position with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to take the position. From 1979 through 2000, the NPL Wildlife and Recreational Fisheries position provided program continuity and a viable and responsive federal contact for state Extension natural resource specialists and for the conservation community.

Outside Support

Another wildlife professional who provided strong influence and support for this expanded Extension effort in natural resources was Jack H. Berryman, a long-time employee of USFWS and a former Extension wildlife specialist at Utah State University. Berryman was a major contributor to the creation of the Office of Extension Education within USFWS in 1978. He also coordinated with others in developing an effective Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that established the mechanism for cooperative funding of

state Extension wildlife and fisheries programs, projects, activities, and products. This program continues today, although significantly reduced by changing budgets and agency priorities. However, many, many excellent Extension wildlife and fisheries products, programs, and activities have been developed via this cooperation over the years since 1979. Berryman and others continued this strong support for Extension programs via collaboration with the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and other conservation organizations. Other individuals and organizations that significantly influenced the passage of RREA and provided continuing support for expanding Extension natural resource programs, included leaders like Dr. Laurence R. "Larry" Jahn and the Wildlife Management Institute. There were others leaders, such as John Gottschalk, Neil Sampson, Dan Poole, and G. R. "Pink" Gutermuth, who provided their support, encouragement, and wise counsel along the way.

Program Foundation and Direction

The need for an effective and efficient two-way Extension wildlife and fisheries communication network was immediately recognized by the new NPL in 1979 as a necessity for providing national program leadership, and progressively this network advanced both state and federal programming capabilities and effectiveness. The frequent interactions between the NPL with natural resource professionals in other federal and state agencies resulted in being able to alert state wildlife and fisheries specialists in a timely manner about new opportunities for cooperative funding for grants and contracts, as well as significant changes in programs and activities. Additional efforts included Extension finding a place at the table for federal policy-making, such as being a major participant in the development of a USDA Policy on Wildlife and Fisheries (USDA 1983), and continuing efforts to highlight the Extension role in wildlife management education of private landowners. Other efforts included assisting in the development of the Eastern Conference on Wildlife Damage Management, helping obtain cooperators for support of the development of the handbook *Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage*, assisting in the development of the National Aquaculture Policy, obtaining support for a NPL in Aquaculture position, and in developing Cooperative Agreements (CAs) and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between Extension and other natural resource agencies and organizations for the benefit of Extension programs across the nation. Increasing the significance of Extension wildlife and fisheries programs through focusing our programs on assisting private landowners to better manage for increased wildlife and fisheries productivity was a major goals of the RREA. Proactive efforts to highlight successful Extension wildlife and fisheries programs resulted in presentations at the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference by one or more Extension wildlife or fisheries specialists almost annually from 1977 to 2004. Similar presentations at other regional and national meetings effectively contributed to broader support. Increased cooperation with other federal and state agencies, which recognized the mutual benefits of cooperating with Extension to use its effective delivery system, enhanced the visibility regionally and nationally about the impacts of Extension wildlife and fisheries educational programs. Other examples included Extension wildlife and fisheries participation in the development and implementation of the Conservation Provisions in the 1985 Farm Bill (although our Extension administration failed miserably to capitalize on the "once in a lifetime" opportunity to obtain a significant budget increase from Congress, and this failure continues to limit future Extension contributions to subsequent Farm Bills). Our participation in developing better understanding by our colleagues within the USFWS and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) helped implement the Endangered Species Act by streamlining efforts to map county-by-county T & E habitats and by helping develop the Safe Harbor Concept. Extension wildlife and fisheries professionals were instrumental in resolving major pending conflicts between private landowners and regulatory agencies. Part of the reason for the success in these and other efforts was our effective delivery of research-based educational programs to grass-roots clientele on private lands, and the strong credibility of local Extension personnel in helping coordinate the interaction between local stakeholders and appropriate agency personnel.

