University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Proceedings of the Fifteenth Vertebrate Pest Conference 1992

Vertebrate Pest Conference Proceedings collection

3-1-1992

RESPONSES OF THE ADC PROGRAM TO A CHANGING AMERICAN SOCIETY

Bobby R. Acord
Deputy Administrator, Animal Damage Control, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/vpc15

Part of the Environmental Health and Protection Commons

Acord, Bobby R., "RESPONSES OF THE ADC PROGRAM TO A CHANGING AMERICAN SOCIETY" (1992). *Proceedings of the Fifteenth Vertebrate Pest Conference 1992*. Paper 1.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/vpc15/1

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Vertebrate Pest Conference Proceedings collection at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Proceedings of the Fifteenth Vertebrate Pest Conference 1992 by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

RESPONSES OF THE ADC PROGRAM TO A CHANGING AMERICAN SOCIETY

BOBBY R. ACORD, Deputy Administrator, Animal Damage Control, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Room 1624, South Agriculture Building, Washington, DC 20250, (202) 720-2054

ABSTRACT: Changes in the Animal Damage Control (ADC) program are reviewed relative to changes in American societal background and attitudes. Many of the program changes that occurred in the past were imposed on ADC in response to external factors, while more recent program changes have been and will continue to be more self-directed. Examples of ADC's proactive approach to dealing with critical issues are provided.

Proc. 15th Vertebrate Pest Conf. (J. E. Borrecco & R. E. Marsh, Editors) Published at University of Calif., Davis. 1992

An interesting change we have witnessed in this country has been the shift in public opinion regarding wildlife damage control from an aggressive position in the early to mid-1900s, to an almost opposite extreme during the 1960s through the 1980s. This change from one extreme to the other has accompanied the shift of our society from that of a largely rural, agrarian-based population, to an increasingly urbanized society that has become farther and farther removed from agricultural production practices and consumptive use of wildlife. There is a general naiveté among most of the general public about agricultural production and the basic principles of wildlife management. The Animal Damage Control (ADC) program has undergone major changes over the years in response to these shifts in societal background and attitudes. Today I want to discuss some of the more recent program changes, but first let us look briefly at the two extreme positions I have referred to.

We need only to look at the language of the authorizing legislation for the ADC program to get an idea just how much thinking has changed over the years. The reference to "eradication" in the text of the Animal Damage Control Act of March 2, 1931, is reflective of societal attitudes at that time toward those wildlife species perceived to be pests of agriculture or natural resources. There was a general antipathy toward predators from most of the American public during this period. This attitude also prevailed among natural resource managers of the day. Even the great environmentalist Aldo Leopold, while employed as a forester with the U.S. Forest Service during this period, advocated extermination of all predators in New Mexico.

This thinking slowly began to change during the first half of the century as our urban populations grew, and we started seeing significant attitude changes beginning in the 1960s. We began to see an increasing trend in environmental awareness in this country that started bringing the ADC program under very intense scrutiny by the public. Opposition to ADC activities began to grow from environmental and protectionist groups such as the Audubon Society and the newly-formed Defenders of Wildlife. The use of poisons to kill predators came under increasing criticism, even from traditionally conservative interests such as editors of national hunting and fishing magazines.

In 1963 Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall appointed a group called the Advisory Board on Wildlife Management to investigate Federal wildlife damage control efforts. This group in 1964 came out with what has been referred to as the Leopold Report, which was critical of the ADC program in many ways and charged it with indiscriminate, nonselective, and excessive predator control. ADC policies were made significantly more restrictive in response to recommendations from this report.

Then in 1971, in response to continuing public scrutiny and spurred by lawsuits from animal activist groups over program use of toxicants, the Secretary of the Interior and the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) appointed a seven-person Advisory Committee on Predator Control. This Advisory Committee's report, known as the Cain report, was also generally critical of the ADC program and stated that the claimed ecological benefits of control were greatly exaggerated. As a result of recommendations made in this report, President Nixon signed Executive Order 11643 in 1972, banning the use of toxicants for predator control by Federal agencies or on Federal lands. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) followed this order by canceling the registrations for Compound 1080, strychnine, sodium cyanide, and thallium sulfate for predator control. ADC subsequently began substituting aerial hunting and increased trapping efforts to offset the loss of these chemical control tools. Today the use of these mechanical control methods is increasingly being attacked.

In 1978 the Secretary of the Interior appointed an ADC Policy Study Committee to review the Federal ADC program. The Committee's report to the Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks was highly critical of program practices. This led to a policy statement issued by Secretary of the Interior Cecil Andrus in 1979 which prohibited the practice of denning and all research on the use of Compound 1080. The policy was an attempt to emphasize the use of nonlethal control methods.

