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SOCIAL, POLITICAL, LEGAL, AND ETHICAL ASPECTS OF WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT

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Wildlife damage management practices are more influenced by our social environment today than in any other period during history. Change is clearly in the wind, and the scope and range of that change will be defined by the social, legal, political, and ethical constraints determined by all segments of society. By defining the decision-making environment, however, management decisions can be made with a clearer understanding of potential ramifications and, hopefully, a refinement of uncertain principles that influence management decisions affecting natural resource use (Holling 1978).

DISCUSSION

The Social Environment

In 1990, the U.S. population was over 250 million people, and immigration was the major source of population growth. As the baby boom generation aged, the median age of the U.S. population also increased. Nearly one-third of all Americans will be a member of a minority group by the year 2000. AIDS, crime, drug abuse, inflation, and the homeless topped the list of issues that concerned Americans in 1988 (United Way of America 1989). These factors, and many others, intertwine to set the stage for

society's reactions to wildlife damage management issues. No easy solutions, however, will satisfy the wide spectrum of societal opinions, animal needs, and the closely related issues of natural resource management.

The Political Environment

In the U.S., individuals and organizations have the right to participate in making laws, selecting government officials, and carrying on the functions of government. In recent years, individuals and local groups have demonstrated that political activism is an effective conduit of change. There is an increase in the growth and number of special interest groups. Society and budgetary concerns are pushing for decentralization of government. Public referendums increasingly are used to develop policy. NIMBY ("Not In My Back Yard") philosophies result in additional litigation, negotiation, and planning considerations for many groups that feel affected by government or corporate decisions.

The Legal Environment

There are numerous legal frameworks that affect wildlife damage management. The National Environmental Protection Act

and its state equivalents, the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act, the Endangered Species Act, and even the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, among others, all have influenced the materials and methods of wildlife damage management. A multitude of regulatory agencies have standing or jurisdiction over what can and cannot be done.

The Ethical Environment

"A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy." This quote by a leading animal rights activist summarizes the extreme view that some members of society have when it comes to animals. Every individual has a different set of ethical and moral rules for guiding their life. What we eat and drink, with whom we associate, our choice of religion, and our attitudes toward animals are examples of these ethical and moral rules. Our attitudes toward animals and animal use also are manipulated by these sets of rules. Thus, our society is composed of a variety of individuals with differing sets of morals, including vegetarians who reject eating meat, deer hunters who reject killing fawns or does, and pet owners who reject selling unclaimed dogs to research institutions (Schmidt 1990).

Technological Trends

Many factors will affect the types of technology and resource management systems available to wildlife damage managers in the next century. The social, political, legal, and ethical trends discussed above will have a major impact on the management of wildlife damage, as will the continuing trend toward multiple-use of public lands, consideration of cumulative impacts, and, of course, economics.

Future Challenges

Where does this leave wildlife damage management? First, recognize that the changes which affect wildlife damage management are not operating in a vacuum, and that the entire mosaic of human society and the world environment is changing. This evolution is natural and expected. What is unknown is the specific direction and strength of these changes. It must be recognized that wildlife damage management is an extremely small slice of the multi-dimensional human niche. Professionals in wildlife damage management must work to define future social, political, legal, and ethical trends, and to devise management schemes that are successful within these new environments.

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