Indirect Program Benefits

Not only have Extension wildlife and fisheries programs been influential with private landowners, but they also had great success with 4-H youth. Significant expansion of 4-H youth natural resources educational programs included development of the National 4-H Shooting Sports Program, the National 4-H Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Program, the National 4-H Sportsfishing Program, and the interagency supported National 4-H Wildlife and Fisheries Volunteer Leader Recognition Program, all developed during the 1980s. All of these programs continue today, except it looks as though the Volunteer Leaders Recognition Program, which has been conducted annually in conjunction with the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference from 1980 to 2006, may be eliminated because of a lack of interest and leadership within CSREES. The many co-sponsors who came to the table and the increased national and international visibility of these programs didn't just happen. Many of you or the professionals you followed were major contributors to these successes. Effective networking, improved state and federal cooperation, increased visibility, and your pro-activeness and dogged determination to assist private landowners in improving resource management on private lands, have contributed immeasurably to the increased knowledge of people throughout this nation as well as internationally.

Because of our effectiveness in program development and implementation, many Extension wildlife and fisheries specialists have been recognized as leaders within their agency or university administration, as well as within their professional societies and related conservation and citizen organizations. Many of you have served as an officer or president of your state chapters of The Wildlife Society, or the regional sections of the American Fisheries Society, or the Society for Range Management. Several Extension specialists have served on The Wildlife Society Council as regional representatives and as national officers. Others have become department heads, deans, vice presidents, and vice provosts within their University, or leaders of some of the major conservation organizations. Aside from these examples, you are involved as members and leaders of national committees, advisory and working groups, and editors and reviewers of national scientific publications, journals, and bulletins. Many of you have achieved significant national and international credibility and visibility for the quality of your programs, publications, and presentations at major national and international professional meetings. You have earned and are deserving of exemplary respect and credibility within your profession.

Major Program Impacts

If I were to attempt to rank the top five major impacts of Extension wildlife and fisheries educational programs and professionals over the past 30 years, my list, which many of you may likely disagree with, would include the following:

1) Extension wildlife and fisheries educational programs targeted to assist private landowners in enhancement of wildlife and fisheries management on private lands have contributed immeasurably to the increased participation and investment by private landowners in better managing wildlife and fisheries resources on millions of acres land throughout North America and internationally. These efforts also have played a major role in convincing and enabling other state and federal agencies and the Congress to substantially increase support and direction within these natural resources agencies for technical and financial assistance programs specifically targeted to private lands management programs and partnerships. It probably would have happened eventually, but I am confident that Extension wildlife and fisheries programming examples during the 1980-1990 decade substantially reduced the time it would have taken otherwise to cause this major shift in emphasis, policy change, and funding.
2) Extension wildlife and fisheries educational programs in wildlife damage management (WDM) have contributed significantly to the professional evolution of wildlife damage management's acceptance and current status within the wildlife profession, as well as throughout the conservation community. Leadership for, and active participation in, conferences such as the Vertebrate Pest Conference, the Wildlife Damage Management Conference and its predecessors, and publications such as the proceedings of these conferences and the reference volume *Prevention and Control of Wildlife*

Damage have contributed significantly to this professional evolution. In addition, the continuing education programs that many of you have conducted within your states for landowners and other wildlife and natural resources professionals also have contributed to this greater awareness and professional recognition of WDM.

3) The 4-H Natural Resource Programs, and especially those National Programs mentioned above, are nationally and internationally recognized as some of, if not *the most effective* youth education programs in natural resources that exist today, and this expansion of efforts and significant increase in member and volunteer leader participation would not have happened without Extension wildlife and fisheries specialists' initiative and development of cooperative support for these programs.

4) The increased state, regional, national, and international visibility gained by Extension wildlife and fisheries professionals and the educational programs they produced have stimulated expanded involvement of these professionals into service and contributions to policy and decision-making within major conservation organizations and agencies that previously did not acknowledge that these programs existed. In addition, the growing visibility and credibility of Extension wildlife and fisheries programs gained through increased participation in national and international conferences and meetings helped develop the exemplary trust and confidence in these programs and in the professionals who conducted them among all major conservation organizations and the entire natural resource community. Examples include the development of the USDA Fish and Wildlife Policy (1983), contributions to the development of Farm Bill conservation provisions, development of nationally and internationally recognized scientific publications and programs, service as professional society leaders, and serving as major contributors to many conservation organizations, via service on, or leadership for, working groups, advisory boards, and as committee members.

