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# ENVIRONMENTALISM AND ANIMAL WELFARE: CORNERSTONES OF WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT

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There are two issues which each of us, personally and as professional wildlife biologists, share a belief in, and which are essential to the conduct of our day-to-day wildlife management activities. Unfortunately, because of associated negative implications, we have failed to appropriately acknowledge and receive credit for our concerns regarding these issues. These are the issues of environmentalism and animal welfare.

This discussion will serve to clarify what these terms should mean to us, why they should be considered cornerstones of wildlife damage management, and the actions we must take in addressing these issues. It is imperative that we become fully cognizant of the relationship of wildlife damage management, environmentalism, and animal welfare.

## BACKGROUND

"Environmentalism" is a commonly used term which has both positive and negative implications, depending on the circumstances in which used. The use of this term elicits different responses. This results in grossly different perceptions and opinions and is responsible for the negativeness too often associated with this term. Unfortunately, as wildlife biologists, we tend to automatically associate the term

environmentalism with radical viewpoints or organizations instead of what the term should really mean.

Webster's Dictionary (1986) defines "environmentalism" as the "...advocacy of the preservation or improvement of the natural environment." An "environmentalist" may therefore be simply defined as an individual concerned with the quality of the natural environment. As professional wildlife biologists, can any of us claim to not share this concern? By choice and by professional training are we not environmentalists? We are! Unfortunately, societal awareness is grossly influenced by emotionalism and the misrepresentations often made by various special interest groups. This has resulted in environmental concerns and advocacies which are highly variable among individuals and groups. The actions of extremists and the association of environmentalism with extremists' viewpoints have caused us, wildlife damage management professionals, to tend not to claim membership in the environmentalism movement. A historical perspective may better allow us to understand this issue. The roots of modern environmentalism can be traced to George Perkins Marsh and his book *Man and Nature*, first published in 1864, which provided extensive documentation that man was in the process of making global and often permanent

changes in the "balance of nature" (Ehrenfield 1970, Stegner 1990). Marsh described the effects of mass deforestation on the land, streams, wildlife and fish and was responsible for establishing the broad features of the natural resources conservation idea. He wrote of two ways of restoring natural "harmony": protection alone and protection plus additional planned interference with biological and nonbiological parts of the ecosystem to achieve a desired result. Later, in the early twentieth century two opposing points of view arose regarding natural resource management: conservation and wise use of natural resources represented by Gifford Pinchot, first professional forester and chief of the United States Forestry Service; and preservation of wilderness and natural areas represented by John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club. It was not until 1933, when Aldo Leopold published *Game Management*, that the Marsh-Pinchot approach became practical. This was the beginning of modern wildlife management as we were taught and practice today.

Following Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring*, the 1960s became the decade of ecology. Social concerns toward the environment dramatically changed. Rapid increases in population size and industrialization resulted in increased pressures on shrinking spaces. It is Earth Day, that first occurred on April 22, 1970, that is commonly regarded as the beginning of the contemporary environmental movement. This movement is described by Odell (1980) as having three goals: 1) the safety and good health of individuals, including their psychological and physical well-being as affected by the natural environment, 2) the long-range survival and welfare of society, including the life-supporting environment on which these depend, and 3) the achievement of a richer and fuller life, including desirable environmental characteristics.

Recent opinion surveys indicate that a majority of Americans believe that the poor quality of the environment is one of our most serious national problems, of more magnitude than homelessness and unemployment. If the environment will be protected, the majority favor among other things, limiting economic development, changing consumptive habits, increasing government regulations and raising taxes. They say they will support politicians who support such measures (Gilbert 1990). "Quality of life" has become a major concern.

## DISCUSSION

How does this relate to wildlife damage management? Prior to the rise in society's environmental consciousness, wildlife, and other renewable resources were essentially the only environmental concerns of the public, and this was largely limited to resource user groups. The wildlife management profession was recognized and respected. As society became more educated and aware of the pressures being placed on the natural environment, it became distrustful of government and its ability to protect the environment. This distrust was enhanced in the 1960s and 1970s due to dissatisfaction with governmental justification and involvement in the Vietnam War and resulted in segments of society rejecting the Corporate State, mistrust of science and desire to be released from the domination of technology (Reich 1970). Radical environmentalists and other special interest groups emerged which continue to be very effective in influencing public concern. As in the 1960s, these radicals reject science and embrace political commitment, they rebel against society and extol nature, and they are suspicious of reason and deeply convinced of the infallibility of their own gut feelings (A. Chase, *Outside* magazine, Dec. 1990). These environmental extremists have influenced the dramatic expansion of public concern for

animal welfare and a corresponding distrust of traditional wildlife management activities and the biological principles on which these activities are based. Increased environmentalism, in addition to increasing urbanization and the effect of mass media, has resulted in a corresponding decline in the public's utilitarian attitude toward wildlife (Gilbert and Dodds 1987).

General areas of environmental concern include wilderness, threatened and endangered species, human population control, clean air, nuclear power, pesticide use, industrial pollution, acid rain, climatic changes, safe drinking water, and natural resource depletion (Goldfarb 1983). As ecologists and wildlife biologists, we all share a concern for these environmental issues. However on any of these issues, our personal values and the degree of concern vary. This variability is reflected in public concern as well. Gilbert (1990) describes environmentalists as having strong views about what nature and our relationship should be and as being obliged to instruct the ignorant, inspire the apathetic and confront nonbelievers in regard to these matters. Is not this the basic information and education component of every wildlife biologist position description? Should we not, then, be proactive in advertising ourselves as environmentalists?

