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February 1991

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Hodgdon, Harry E., "WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT: POLICY AND PROFESSIONAL CONSIDERATIONS" (1991). 5 - Fifth Eastern Wildlife Damage Control Conference (1991). 18.
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WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT: POLICY AND PROFESSIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Proc. East. Wildl. Damage Control Conf. 5:28-30.1992.

I am honored by the opportunity to be part of this conference and to participate with such a distinguished panel this morning.

Today I have been asked to address policy and professional considerations as they relate to wildlife damage management. As an advocate of professional wildlife management, I will share with you some of the problems and issues that confront, frustrate, and confound us; some sense of the problems that lie ahead; and some thoughts on what we need to do to ensure the wildlife profession remains relevant in the future.

The Wildlife Society endorses the management of wildlife to sustain and enhance populations, species, habitats, and ecosystems for human benefit, while responsibly protecting property and other resources, and preventing health and safety hazards. Let me say right up front, that ecologically-sound wildlife damage management is an important and integral part of wildlife management and the wildlife profession. It is necessary and increasingly important because of expanding human populations and their associated impacts on wildlife habitats. I know there have been, and continue to be, individuals within both wildlife damage management and wildlife biology who share less than full acceptance of the attitudes, capabilities, and activities of each other. Diversity of opinion and open debate are healthy signs in any profession; divisiveness and isolation are not. Wildlife damage management is part of the wildlife profession and I will address it in that context.

I want to acknowledge that today I am drawing freely from the thoughts, ideas, and comments of some of the best thinkers of the wildlife profession, both from within and outside wildlife damage management. I am deeply indebted to them for their assistance, especially for their views about the future because my predictive powers often have been suspect - I never dreamed that either a peanut farmer or an actor would occupy the White House! However, my real incentive came after reading the New York State penal code that contains the following statute: "Persons pretending to forecast the future shall be considered disorderly and liable for a fine of \$250 and/or 6 months in prison." Somehow the advice attributed to Calvin Coolidge always seemed safer - if you wait long enough, the future will be here! I would guess that most of us in the wildlife profession agree with this presidential advice because we don't seem to have a very clear direction for our efforts.

I believe that the future of renewable natural resource management and the wildlife profession are both bright and up to us to shape. Humans will always want to enjoy wildlife.

Recent polls and surveys indicate that this is true. More and more people rank wildlife and natural resources as important; 90% of Americans seek enjoyment out-of-doors and the environmental ethic is gaining strength. By a margin of 2 to 1, the public is prepared to choose conservation and the environment over uncontrolled development, and by a margin of nearly 3 to 1, they believe government should keep environmental protection a high priority, even if it means slower economic growth.

Further, the future of wildlife will continue to depend upon professional, scientific management. However, the rules for practicing that management have quietly, but steadily changed. Future changes will be less quiet and more rapid. As these changes occur and our anxiety levels rise, the direction of our efforts seems less and less clear at times and our frustration increases. Wildlife resource scientists and managers will need to be more innovative, more resourceful, and more sensitive to changing public values than ever before, to meet these challenges successfully.

The overriding challenge before us is one that we have been aware of for many years, but have been slow to address. Some contend our reluctance is because of its complexity and magnitude, while others suggest that we are dinosaurs, incapable of adapting to new situations. The dilemma has been that as human populations increase, public desires for wildlife and associated outdoor recreation opportunities increase and change. As more of our finite resource base is converted to a variety of intensive uses - food and fiber production, housing, transportation, energy, etc. - the quality of land and water for wildlife and public recreation decreases and conflict between wildlife and humans increases. Further, concerns are escalating over the health of the remaining lands, waters, and wild-living resources.

For more than half a century, the central theme of our efforts has focused on placing use and management of wildlife (and nearly all renewable natural resources) on a sustained yield, rather than strictly on an exploitable basis. In large part, we have become very successful and comfortable with this approach. However, for more than a decade, perceived management shortcomings have caused more and more people to re-examine the sustained yield concept of conservation. We have come under increasing criticism for failing to adapt what we do to reflect evolving public values. I would contend that the wisdom of sustained yield has not changed, but more and more publics now recognize many values in addition to that of wildlife as a harvestable renewable resource that management can sustain. Increasingly, we are told that this sustained-yield mental framework is too narrow and that we must develop a

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broader approach for our management systems. We must move beyond sustained yield to a much more sustainable ecosystem management approach.