5) The maturing and matriculation of many former Extension wildlife and fisheries specialists into leadership and administrative positions within their institution, or within major conservation organizations because of their: a) productivity; b) increasing expertise and comprehensive growth in administrative effectiveness; c) enthusiasm for the goals and objectives of their agency or institution; d) administrative capabilities for leadership, as recognized by their peers and administrators; and e) the confidence and trust they have earned.

Discussion

The above review of our collective efforts and influence in improving wildlife and recreational fisheries, and related natural resource management generally indicates that the investment within USDA-Extension Service (and since 1995, USDA-CSREES) of funds and manpower in the NPL position has been, unquestionably, a wise one. Certainly, as this nation faces the increased demands of a growing and diverse population and changing uses of its natural resources, especially on private lands, there is a greater need than ever for proactive leadership of Extension wildlife and fisheries educational programs to better assist the nation's landowners and managers to sustain these critical resources. Although this need seems blatantly obvious to those engaged in these professions, timely efforts and input needs to be provided now and in the future to organize and sustain support for revitalization of the NPL Wildlife and Recreational Fisheries position within USDA-CSREES. Recent projections are that the world's population is expected to increase by >1 billion people to 7.5 billion in less than 15 years, with <5 percent of that occurring in developed countries. However, the growing international demand for food, other products, and development will continue to place more stress on the dwindling natural resource base in the United States that most of us are passionately concerned about sustaining, and the challenges of helping private landowners better manage their natural resources becomes greater every day.

Obviously, I could elaborate on any and all aspects of these examples of contributions and program successes, naming names and heaping credit on my colleagues past and present, but surely you recognize and acknowledge at least some of the things I have alluded to. I have enjoyed the distinct pleasure of having (in my opinion) a truly rewarding and enjoyable 40+ year career, a great deal of which was made possible by

having the pleasure of working with some of the finest and most dedicated professionals in the world. One of the neat things about this was that collectively, all of my Extension colleagues were smarter, more effective in developing and delivering educational programs, and better linked to the needs of clientele in their states than I ever could have been, and they were and continue to be exemplary communicators. Any success I might have achieved was predominantly because I was blessed with some great mentors who were always honest and forthright in their evaluation, criticism, and occasional "at-a-boy's", and the many respected colleagues that I had the opportunity to work with and for.

Some of those are no longer with us but always will be remembered for their contributions and the legacy of wise stewardship they left with us. You have heard some examples of successful and innovative Extension programs, opportunities, and activities, why they worked and maybe why they didn't, from my respected colleagues and friends on this panel. I want to congratulate them for traveling on their own dollars to attend and participate on this panel and those others who are either retired or former Extension wildlife and fisheries specialists who participated in the discussion. Your efforts and sacrifices are significant. I also commend those of you in the audience who participated in asking pertinent questions, and we hope this session has been insightful and beneficial to you.

On behalf of those of us from the past, we had our opportunity, we appreciate it, respectively and respectfully we gave it our best, and have recognized that it is time to hand the baton off to those of you who follow. We wish you our very best for the future. I am confident that any of our former or retired specialists would be glad to try and answer any questions you might have during this conference, or to offer advice, if requested, now or later if you can catch up with us. You can be confident that if we don't know the answer to your query, or if we cannot offer what we consider to be helpful advice, we will be honest in saying we don't know, or we can't offer anything useful.

Conclusion

I close by saying that I don't apologize for my shortcomings academically, professionally, or in my attempts over the years to be a wise steward, nor for the past leadership efforts of those we had as mentors within our honorable profession. I take some measure of pride in having served as a state Extension wildlife specialist, as the National Wildlife and Fisheries Program Leader, and in having the opportunity to serve the profession in whatever ways I could, and in working with those of you who have served as Extension specialists past and present. I do, however, apologize for having contributed in any way to the stimulation or education of some of you who partly because of me have become hopelessly addicted as spring gobbler hunters. If I have ever knowingly or unknowingly offended any of you in any way, please accept my sincere apologies, inform me specifically of my transgressions and I will try to do better in the future.

It has been my pleasure to work with and for a group of highly respected and admired colleagues, most of whom have become trusted friends, and I can truthfully and sincerely say in closing, THANK YOU for the privilege and opportunity. I am and will forever be convinced that you are among the finest, most dedicated, capable, and productive people in our profession.

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