Another component of our activities which we must capitalize on in our public relations efforts is the area of animal welfare. This must not be confused with animal rights which refers to a philosophy that animals have rights, to include legal rights, equal, or similar to humans. Animal rights do not support the concept of wildlife management. Animal welfare is primarily concerned with reducing pain and suffering in animals. The common goal of animal welfarists is to minimize pain inflicted on, and the unnecessary killing of, animals

(Schmidt 1989,1990).

Do we not share the concern for animal welfare? We do. There is, however, variation among wildlife professionals, as well as even greater variation within society in general, regarding what is unnecessary pain or unnecessary killing. It is this variability of philosophies and perspectives that creates disagreement regarding how animals should be used and treated. This variability significantly affects wildlife damage management.

Animal rights and animal welfare organizations are growing in number and memberships, yet relatively few individuals are actively and effectively communicating their messages which are being bought by the American public. They each may have differing causes except for the common concern for animal welfare. This very small minority is successfully reaching the American public because of their devotion and activism.

### *Erosion of Professional Credibility*

We each must realize that these activists are getting the attention of the American public and, little by little, are increasing the credibility of the messages they are sending. Because of the shared concerns for the welfare of animals, the naive public increasingly perceives many of these activists and organizations to be wildlife management experts. They are heroes who have come to the rescue of poor, defenseless wildlife which the public believes have no one to protect them. At the same time the credibility of the wildlife management profession is being methodically eroded. While our overall standing in society, at this time, is in "fairly" good shape, we are losing ground. Activists are effectively feeding the naive public emotion-laden misinformation and innuendo—oftentimes outright lies! Using the environ-

mental "green bandwagon," animal activists are causing the public to have increasing doubts regarding our professional credibility.

The wildlife management profession is partially responsible for this erosion of credibility. Our principal failures include:

1. We have failed to take an activist role. We, individually and as a profession, have tended to "stick our heads in the sand" regarding societal concerns toward the welfare of animals and the corresponding impacts on the wildlife management profession. We tend to be reactive rather than proactive.
2. We have failed to fully develop and implement communication skills. We know what we do and why we do it but do we know how to say it? By and large the answer is no!
3. We have failed to properly utilize the media to our advantage. Do we know how to sell our message so it is bought by the public? No! Unlike the large, well-known animal activist groups, we do not effectively sell ourselves to the public.

#### *Actions Needed*

It is imperative we acknowledge our shortcomings and aggressively seek to better address our professional obligations. Actions which must be taken include:

1. We must fully recognize the fact that the public does not necessarily view us as we view ourselves—wildlife and the biological environment. They do not know our activities are based on sound biological principles and may very well not care! Their perceptions of us too often are predicated on emotion—emotion which is tainted by an urbanized

society's increased isolation from the biological reality that death and pain are an integral component of life itself.

We must instill in ourselves the desire to become aggressive wildlife management activists. We must instill in ourselves a "can do" attitude. Our attitude must be that we can effectively counter the misinformation that is constantly being fed the public and we can temper the effects of animal activist activities on wildlife management. We can do it.

We must identify and refine the messages we want to get across to the public. We must focus on our mutual concerns for the environment and the well-being of wildlife. We should inform the public that not only are we responsible and professional wildlife biologists, environmentalists, and animal welfarists, but are *de facto* naturalists, ecologists, preservationists, and conservationists as well. We know this but the public does not.

We must not waste our time debating the issue of animal rights. We are not going to change the opinions of the relative few who believe in animal rights. Our target audience must be the general public who is simply misinformed and who is being grossly misdirected by the emotion-driven hype of the animal activists.

5. We must become sophisticated and must project a sophisticated, polished image.
6. We must constantly develop and hone our speaking skills.
7. We must learn how to use the mass communication media effectively. Note that we must use—not be used. The

leading animal rights/activist organizations are successful only because they are very effective in using the media to their advantage. They know how to stage events, know what messages are "sexy" and know how to deliver these messages. They know how to stir human emotions toward "warm and fuzzy" animals. They take full advantage of these emotions. We must learn, as well, to seek out the media rather than wait and hope the media does not seek us out. We must be aggressive and assertive.

8. We must out-communicate our adversaries!

The need for improved communication is not a recent phenomenon and public education has long been recognized as an important component of wildlife management. We have tended to delegate this job, however, to others—not take the job on ourselves. This effort must be made by EACH of us and we must do it right!

## CONCLUSION

In designing its "Protect What's Right" program, the Wildlife Legislative Fund of America contracted the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan to conduct a social attitude study. The results of the study indicate that the majority of the American public is ignorant about wildlife and most people think that virtually every wildlife species is on the brink of extinction. There is a growing aversion to wildlife management activities that involve the killing of wildlife. Fortunately this aversion is not deeply rooted. People have a gut feeling that they don't like it but their depth of conviction is shallow. Social scientists say that people like these who display a combination of ignorance and shallow depth of conviction are highly influenced by educa-

tion. If we effectively communicate our message to the public, they will accept it.

The future of the wildlife management profession is in our hands. What are we—you and I—going to do? Environmental concerns and the resultant demands and restrictions on wildlife management activities will increase. The animal welfare issue will grow larger. Our society will become increasingly urbanized and therefore, further removed from the "real" biological world. Wildlife management actions will increasingly be influenced by emotionalism. Biological rational will not necessarily prevail. Whether it does or not will depend on how effective we are at selling ourselves and our product, wildlife management. We must be proactive in advertising our concerns for the environment and animal welfare. The public must understand that management decisions are predicated on these concerns. We must effectively sell to the public that, as professional wildlife biologists and wildlife damage management specialists, we are truly environmentalists and animal welfarists.

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