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CLOSING REMARKS

F. Eugene Hester

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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CLOSING REMARKS
by F. Eugene Hester*

I am glad to be here to present the closing remarks before such a group of professionals who represent the many agencies and individuals who daily perform the delicate task of resolving animal damage conflicts. The segment of wildlife management that you represent is perhaps the most difficult to accomplish in view of existing public opinion and involvement.

The United States is blessed with a rich abundance and diversity of wildlife not shared by many nations. This vast heritage, so important to our country, formed the economic foundation and basic food supply for our forefathers as they explored and settled our country. However, after years of exploitation, the resource declined and, in some cases, vanished. The diligent efforts of the professional wildlife managers of our times have improved the status of our nation's wildlife heritage on many fronts. This increase in our population, has multiplied the frequency of wildlife conflicts that we, as managers, have to resolve. Resolution of these conflicts increasingly requires today's wildlife manager to delicately balance the need of those who experience wildlife conflicts with the responsibility inherent in our profession of providing proper and balanced management for all species.

The wildlife management profession has, through necessity, become centered around protecting and enhancing populations to the extent that conflict resolution sometimes seems to be neglected. This fact is evident even in our university wildlife curriculums. Hopefully, this trend is beginning to moderate and will result in a balanced approach in

future training as well in management priorities.

We have progressed through an era of environmental awakening in which the public became concerned about the overall status of our environment, including that of wildlife populations. Overall, this public awareness has been positive; however, we, as professionals, now have the responsibility to carefully educate the public about the need for population management and control in some situations. We also must carefully consider our actions to assure that our activities are biologically sound. The reports and proceedings of this and other professional animal damage control conferences are an important source of information to be shared by all the professionals in the field, as well as the general public who experiences wildlife conflicts. The element which remains to be accomplished is public education. This is perhaps the most important, if we are to secure the proper degree of public understanding and confidence in the future.

The responsibility for providing wildlife damage control is shared by Federal, State and many private wildlife managers. The Animal Damage Control Act of 1931 assigned this authority and responsibility to the Secretary of Agriculture. This charge was assumed by the Secretary of Interior after a reorganization of responsibilities which occurred in 1939. The original act provided the authority over resident wildlife species, and in accordance with the provisions of the Act, the Service views its role as cooperative in nature. A cooperative agreement, or financial partner in the case of operational control programs, is required prior to our involvement in any state. This arrangement results in programs which are tailored to meet the needs of the people in each state.

The programs in the eastern states are basically formed around the concept

*Deputy Director, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D. C.

of extension education--helping people to cope with their own individual problems. This approach instills an understanding of wildlife management as well as providing the abilities and knowledge for people to be self sufficient. This investment is compounded as information passes from person to person.

When the offending species is highly mobile and likely to travel freely across many people's property, the chances for individuals to effectively resolve their own problems diminish. In these situations, cooperative efforts are required. This may be accomplished through community actions or through professionals employed to serve the community at large. Migratory birds and larger predators are examples that often require cooperative control efforts to be effective. The programs in the western states are structured to meet this type of need and involve the employment of personnel to provide operational control assistance. Extension assistance is supplied when appropriate but lethal control of individuals and local populations form the major element of these programs.

This is not to say that lethal controls are the only solution in these situations. Local population reduction is an effective means of reducing conflicts- but populations replenish themselves and can require a continuing effort to avert future conflicts. Future efforts should assume an integrated approach, involving consideration of structural modifications, adjustments to some farming or ranching practices, employment of frightening mechanisms, repellents, and exclusion fencing, to name a few. Lethal solutions may always remain as the only effective means of damage abatement in some situations, but innovations will hopefully allow us to decrease such efforts.

Limitations in financial and human resources are likely to always plague the wildlife management community. This will increasingly limit our ability to achieve our various goals.

Each realm of wildlife management must compete with others for the limited resources available. Cooperation among all wildlife managers will become more and more important to assure that the needs of all wildlife interest groups are addressed. In this context, I refer to managers from the widest array of wildlife disciplines, including Federal and State agencies responsible for fish and wildlife, land management, extension education, research, and associated support functions. Every effort must be made to assure that our operations do not come to cross-purposes. This requires a high degree of communication and coordination throughout the profession to develop the necessary understanding and appreciation of our sometimes divergent responsibilities. Communication itself is no small feat; however, if we are to accomplish the most with the limited resources available, it is essential.

The future may hold a variety of changes for us all. If the past is any indication, our jobs will become more complex. Political influences will shape our future responsibilities and alter our priorities. We, as a profession, must always devote ourselves to bridging the gaps that occur and never lose sight of the resource that we have chosen to steward.

Animal damage control is and will always remain a controversial responsibility of the professional wildlife manager. As the world's population expands and wildlife conflicts increase, a balance that will sustain the resource while limiting conflicts will be harder to achieve. Public involvement in our activities will surely increase. Unless we are united in our efforts, our management abilities will diminish due to legislated restraints imposed on the tools at our disposal. There is an increasing thrust to restrict all consumptive use of wildlife. And there is a growing interest in animal rights. The public is concerned about the continued existence of a rich diversity of wildlife for future generations. Animal damage control is viewed by many as a serious threat to that continued existence. This attitude must be changed by each of us at every

opportunity. We must professionally represent ourselves and our actions with facts that can be accepted by all segments of our society. This responsibility is equally shared throughout our profession and must be shouldered by every individual. While this meeting may be important to us as natural resource managers, we must be careful not to neglect the need to educate the public at large.

I wish to commend those of you who coordinated this meeting as well as those who presented papers. This gathering is the result of a truly professional cooperative effort. I am pleased that my agency could assist as a co-sponsor. I know that the exchange of information here will benefit those who are present, as well as many who will receive the printed proceedings.