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A PERSPECTIVE FROM A STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
--Research Needs in Wildlife Damage Control--

by Robert J. Mungari 1/

Prior to addressing our topic of "Research Needs in Wildlife Damage Control" it is necessary to provide you with the perspective of the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets as it relates to wildlife damage. The Department does not possess statutory authority over the management of the State's wildlife resources. We, therefore, lack the ability to address agricultural crop losses from a statewide or regional perspective through the utilization of population management. Instead we must approach damage control on an individual farm basis with the impact of our present control activities and practices being somewhat localized.

Our involvement in this area of study is a direct result of the concerns and perspectives raised by our primary constituents "the farmers". It was their concerns that initiated our participation in wildlife damage control in 1979 with the onset of our sponsorship of deer damage control research at the Institute of Ecosystem Studies.

Our most recent accomplishment in this area has consisted of the signing of the first federal-state cooperative agreement for animal damage control east of the Mississippi River in November of 1986. This agreement, between the USDA-APHIS/ADC and the Department, focuses on the control and prevention of sheep predation by coyotes and black bear damage to apiaries.

Animal damage control activities proposed under the cooperative agreement are supported by matching federal-state contributions. The extent to which ADC issues are addressed through the cooperative agreement is ultimately dependent upon the amount of the state contribution and the funding allocation of the ADC program within APHIS.

There exists one cooperative agreement per state which will be made with the lead agency. It is the responsibility of the lead agency to represent all state interests. Any agency, cooperative or individual within the state, may apply for matching funds through the federal-state cooperative agreement.

Our first priority with regards to research needs involves the strengthing of eastern federal-state cooperative agreements through the establishment of a federally operated animal damage control research facility in the east.

To successfully employ federal-state cooperative agreements in the east, an eastern regional research and support facility must be established. The facility would be a branch of USDA-APHIS and would function as a support unit to the eastern states through federal-state cooperative agreements. Emphasis would be placed on applied research to support contractual work in urban and rural settings. The facility would be staffed by federal personnel.

The programs established through the cooperative agreements between USDI and states west of the Mississippi River were provided support from the Denver Wildlife Research Center. The success of the western programs can in part be attributed to this resource. We must conclude that without similar support for the eastern state programs, the potential for achievement and success will be seriously jeopardized.

The advantages of initiating this action are numerous. Staffing of the facility with trained personnel would provide the east with an expertise currently not available in any of the States. This resource alone would serve to encourage more parties into entering existing federal-state cooperative agreements, increasing

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State contributions and in turn, the available federal matching funds.

The facility would act as a catalyst, providing incentive for all eastern states to enter into federal-state cooperative agreements with the end result being a pooling of financial resources to address issues common to the participating states at a reduced cost. Efforts would be coordinated by a common entity (USDA) to all eastern cooperative agreements to maximize research efforts by avoiding duplication.

Until recently, federal cost-sharing assistance was not available to states east of the Mississippi River. Consequently, expenditures in the area of animal damage control were minimal in the east. In fact, many ADC recommendations for the eastern states were actually adaptations of techniques and methodologies developed in the western programs.

The adequacy of such recommendations has recently been questioned. Animal damage control in the eastern two-thirds of the United States is a complex undertaking. Problems arising from land-use patterns and populations of wildlife species are of increasing concern to farmers, rural and suburban homeowners and resource managers.

In 1983, the First Eastern Wildlife Damage Control Conference was appropriately held in New York State bringing national attention to the plight of landowners and homeowners who have traditionally absorbed the cost of wildlife damage. With increasing attention being focused on animal damage, there now exists a need for recommendations involving damage control and prevention.

Most eastern states are presently unable to successfully respond to this need due to the general lack of funding available to address the inordinate number of current damage issues faced at the state level.

The most efficacious approach to this problem would be the consideration of cost-sharing programs designed to specifically address state ADC issues. We can further maximize expenditures by avoiding the unnecessary duplication of efforts at the state and regional levels.

We also need to locate an existing source of expertise and knowledge in this area of study that can be utilized without incurring a great expense.

All this can be accomplished through the utilization of a single vehicle - that being the federal-state cooperative agreement.

Our second priority would be to better define the value of ADC research in terms of its economic significance. It is necessary to make ADC research competitive with the traditionally funded disciplines of entomology and plant pathology.

For example, in 1986, New York State funded Integrated Pest Management at a level of $350,000. In 1987, funding of IPM may exceed $500,000. Yet little of this money is directed at ADC research.

Our primary problem is not in the identification of wildlife damage issues but in determining their significance in terms of economics.

We are required to substantiate our proposed budget with accompanying justifications for requested expenditures. It may be a paradox of state government that allows us to identify a problem but because it has not been investigated (due to lack of funding) it becomes difficult to defend its inclusion in a budget.

Further definition of the economics of damage, its control, and prevention on a local, state and regional basis would provide support and justification for state expenditures. If more monies can be generated to address ADC problems and those problems can be cost shared through cooperative agreements, it is easy to observe how we can maximize our efforts and subsequent progress in this area.

In concluding, our goals appear appropriate for the circumstances that presently prevail. We must build a better case for research needs in the area of animal damage control and prevention. We must substantiate the need for expenditures in this area of study by estimating the economics of ADC on a local, state and regional basis in order to procure interest and

funding that has traditionally gone to other disciplines of science.

Once dollars become available we should strive to maximize that resource through the cost-sharing of research, the avoidance of the duplication of efforts and the utilization of available federal resources such as personnel, facilities, etc. One vehicle presently available through which all these criteria can be obtained is the federal-state cooperative agreement.

The more participants involved in such agreements the stronger the over all effort becomes. United through federal-state cooperative agreements these problems will not continue to be beyond our grasp.

Obviously our efforts in the east would be enhanced through the establishment of a federally operated Eastern Regional ADC Research facility. The existence of such a resource would encourage the development of additional federal-state cooperative agreements in the east as well as enhance participation within state cooperative agreements. It would also commit federal interest and involvement at an appropriate level in addressing the ADC problems of the east.