The focus of the future must be on realigning numerous policies and programs for managing agricultural and forest lands and aquatic areas. In visualizing these management actions, it is imperative that we recognize the dominant influence of people and their activities on the resource base. Management objectives and guidelines must be viewed as the essential means to provide public values and multiple benefits from the resource base as human activities are carried out. This approach will require sensitive, integrated management of natural resources and human activities in all land and water developments and uses.

Integrated management within the context of sustainable ecosystems will provide the future framework for the wildlife profession. Here is where some real opportunities exist, but to take advantage of them will require some changes from us. Traditionally, wildlife management has had quite a narrow purpose. Much of the public, and even some members of our profession, view us as still thinking primarily in terms of numbers of deer or ducks harvested, licenses sold or checked, or depredating animals killed. Further, we often are not viewed as strong team players, especially when we continue to react negatively to all proposals that may impact our particular field of interest. We have a reputation of not being equipped to lead, but only to dig our heels in and fight to defend the way we have always done business. No wonder we often feel the stature of our profession has declined, and that the public no longer understands or fully supports our recommendations and activities!

To be effective in the future, we must adopt a different mental attitude. We must look for opportunities to manage for many wildlife values rather than hanging tough for the status quo. We must shift our emphasis from preventing development activities at all costs to one of making renewable natural resources sustainable and compatible with human activities wherever possible. We will be calling fewer of our own shots. Instead, more and more we will be serving in interdisciplinary teams to predict the effects of habitat changes and to develop and advocate sound management approaches and alternatives.

In addition to our changing role, we also must be more aware of the public's needs and attitudes toward what we do. We have a tremendous opportunity before us to broaden our base of public support. We live in a political system of government in which people have rights, and many are now demanding the right to be involved in the decision-making process. There is no question that the strongest and most successful programs are those understood and supported by the public. It is imperative that we determine the values people place on these resources and how as many of these values as possible can be accommodated in our management programs. Budgets, personnel, and green lights to go ahead with habitat

protection and enhancement programs are not our automatic inheritance. Without a vigorous, supportive public and political constituency, our programs - just like any other public programs - are dead.

We all know that accumulation of knowledge is essential to accomplishing the goals of maintaining wildlife and wildlife habitats. But the accumulation of knowledge alone is no longer enough. We are failing at the transfer of that knowledge to the public and to public policy makers. Traditionally, we have not stepped forward to keep people informed and to force necessary changes in public attitudes and policy. This must change. Wildlife professionals must be involved in the educational process. Our professional expertise is critical to public understanding about wildlife resources and the formulation of sound management policies and programs. We must become responsible educators and activists as well as analysts. Being correct is no longer enough!

Each of us must be **aware of, and try** to avoid, such pitfalls as indifference to communicating with people and the tendency to operate with a preconceived idea that everyone wants and expects the same goals for wildlife that we envision. We have a strong professional bias - far too often we get hung up on our traditional attitudes, activities, and ways of doing business. We must listen to people to understand their needs, attitudes, and expectations. We must be flexible enough to modify our priorities with the changing times. We also must learn to tell people just what our problems are, what we **can do, and** what we cannot accomplish. We cannot be lawyer, judge, and jury on all wildlife management questions. For those of us addicted to the past, where we had much freedom in manipulating populations and habitats, it probably is difficult adjusting gracefully to the collision of supply and demand for dwindling resources and changing expectations.

We also must openly recognize that decisions and actions are based on both facts and values. From a practically infinite variety of possibilities, a certain end is chosen and we devise the technical means to achieve it. The choice of ends involves values. Values may not appear to be operating in routine resource allocation decisions because prevailing conventional values are simply assumed. They go unnoticed because they are internally shared and have been built into the system over a long period of time. The problem comes when we confuse values and beliefs with scientific facts. We sometimes couch our intentions in terms that seem anchored in science, but may be judgements of value. We always must be cautious to integrate science into the value system and not integrate the value system into science. It's time to question our assumptions when we find ourselves being questioned by an outsider and we're ready to provide the typical defensive Pavlovian response - "proven biological principles" or "scientific management." Look at how many years we used science to perpetuate the notion that predators only take the weak and sick. Today, are we using scientific management to defend all regulated hunting and trapping, or large-scale population reduction of predators?

