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ANIMAL CONTROL - PROGRESS, PROBLEMS AND PROFESSIONALISM

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I want to take some liberty with my title as it is rather general. Specifically, I want to discuss some matters of mutual concern, and I will touch lightly upon our Division's activities and the status of our reorganization and redirection. In so doing, I do not propose to rehash the several talks that have been previously given and the papers written on what's new in animal control. Rather, I shall use this opportunity to examine a few problems that confront our Division, and in many cases, that confront everyone concerned with vertebrate pest control.

We are now, in a very real sense, hooked on the horns of dilemma. On one hand, there is an ever increasing need for agricultural products, both here and abroad. Also, there is the need to protect human health and safety. These needs will require an increasing amount of animal damage control, now and in the future - regardless of whether the damage results from insects, starlings, or coyotes.

On the other hand, there is a very real concern regarding the impact of control on the general environment and on non-target wildlife in particular. As a result, those charged with the responsibility for animal control must be responsive to public concern, and more aware of the ecological implications of their work - all-the-while maintaining the competency and professional ability to remove depredating animals.

Simply, then, we must do a more effective job of controlling animal damage to protect the health and economy of our Nation, but at the same time, use more selective techniques which result in the least amount of harm to our environment. We think, therefore, in terms of improved technology, selective techniques, built-in humaneness, and minimum effects on non-target organisms, and base control upon demonstrated need.

These are oft repeated and familiar aspirations, but those bearing the burden of responsibility must make certain that these thoughts are not presented merely as platitudes and trite sayings. It is a challenge to our scientific and administrative ingenuity to give these generalities real meaning.

First, where do we stand with respect to more selective and effective techniques? This will no doubt be covered in some detail by other speakers. But briefly, after years of research and field testing, Compound 1339 is in the very last stages of registration and will soon become available for general use. We believe this will provide appreciable relief from the starling problem, particularly in feedlot situations. Regrettably, we cannot report similar progress in controlling bird depredations on fruits and field crops, especially those caused by blackbirds and starlings. We are hopeful that an ideal reproductive inhibitor will be found among the several now being tested.

Another new chemical, designated by the Denver Wildlife Research Center as Compound 714, has been registered in the last few weeks under the trade name "Gophacide" and will serve as a replacement for Compound 1080 in the control of certain burrowing rodents. This, too, results from many years of research and field testing and is most welcome because it substantially reduces secondary hazards.

While discussing control chemicals, let me set the record straight about substitutes for that much maligned chemical, Compound 1080. This compound remains our most effective and selective tool for controlling coyotes. It is ironic that on the one hand, we consider this our most selective technique, and on the other, we search diligently for substitutes and spend so much time defending, almost apologetically, our use of 1080.

Here we have a colorless, odorless, tasteless material, extremely toxic to the canids; much less so to other families of mammals and to the birds. Thus, properly used, it is quite selective. This selectivity is further increased because other carnivores have a much reduced home range. So, properly spaced, a 1080 station is available to all coyotes in a given area, but is out of the range of all but those smaller carnivores living in the immediate vicinity of a station.

It is true that there have been accidents, but there is no control compound used today that is more carefully regulated and more scrupulously used as 1080. In using any lethal compound, technique or device, there are bound to be accidents and abuses, even in spite of anyone's best efforts to prevent them. We are, however, doing all within our power to use this chemical with the utmost responsibility.

Let us consider the alternatives. If we rely solely on strychnine, it would present a far greater potential hazard to non target animals. The same can be said of trapping.

When 1080 was discovered and brought into use, it was this agency that alerted the public and conducted a widespread educational program to point up the highly lethal nature of the compound. This is as it should be, but we actually caused alarm. Bureau literature described symptoms and lethal dosages. Bureau signs identified areas of use and pointed up hazards.

There have never been so many chemicals used for manipulating the environment. There has never been a time of more extreme public and official sensitivity. The Leopold Committee reported, however, "In the open areas of the western United States, by far the most efficient control method for coyotes is the 1080 bait stations." The report continued, "When properly applied, according to regulations, 1080 stations ... do an effective and humane job of controlling coyotes and have very little damaging effect on other wildlife". We cannot overemphasize the importance of the latter.

Now let us consider some alternate approaches to animal control. We are convinced that the use of chemosterilants will provide a safe and humane method for controlling coyotes and other troublesome species such as starlings. The concept is sound, though development of practical and efficient methods of applications in the field are still under study. We are hopeful that we may have a breakthrough in the near future.

Sometimes the answers to our problems have already been found but escape our notice since they are seemingly unrelated to the problems at hand. It is possible to take tools developed for other purposes and apply them to our problems which may be totally unrelated to the original tool.

