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# IMPLICATIONS OF THE ANIMAL RIGHTS MOVEMENT FOR WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT

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Animal rights advocates are a vocal and active segment of the public who are likely to protest the killing of animals to reduce wildlife-caused damage. Wildlife damage management frequently involves killing damage-causing animals. Most media portrayals of wildlife damage management programs emphasize the killing of wildlife, and so inherently evoke a negative response from the public. The goals of this paper are to help wildlife damage managers better understand animal rights advocates and to suggest possible means to reduce conflicts.

To meet these goals, the animal rights movement is placed in a historical perspective with regard to the animal welfare movement and associated legislation. Demographic characteristics of animal rights advocates are described. The implications of the animal rights movement for managers and management of wildlife-caused damage are presented. Finally, I present recommendations for addressing the animal rights movement and animal rights advocates that should be useful to managers of wildlife-caused damage.

## BRIEF HISTORY

The animal rights movement is entwined in the animal welfare movement, although Schmidt (1990) nicely summarized distinctions between the two. Supporters of

animal welfare believe that all animals should be treated humanely. Animal rightists believe that all animals have an inherent right to live "naturally" without use by or interference of humans.

People who support animal welfare believe that all human activities involving animals should be conducted humanely in ways that minimize the animal's physical and psychological discomfort. The majority of the general public would undoubtedly express support for the humane treatment of animals. I believe that most wildlife professionals also support the concepts and practice of animal welfare.

## *Animal Welfare Movement*

The first humane group organized in the United States was the American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 1869. The organized humane movement includes over 7,000 groups which support the humane treatment of animals (Silberman 1987). Among the humane organizations, views on animal rights cover a broad spectrum (Molbegott 1989).

## *Animal Welfare Legislation*

Animal welfare legislation is primarily concerned with the care, handling, and treatment of captive animals. Federal

legislation primarily concerns the handling of captive wildlife used in research and for exhibition (Garbe and Wywialowski 1991). Animal welfare legislation throughout the world was further detailed by Silberman (1988) and Blackman et al. (1989).

### ***Animal Rights Movement***

The animal rights movement is more recent than the animal welfare movement. The animal rights movement in the United States began in the 1970s. The growth of the animal rights movement can be characterized by the number of popular magazine articles with the key word "animal right(s)," which increased from none in 1975 to 71 in 1990 (Fig. 1). The number of books followed a similar though less dramatic increase. Singer (1975), who is often credited with initiating the modern animal rights movement, extended the principles of animal welfare, emphasizing reduction of the suffering of individual beings. Singer (1975:3) argued that we should strive for equality of consideration among the species, but that "equal consideration for different beings may lead to different treatment and different rights."

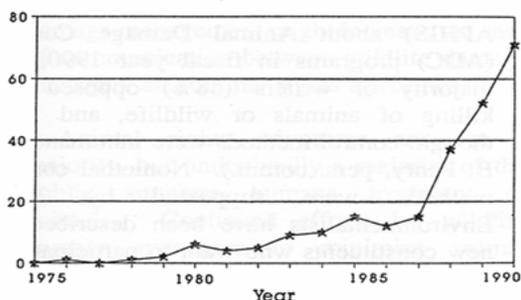


Fig. 1. Number of popular magazine articles with "animal rights" in text.

Some animal rightists believe that in addition to humane treatment, all animals have an inherent right to life without suffering (Regan 1983). Extreme animal rightists believe that the use of all animals by humans should be stopped including all use of animals as pets, in zoos and circuses, for research, and for meat, leather, and furs.

### ***Animal Rights Groups***

According to Silberman (1988), the 1980s will be remembered as the "Era of Animal Rights Activist Genesis." Silberman (1988) described People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) as the driving force for the animal-rights activist movement. Following the arrival of PETA, the Animal Liberation Front also appeared in the United States. Some of the public groups formed in the 1980s include the Animal Political Action Committee, Animals in Politics, National Alliance for Animal Legislation, United Action for Animals, Human/Animal Liberation Front, Culture and Animals Foundation, and the Voice for Nature Network (Silberman 1988). Various professionals concerned with animal rights also formed associations, including the Animal Legal Defense Fund (attorneys), National Association of Nurses Against Vivisection, Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, and Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights. Other major organizations in the animal rights movement include The International Fund for Animal Welfare, Friends of Animals, the International Society for Animal Rights, and Greenpeace.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF ANIMAL RIGHTISTS**

What percentage of the public is considered animal rightists? In a 1990 Gallup poll commissioned by the National

Shooting Sports Foundation, 7% of the public agreed with what animal rights groups are trying to accomplish and how they are trying to accomplish it (Williamson 1990). Those people actively involved in the movement would be considerably less than 7% of the population.