We must build and maintain a broad constituency base that will change through time. If we are to improve our profession substantially and gain greater public support for our efforts on behalf of wildlife resources, we must broaden our horizons and expand our services to other segments of the public, including our traditional users. In this way, increased support can be gained for the whole range of resource management activities. Innovative approaches to obtaining the needed support must be tried, even though they may represent major changes for us in adapting to evolving public interests and needs, and in being involved in helping to shape those needs.

For many years, natural resource managers have hoped for an awakening of the conservation ethic in the minds of the citizens. That awakening is now taking place. Wildlife professionals must recognize that it is time to move forward together with new, innovative, well-designed research, education, policy, and management programs that produce multiple benefits, while maintaining the productive capabilities of the resource base. If ever there was a time to "think big," it is now.

Wildlife damage management has been controversial, largely due to the perceived difficulty of "balancing" demands to protect landowner interests from deprecating wildlife with demands for wildlife protection, enhancement, and recreation. Within the wildlife profession, wildlife damage management is unique in that it directly or indirectly attempts to prevent damage, reduce populations, eliminate individual animals, or modify the behavior or activities of populations or individuals to protect human interests and/or welfare. The perceived "gap" of "conflicting" views is just that - a perception probably unwittingly promoted by both sides decades ago. Wildlife damage management must be considered an important component of every wildlife management plan, program, and activity. It is the safety net that can help reassure the public that we are prepared to deal responsibly with every eventuality - successes and failures. Many of today's "problem" species are former wildlife management "success stories" where we were so successful that we have created damage and nuisance problems our predecessors never dreamed possible.

We have been so effective at maintaining this dichotomy of activities that we now face major problems, including the lack of public and even professional acceptance for controlling species as a management tool to aid the recovery of endangered and threatened species. So ingrained within agencies and wildlife biologists is the notion that control of wildlife is the antithesis of conservation that when faced with the knowledge that depredation is the limiting factor to the recovery of an endangered species, removal or control no longer is considered a management option.

to the full variety of ways people enjoy natural resources as a basis for adjusting our management program goals. Learn to temper your logic with reason. Evangelical approaches of the past will no longer do. We must remember that we are serving human objectives, and that we work for the public. However, always remember that there is a fine line beyond which social issues must not dictate resource decisions. We remain obligated to stand firm in the face of pressures that would significantly degrade resource values. We also must fulfill the role of expert and guide decision-makers toward management programs that are ecologically sound, sustainable, and in the best interests of the majority of the people and wildlife.

In conclusion, for those of us in the wildlife profession, I realize that these may be confusing and often discouraging times. Sometimes the odds against us succeeding seem almost insurmountable. However, we have a great responsibility to continue to be advocates and agents for sound stewardship and management.

Professionalism is pride in and a commitment to what we do, and to the future of doing it - caring, sharing, providing support, being patient. It is more than acceptance of responsibility, more than doing our duty, more than being good at what we do. Professionalism is the desire to contribute. It requires service to the profession, a willingness to be a leader, and a desire to meet the needs of other members of the profession.

We can make a difference, and I firmly believe that we will succeed. I encourage every one of you to stretch a little bit from the traditions of our individual subdisciplines, and to participate actively and fully in designing those future wildlife management programs and uses that will provide both the desired public benefits, **and** the long-term protection and sustainability of the resource base.

The very basis of the wildlife profession is being challenged by people who do not support the use of wildlife for human benefit, or who disagree with the killing of wildlife for nearly any purpose. All wildlife professionals must ensure that our activities are performed as responsibly as possible, are effective, and are biologically, economically, and socially justifiable. Our philosophy of responsible human use of wildlife will continue to be accepted by the majority of people if we are willing to broaden our horizons, perform our activities professionally, are sensitive to contemporary-citizen values, and help educate the public and decision-makers to the benefits of wildlife management.

These are interesting times, exciting times, critical times. *B* But a *white-water canoeists* and rafters know, the river behind always look calmer than it was, and the white water ahead

The last decade of this century will be a period of tremendous opportunity for us all. Tradition has served us well, but don't be constrained by tradition. Increase your consciousness

looks wilder than it will be. We are in the white water now and we are getting tossed around orbit, but always remember that we can make the fastest progress in the rapids.

Wildlife Problems in Urban and Suburban Landscapes

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