All of these changes in how the ADC program was conducted reflected the dramatic change in the American society that had taken place since the earlier part of the century. The environmental movement created a momentum of change which ADC was poorly prepared to handle. These changes were guided by external forces rather than by the ADC program, and some changes were made in spite of logic rather than in response to logic. The ban on all research on the use of Compound 1080, for instance, temporarily halted progress on development of the Livestock Protection Collar. This was done even though the collar was considered one of the most promising approaches to catching the offending animal, which was something the conservation groups had been demanding for years.

During the 1980s, we began to see some shifting of opinion on wildlife damage control toward a more reasonable and not quite as extreme a position as was commonly advocated

during the 1960s and 1970s. The country's increasing urban sprawl, combined with growing populations of some wildlife species led to increasing numbers of wildlife damage problems. There was increasing dissatisfaction among the agricultural community with policies that were often based more on politics and perception than on scientific facts. This led to efforts by agricultural interests and some members of Congress to move the ADC function from the Department of the Interior to the Department of Agriculture. This move was implemented in April 1986, and ADC has been part of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) in USDA since that time.

While the radical program changes we saw occurring during the 1960s through the 1970s were imposed on the program by external forces as a result of the environmental movement, more recent program changes have been and will continue to be more self-guided. It is evident that ADC will continue to face increasingly greater challenges due to today's rapidly changing society. Change is inevitable. But that does not mean that we in ADC must only respond to change initiated or advocated by others. It was Winston Churchill who advised: "Take change by the hand before it takes you by the throat." We need to guide and be in synchrony with the change rather than be its victim.

Probably one of the most significant changes in the ADC program since our transfer to Agriculture has been our proactive approach to dealing with critical issues— in other words, our efforts to guide program changes. Shortly after the transfer we became involved in intensive efforts to develop a strategic long range plan for the program. ADC's Top Management Team (TMT) identified and assessed apparent program strengths and weaknesses, external influences and relationships, and conditions that would ensure continued program vitality. Based on these factors, the TMT identified a set of strategic goals for ADC and developed a plan for their achievement over a 5-year period.

Another development occurring shortly after the program's transfer to USDA was the establishment of the National Animal Damage Control Advisory Committee to advise the Secretary of Agriculture on ADC policy issues. As it turns out, some of the most important recommendations coming out of this Committee dealt with the same critical issues identified in the ADC Strategic Plan. We have seen some very positive dividends from the implementation of our Strategic Plan and Advisory Committee recommendations.

One of the most important of these changes has been our effort to promote public information and education. Much of the current opposition to the ADC program stems from the fact that many people are misinformed about our program operations, its management, and objectives. Some people have the impression that today's ADC program is conducted essentially as it was back in the early part of the century, when the prevailing attitude was that the only good predator was a dead one. One of the reasons this misconception still persists long after that attitude has died is that we did not do a very good job of telling people about changes in the ADC program. Instead, we, and the wildlife management profession, allowed this misconception to be promoted by animal rightists while we just went on about the business of trying to help people solve their wildlife damage problems.

Today there is still much misrepresentation of information about the ADC program, but what has changed is that we are now actively involved in efforts to educate the public about the realities of damage by wildlife and how it is managed. Part of this effort includes improving communication specifically with those organizations who seem to be misinformed about the way we conduct business. There will likely never be total agreement on all points between ADC and some of our critics, but by approaching our differences with openness and a willingness to listen to the other side's concerns, I firmly believe that we can continue to find much common ground. I also believe that within ADC there is a greater receptivity to new ways of thinking about traditional issues than has ever before been the case.

An additional aspect of our efforts to promote public education has been the identification of information and education needs and our development of a communications plan around those needs. Informational materials about the program have been developed and an informational video about ADC and the need for wildlife damage control is in production. We now benefit from the valuable assistance provided by trained public relations specialists in APHIS who help us in dealing with media inquiries and prepare press releases. These people have been very instrumental in helping us use the media to highlight the positive aspects of ADC and the need for responsible wildlife damage control. Another factor which aids the ADC program today is that it is no longer just ADC that is under attack. The whole practice of wildlife management, including hunting and fishing, is being publicly reviewed. The defenders of wildlife management are also having to defend wildlife damage management as one basis for hunting and fishing. The gap between conservation interests and ADC has narrowed dramatically. This greatly aids the public education effort.

I could not discuss our public education efforts without mentioning the cooperative agreement we have established with Utah State University (USU). Through this agreement, USU is developing a model academic program in wildlife damage management. We have high expectations that this program will contribute to a greater overall awareness among students and members of the wildlife profession about the need to manage wildlife damage problems. The USU program will also involve the establishment of an extension program in wildlife damage management with emphasis on national outreach efforts to educate other wildlife professionals and the public.

