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ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF AGENCIES FOR WILDLIFE DAMAGE CONTROL

--An Overview--

by James E. Miller*

"A well balanced wildlife management program includes research, the acquisition of land, the development of habitat, the careful regulation of hunting or harvest, the protection of certain species, the enforcement of laws -- and -- the control of animal depredations. Though necessary, this is among the least popular and most controversial of the wildlife management functions. It is, nevertheless, one of the activities which a responsible agency must undertake." This statement is a direct quote from the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' (IAFWA) Position Paper on Animal Damage Control (1981).

The following quote from the Position Statement and Policy of The Wildlife Society (3/19/85) states: "Prevention or control of wildlife damage, which often includes removal of the animals responsible for the damage, is an essential and responsible part of wildlife management." Many of us have conducted our programs over the years in concert with these positions, however, there are others, including some administrators and educators, who perceive it as negative to, or at best, an adjunct necessity to other objectives of wildlife management programs.

It is essential for those of us in the wildlife and natural resources professions to acknowledge and support wildlife damage control as a vital element of wildlife management programs. It should be taught in our colleges and universities as a part of the wildlife management curriculum, must be afforded appropriate research emphasis, and must be conducted as a positive part of wildlife management programs -- without apology and without excuses, but with necessary and appropriate support and funding.

We recognize that wildlife damage prevention and control is not a new

problem -- it has always been a vital element in the protection of the human interests; it is complex and rarely lends itself to easy answers; it doesn't disappear if we ignore it. If ignored, it often forces the landowner, manager, or community to resort to practices that are environmental hazards and/or eliminates existence habitat for all wildlife species, and wildlife damage control will remain controversial.

Recent reports estimate that about two-thirds of our wildlife is produced on private lands, the remainder being produced on public and other lands. Even if you question these estimates, I believe we can agree that if we expect the private landowner or public land manager to produce wildlife for us to make these lands accessible for such desirable recreation, we must ensure their access to assistance and to cost-effective tools to prevent or control excessive losses, damages, or health hazards from problem species. Can we in good faith as agency wildlife professionals encourage the private landowner or manager to sustain or enhance wildlife habitat, yet ignore their pleas for assistance when pest problems occur? I think not! If we expect these landowners and managers to continue to provide habitat for all species of wildlife (owned by the public) and to provide access for use whether compensated or not, we must be willing to assist them with professional research, educational information, operational control and technical assistance when needed. The incentives must outweigh the disincentives!

From the presentations on this panel, there should be consensus on at least two points: (1) Wildlife damage control is an integral part of wildlife management; and (2) There must be coordination between agencies, organizations and support groups to better educate the public and to enlist their support for wise stewardship.

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