What types of people are committed to the animal rights movement? In an attempt to learn more about the characteristics of animal rights advocates, Richards and Krannich (1991) surveyed a sample of subscribers to the *Animals' Agenda* (AA), a magazine focused on animal rights issues. Relative to the US population as represented by the 1980 census, AA subscribers were disproportionately white (97% vs. 83%), executives (46% vs. 23%), female (78% vs. 51%), upper income (39% vs. 5% with >\$50,000 gross annual income), well educated (2 times as many with some college and 3 times as many with a master's or doctorate as the public) and under 50 years of age (80% vs. 74%). The AA subscribers did not differ from the 1980 census for urban versus rural residence. Regional distribution of AA subscribers was similar in central and mountain regions, but overrepresented in coastal regions and under represented in the south. Additionally, most AA subscribers had pets (89%), but no living children (70%). Additional characteristics of interest for AA subscribers included a high degree of involvement in the environmental movement, and positive responses to environmental issues.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT OF ANIMAL DAMAGE**

### ***Trends***

The current trend of the animal rights movement is one of increased interest by the general public (Fig. 1). Interest in this area is likely to continue, and these special

interest groups are not likely to disappear. However, other national trends contradict further growth in the number of animal rights advocates if their characteristics remain similar to those found by Richards and Krannich (1991). These other national trends include an increasingly diverse work force composed of more non-whites, and predictions of reduced affluence in the decades ahead (Snyder and Edwards 1991).

### ***Attitudes and Education***

A common belief among wildlife managers is that if we could only educate the public, then they would view the problem as we do. But information and education alone are unlikely to resolve differences of fundamental beliefs. Most attitudes and values are formed at a young age and are resistant to change. Animal rights advocates are characteristically well-educated and with positive environmental attitudes and knowledge (Richards and Krannich 1991). The attitudes and values of animal rightists make them unlikely to accept any procedure that requires the killing of, or causes suffering to animals.

Based on 565 letters sent to the United States Department of Agriculture-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS) about Animal Damage Control (ADC) programs in fiscal year 1990, the majority of writers (58%) opposed the killing of animals or wildlife, and 17% thought control methods were inhumane (L. B. Penry, pers. comm.). Nonlethal control methods were supported by 28%. Environmentalists have been described as new constituents who want to participate in making decisions, not just be informed (Thomas 1991). A participative decision-making committee was formed to resolve deer management issues in Minneapolis, Minnesota (McAnnich and Parker 1991). Indeed, the best solutions can probably be

reached through cooperative meetings, symposia, and problem solving sessions (Hutchins and Wemmer 1986/1987).

### *Is Rapport With Animal Rightists Possible?*

We tend to establish rapport with those whom we can establish common bonds. Richardson (1987:21) emphasized that "people like people who are like themselves." Some potential common ground between wildlife damage managers and animal rights advocates includes positive environmental values. I believe that, contrary to the image frequently portrayed by the popular media, most wildlife damage managers became interested and involved in their profession because of their appreciation for wildlife and the outdoors. Animal rights advocates are more concerned with the environment than the general public (Richards and Krannich 1991). Thus, environmental concerns provide potential common ground between animal rightists and wildlife damage managers.

Although many of the leaders of the animal rights movement are men, the majority of the membership is women (Richards and Krannich 1991). Although gender differences do not prevent rapport, increased participation of women in animal damage management might increase the ease of communication between wildlife damage managers and animal rights advocates.

Animal rights advocates are not a majority, but undoubtedly a majority of the public supports humane treatment of animals. Continued efforts by wildlife damage managers to minimize animal suffering would benefit all parties (Schmidt 1990). Animal rightists may not be totally satisfied with more humane methods of handling animals and resolving damage problems. But the majority of the public would probably be more comfortable with a

program in which humane methods were considered and used, than a program in which the amount of animal suffering was not stated as a consideration. This humane consideration exists in USDA-APHIS-ADC Directive 4.056, which states as policy that ADC personnel terminate the life of an animal in a "painless and considerate" manner.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Wildlife damage managers can address these challenges through consideration of the following recommendations when working with the public and animal rights advocates.

1. Avoid stereotyping activists. Avoid generalizations about the probable goals and objectives of individuals who challenge your programs.
2. Remember that an interested public wants to participate in decision-making processes, not just be informed. Ask them what concerns them. Some may suggest viable solutions that have not been considered or attempted previously.
3. Identify similar concerns, and then attempt to reach a consensus on means by which both your program's objectives (prevention or resolution of wildlife-caused damage) can be met, and their concerns can be recognized and addressed.
4. Describe your program and state its objectives in neutral or unbiased terms. Wildlife may be perceived as always good by some people and always a pest to others. To public servants, wildlife is neither good nor evil. To the majority of the public, who are not impacted by wildlife-caused problems, wildlife is always good. Identify the issues as protection of publicly- and privately-owned resources and property, and as protection of public safety.

## CONCLUSIONS

Animal rights activists will continue to challenge both the methods and objectives of wildlife damage management in the years ahead. Resolution of the challenge will not be easy. Yet, humane treatment of animals is a concern of both wildlife damage managers and the public. Wildlife damage managers must use thoughtful and creative means to address and resolve these challenges.

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