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EXPECTATIONS AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE EXTENSION PROGRAMS

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The charge to the panel was really in the form of a question: What do customers and cooperators expect and what are the future opportunities for fish and wildlife extension programs?

It's a pretty risky subject. Each state is different; each has different problems and opportunities. And, most of the practitioners—those who know most about it—are here in this audience.

Pete Petoskey and Jim Miller have already presented some historical background and a perspective for the future. And, the fact of these workshops and a glance at the program is clear evidence of the progress being made. The professionalism, the wide range of subjects, and the attendance are most impressive. It is a privilege to be a participant. In the early '60s a few of us could get together once a year for a half day—or less—in connection with the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference. Quite a difference!

From the early days of extension when the emphasis and the measure of success was the number of farm and home visits, there have been profound changes. Phenomenal increases in the population, changes in demography, new or improved cooperating organizations and agencies, increased urbanization, fabulous advances in technology and communications—and an unparalleled public awareness and interest in fish and wildlife and the environment generally.

As the face of America has changed drastically, so too have the customers and cooperators and the expectations and opportunities for all extension, including fish and wildlife programs. And, extension must adapt to change to survive.

But, one thing has remained constant since the founding of the extension program in 1914—that the purpose of extension is to extend knowledge to the people. And, the need for accurate, objective information has never been greater than in this day of emotional environmentalism—to better inform voters and improve responsible decision making.

There are really at least three levels of extension—local or county, state and national—each with somewhat different problems or challenges and opportunities and expectations; and, each requiring different approaches.

As far as customers or cooperators are concerned, I am most familiar with the state and federal fish and wildlife management agencies and their expectations. So, I would like to comment on that aspect, and along the way I

want to stress cooperation and partnership—not in the rhetorical, faddish sense, but real working cooperation and partnerships.

Before getting into that, let me make an observation. I can assure you that the Berryman Institute for Wildlife Damage Management at Utah State University has extension as one of its program elements, under Terry Messmer. It is and will continue to make use of extension to distribute information to professionals as well as the public.

Efforts to achieve a partnership between wildlife agencies and extension began in 1936. By 1962 there was a wildlife specialist in 23 states. In 1970 a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Federal Extension Service and the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife (now the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [FWS]). By 1976 about half of the states had a program of sorts. Finally, the Renewable Resources Extension Act was passed in 1978; the Natural Resources Unit established in the Extension Service in 1979; and \$15 million was authorized. I stress authorized, not appropriated. Today 32 states have wildlife specialists and programs.

In those states having fish and wildlife extension programs and where there is a good working relationship between the management agencies and extension, the expectations are similar.

The fish and wildlife agencies would like to have extension address issues that confront the states. As a non-regulatory educational agency, extension has credibility and can reach audiences not normally reached by the state and provide information and analysis free of pressures and political interference.

The ideal, of course, is when the state and federal fish and wildlife agencies participate in the development of extension's annual plan of work, helping to identify priorities. Where this occurs and where all of extension, including the county agents, are committed, there is added incentive for the wildlife agency to contribute financially to extension. This approach is also useful in identifying public concerns. Usually, the issues confronting the management agency are also the ones of broad public concern. The public—or that portion of the public that is even aware of extension, expects accurate, objective data and analysis to assist in forming an opinion on very basic and fundamental issues. This may be the most important opportunity and challenge. The protectionist forces have been very successful in making use of the most advanced and sophisticated means of reaching the public. And, they are served by a sympathetic protectionist oriented media. That public makes decisions and votes. They need a source of accurate, reliable information and analysis.

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For the most part, fish and wildlife extension is working well in those states where it exists and which are represented here. But, what about the states where it does not exist? Obviously the first priority must be one's own state. But, I think we must also be concerned about where it does not exist. I suppose the expectations are not as high as we think or hope—at least they are not translated into appropriations and full participation. I don't think we can take a bow on total program participation. We must all ask why, after 60 years of effort and 18 years since passage of the Act, there are still only 32 states with a program and the highest appropriation was \$3.2 million? And that the FWS budget for cooperative work for 1996 is uncertain and unlikely to be near the level of previous years. Consider that the President's budget request for 1997 for EPA, which didn't come into being until 1970, is \$7 billion. Quite a contrast.

There are three basic elements involved in successful fish and wildlife programs: the Federal extension education system; the FWS as the repository for information; and the state agencies with a major responsibility for fish and wildlife resource management. All three must have a firm commitment to fish and wildlife extension; and, all three must be adequately funded. And, there must be a working partnership. But, we better understand that the present fiscal austerity climate will not end. Lean budgets will be the norm and fish and wildlife education will, as usual, be very vulnerable. As urbanization increases, political support for extension decreases, we must learn to be more competitive in obtaining funds; and, to use the money we do get more wisely.

We can't leave program expansion to Jim Miller, the International Association and supportive members of the Congress. Recognition of the need for and the opportunities must begin with the States' existing Extension Service and the participating fish and wildlife agencies. We will all have to help in that effort.

We need to remind ourselves again and again that we are part of the most extensive and effective education system in the world. It is a uniquely American system. It

has the advantage of being non-regulatory. And, as the name implies, it is a mechanism for cooperation; it has an unparalleled delivery system. Cooperative extension is not old hat, as some believe; it is not outdated; it has not outlived its usefulness. Far from it! It needs some updating and it's happening.

I haven't done a survey lately, but I have the impression that some of the state fish and wildlife agencies have reservations about academia. Some view extension programs as potential antagonists. Some view wildlife extension as hobby oriented or superficial. Others are fearful they will lose much needed credit if they work through extension. Frankly, I think we all suffer from a hangover of some antagonisms that existed some years ago.

Some extension officials, on the other hand, view the wildlife agencies as political, non-professional organizations—they can't afford the association. And, that wildlife does not have sufficient priority and importance to compete with agri-business for time or short dollars.

We all have a responsibility for the Nation as a whole. We need to assure the non-participating state agencies that extension can be an ally; that there is enough credit for all; that through extension they have the facilities of an entire university available; that there are unparalleled press, radio, and TV opportunities. And, we need to assure the non-participating state extension services that without fish and wildlife extension, they do not have a full program, that they are missing a large segment of the public—that they may indeed be old hat.

Obviously, any specialist must give first priority to his or her own state program and make certain that it is on solid ground. But we all need also to do some missionary work in the national interest. We cannot afford misunderstanding or friction. Frankly, I don't think a state wildlife agency can afford not to participate in wildlife extension; and no land grant university can afford not to include wildlife in its program. The opportunities are greater than ever before—locally, state, and nationally.

Thank you.