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EXTENSION'S PERSPECTIVE OF FEDERAL, STATE AND PRIVATE ANIMAL DAMAGE CONTROL PROGRAMS

by Gary J. San Julian [1/]

ABSTRACT

Extension personnel are in a unique position to observe and to be involved in animal damage control (ADC) programs at the federal, state and private levels. In order to offer educational programs, we must interpret regulations and policies to provide a workable interface between ourselves, other agencies and the public. This is not an easy task in such a sensitive and emotional area.

The lack of uniformity in policies among federal agencies as well as the hazy lines of authority and responsibility for some species makes it hard to provide guidance for our clientele. The growing involvement of the public and private business in ADC is influencing policies on a local basis. A concise and comprehensive evaluation of roles and policies involved in animal damage control is required if both the resource and our publics are to be served.

In March, 1985, after much deliberation and investigation, the agency responsible for animal damage control at the federal level was moved from the Department of Interior to the Department of Agriculture. The physical changeover is complete; but, there is still some animosity or concern in some agencies and organizations over the transfer which affects cooperation. These conflicts are evident to individuals that are responsible for information transfer and educational programs.

State wildlife agencies have an opportunity to play a key role in developing ADC programs. However, many of these agencies choose to ignore or gloss over the subject because many of the public's concerns involved only agricultural or urban damage and relatively few native game species. The question of jurisdiction and responsibility for certain wildlife species has significantly influenced and in some situations strained the relationship between federal and state wildlife agencies in the area of ADC.

For example, the woodpecker, a migratory bird, comes under the jurisdiction of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), but the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS) is charged with the federal responsibility for ADC. When the Extension Service receives a complaint about woodpeckers, Extension personnel often check with the state director for ADC regarding regulations and/or prevention or control measures. He in turn can recommend that a kill permit be requested from USFWS for the offending individual. The homeowner must then fill out a depredation permit application and send it to USFWS for approval. In the Atlanta region, the request is usually honored and the homeowner can take the necessary action. However, in some regions kill permits are not so simple to obtain. It seems that the process throughout the system could be streamlined and standardized. If ADC offices were authorized to issue sub-permits in specific cases, the paperwork would be reduced and the problem could be resolved more effectively and economically. These same professionals were making evaluations and issuing sub-permits as USFWS employees a few years back.

Many urban areas are seeing the establishment of private urban damage control businesses. Some are outgrowths of pest control operations and others are new endeavors in animal damage control. Again, the potential for conflict exists. In North Carolina, a landowner must request a trapping permit from the NC Wildlife Resources Commission in order to trap any wildlife, even if using live traps. If the homeowner hires someone to do the trapping, the third party must be

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authorized by the homeowner's permit. The process of permitting makes it difficult to serve the public. Even if wildlife agencies do not want to handle damage complaints, they should maintain their authority through a license procedure which makes it simpler for others to do the work.

It is essential that all agencies work together in the area of ADC if we are to maintain control and credibility. Animal damage control is an integral component of management and our wildlife profession. Only through a coordinated effort can we correct problems in regulations and jurisdictions. If we do not cooperate, we may lose the few management tools remaining for ADC. Wildlife biologists must take a professional leadership role that results in a committed effort from all wildlife agencies; otherwise, biological decisions will be made without benefit of our counsel. An ADC committee at the state level including representatives of federal, state and private organizations would help develop a coordinated and consistent animal damage control program.