One of the critical needs identified by the Secretary's Advisory Committee and in our Strategic Plan was the need for data on resource losses due to wildlife damage. Part of our response to that need was an ongoing series of agreements with the National Agricultural Statistics Service to collect information on various types of wildlife damage. The first survey they conducted for ADC in 1990 documented that over one half of the farms surveyed in the United States experience wildlife damage. One aspect of this survey contributed to an interesting insight into our need for communication efforts. The highest percent of farms experiencing wildlife damage occurred in the Northeastern United States. An analysis of congressional letters responded to by APHIS' Executive Correspondence unit revealed that this is also the area of the country from which we received the most mail in opposition to our activities. This points out an obvious need for us to promote information and education efforts in the Northeastern part of the country particularly.

Our initial efforts at strategic planning were to lay out a plan for the ensuing 3-5 years. We are currently involved in what might be referred to as "Phase II" of our strategic planning efforts. This process was initiated last year in an effort to ensure that ADC could continue to provide responsive service to those who require assistance while also responding to environmental and animal welfare concerns about the conduct of the program.

This task was approached through a process involving all levels of employee representation—a vertical slice through the program from top to bottom. Representatives from the wildlife management profession outside ADC were also included. Viewpoints were solicited from a wide range of interested parties, including animal welfare groups, agricultural interests, and the wildlife management community. Three separate working groups were established to address each of three broad areas of emphasis relative to how we conduct our program. These were identified as:

- Professionalism—which included emphasis on education requirements, membership in professional societies, publishing of technical papers, relations with other agencies, ethics, conduct, and a professional image.
- Methodology—which concerns total implementation of the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach to damage resolution and research and adoption of effective, socially acceptable technology.
- Management—which focuses on a more strategic way of thinking and an orientation toward public accountability, environmental sensitivity, and a scientific approach to wildlife damage management.

These groups were to develop a consensus around each issue, to modify or expand its elements, get input from peers, and agree on recommendations for ways to implement positive changes. Developing a strategy for how our program will evolve in the years ahead is the most important goal! It would be premature to elaborate now in any great detail about the substance of these recommendations, but significant philosophical and attitudinal changes within the program will be involved. More awareness about the issues of animal welfare will be created. Simply stated, there must be a major effort to demonstrate the concern we have for animal welfare.

Professionalism in ADC is one of the most important issues dealt with in our future efforts. Increasing emphasis is being given to professional development of our employees and to setting a high standard of professional excellence in our work. We are encouraging our employees to become involved with The Wildlife Society, the various Associations of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and other professional societies, and to attend professional meetings. We are also seeing increasing involvement of our employees with colleges and universities in teaching or advisory capacities. All of these efforts help promote an understanding of wildlife damage management in the professional and academic community and provide continuing education opportunities for our employees as well.

Methods used by the ADC program were another focus of our future efforts. We realize the importance of developing new, more effective and socially acceptable methods if we are to maintain our ability to provide services for those who require them. Approximately one-fourth of our annual budget is already invested in research and even more research is needed. That is why we will be actively promoting the commitment of additional resources from outside or nontraditional sources to conduct more research. A research prioritization process has been developed to ensure that our research efforts are focused on those areas where the need is the greatest, not only from our perspective, but from the perspective of our cooperators, the academic community, and outside interest groups as well. Increased emphasis will be placed on animal welfare in pursuing new methods. And although we are committed to pursuing new methods and improving existing methods to be more socially acceptable, there is an equal commitment to maintaining our existing methods until new alternatives are available.

Another program response to changes in our society involves our increased involvement in the preparation of Environmental Assessments and other efforts to comply with provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). ADC employees are now routinely involved in the development of Environmental Assessments for work conducted on lands administered by the Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management. Although this involvement has in some cases become very time-consuming, there is a positive side to this situation. Because of the need to ensure that every possible aspect of NEPA compliance has been addressed, I believe that we will finally be able to demonstrate—publicly—that our program activities are environmentally sound. When our Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement is released this summer, we will have cleared a major hurdle in assuring public input into the ADC program.

While the way we go about our business will likely continue to change in response to a changing American society, the one thing that will not change is our commitment to providing responsive service to the American public. Expanding human and wildlife populations with continuing loss of wildlife habitat will increase the need for us to become more involved in work to protect endangered species and other natural resources, human health and safety, and the growing diversity of agricultural enterprises. This involvement will be undertaken with great consideration given to the concerns of our changing society.