A good example of this is the use of the helicopter which was used this year on a test basis to remove sheep depredating coyotes which have eluded other control efforts. Also, it allowed us to place toxic baits in virtually inaccessible areas, or for that matter, in areas that could be reached by no other means. We do not intend to replace fixed wing planes with helicopters, but rather to use them as a supplement, to accomplish very specific objectives. Before leaving this subject, let me stress that in using the helicopter we are not talking about dropping aerial drop baits from the air. We are talking about landing, placing, and then posting the bait, as would normally be done if the bait were placed from the ground.

Aerial hunting is being used more now than ever before. This is a selective method, since it allows us to remove individual animals in the specific areas where they are doing damage.

We have made several administrative breakthroughs that have increased our ability to do an adequate job. Flexibility is one key to successful administration and we can't use yesterday's organizational tools in solving the problems of today and tomorrow. Greater flexibility in the use of manpower is being achieved in what we call our mobile forces concept through which we have a team of men to move into critical areas to bring the right talent to the right place at the right time.

Everyone seems geared to traditional lines of organizational and functional responsibility with each man having a headquarters and his own area to work. We need more flexibility, in using our men to get the best return on the dollar invested, and to do the most effective job.

The administrative technique of training is certainly not new. And, it is interesting to note that the most aggressive and successful agencies and private industries have the most aggressive training and career development programs. We have already launched one of the most intensive training programs in Bureau history. We are attempting to use our human resources to the full extent of each individual's capabilities. We think the same must apply to those engaged in commercial control.

One of the fundamental problems confronting us as an agency and others involved in vertebrate pest control is to make determinations on when control is really necessary and when it is justified economically. Knowing the extent of depredations is not sufficient. Rather, we need to view the problem from the broad standpoint of ecology and the total economy, and, to determine the responsibility of the Federal Government, of the State Government, and of the individual person suffering the damage. Over and above what we have been doing in the Bureau for years, and what industry has done, we need penetrating, in depth, interdisciplinary studies of this whole subject. This field is wide open and we solicit the aid of universities since we need far more studies along these lines than the Bureau can ever undertake. Along that same line, everyone speaks glibly of predator-prey relationships and of the relatively new behavioral sciences. Here also we could use some university help.

For too long those concerned with animal control have focused on the offending species and this has seemed logical. There has been entirely too little attention to the combination of circumstances - again, the ecological situation - that has created favorable conditions for the problem animal. We must think in terms of integrated control. It is the total ecological situation, not a single species that results in a pest situation -- usually the results of man's activities.

We see this daily as architects create favorable starling habitat. It is time we re-examine man's activities as related to the total environment to determine whether the application of ecological principles would or would not, in the long run, prove more economic and more desirable.

I think you know that requests from overseas for technical assistance with animal problems are increasing. For example, just recently we have extended a helping hand -- in the form of two experienced personnel -- to India and to Madagascar. Other organizations are doing the same. But, the point I would like to emphasize in this regard, is that our exported resource knowledge should be of the very best quality since we are in a position to help the emerging nations avoid some of the mistakes made in Europe and in this country.

The title of this talk implies some discussion of all of the responsibilities of the Division of Wildlife Services which was established in July of 1965. In addition to assuming the animal control responsibilities of our predecessor, the Branch of Predator and Rodent Control, two new responsibilities were assigned - Pesticides Surveillance and Monitoring, and Wildlife Enhancement. We have now completed our minimum staffing for these activities and have developed a modest, ongoing program.

The long-range goal of the Pesticides Surveillance and Monitoring program is to assure that the use of chemicals on Federal lands, particularly Interior lands, will be models of the wise and judicious application of pesticides used in managing natural resources. To accomplish this goal, there are several rather specific and short-term steps which go beyond actual field observations of selected applications. These include developing liaison and rapport with others having a responsibility in the use of pesticides.

One program objective which will be of interest to you is to improve the flow of information from this Bureau to those engaged in the manufacture and application of pesticides. Incidentally, surveillance is not a police or enforcement operation. We are making field appraisals of significant applications, but with the intent of heading off the so-called disasters rather than documenting failures.

A prime goal of our pesticide work is to objectively and constructively probe the subtleties of wildlife pesticides relationships. It is quite logical that this be a companion function to our animal control responsibilities. It also reflects our interest in the quality and integrity of the environment as a whole.

Our third function, Wildlife Enhancement, is intended to provide a service not available through existing State and Federal agencies. This program is designed to improve conditions for Wildlife, especially on Indian or military lands and with initial emphasis on waterfowl. Beyond this, we hope to serve the great mass of the American people who are non-consumptive users, the bird watchers and nature enthusiasts. They have a genuine interest in the natural environment, even if it is only seeing or sometimes just reading about nature. This public should be served and we intend to provide them with information to improve their understanding and enjoyment of wildlife.

While we are on the subject, I think all pest control operators should be cognizant of the very real and legitimate interest of these non-consumptive users. It is a fact of life that any program must be acceptable both to the people and to the Congress.

So let me close on this note. We are engaged in providing a professional service. This implies standards, ethics, and a continued striving for improved professional competence. It is incumbent upon us, as professionals, to adopt ethical standards and live within them. This should be our highest goal.