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The Probe NADCA
ISSUE 139
DECEMBER 1993

Look Before You Leap: Business considerations in wildlife damage management

Terry Whitworth, Whitworth Pest Control, Inc., 3707 96th Street East, Tacoma, Washington, 98446

Many NADCA members who are government employees probably have considered starting their own businesses, especially as government support for ADC programs declines in the future. When I completed a Ph.D. in 1975 with a zoology degree, the job market was very similar to today's. Though most of my professors directed me toward government employment, I chose the private industry route. After nearly 6 years working for and managing a pest control firm, I started a pest control business of my own in early 1981.

Today my firm grosses about $500,000 per year, while providing me and 9 other employees with a decent wage plus benefits. In my early years I was delighted that people would pay me for something I'd do for free. As my business has grown, I've experienced many ups and downs, but I can honestly say I've never regretted my decision to take the leap into free enterprise.

The obvious benefit of business ownership is that you are your own boss. Sure, you must answer to employees, government agencies, insurance companies, and customers, but you always have the final say. To me, the knowledge that you, the owner, have control of your fate is the biggest benefit of being an owner.

Many NADCA members are college graduates with science backgrounds. The others have unique wildlife damage management experience. This training can be a great help when it comes to solving pest problems, but to succeed in business you must have a variety of entrepreneurial skills which often tend to be weak, at best, in scientists and technicians. To succeed, you must develop skills in sales, marketing, customer service, accounting, and personnel management. Wildlife damage managers are rarely taught these skills, but books and seminars abound which can help you develop them.

Ownership carries many responsibilities which can weigh heavily on some people. In the early years of a business, 60-hour-weeks are common, especially in the busy season. As a beginning entrepreneur, you are responsible for everything—sales, service accounting, etc.—and you may find little time to do the things you enjoy. When you run your own business, the work never stops nor do the problems. It can often get overwhelming, and most new owners have to learn to cope with "burnout" within two to three years after start-up. During the start-up phase, money will be very tight and you'll likely have little time for home and family. If you can survive the start-up phase, it does get easier. However, the challenges never end, nor do the problems, but they do change as your business grows.

About 10% of my business ($50,000/year) is wildlife damage management. Rodent control is number one (about 5%), while bird control is number two. Problems with wildlife, though common, produce little revenue. Even with the Washington Department of Wildlife and the local Cooperative Extension Service referrals, people are rarely willing to spend much money to solve wildlife problems. In our area, we have several "trappers" who trap for fun and charge very little for their services. I can't, in good conscience, charge a homeowner $100 to $200 (my cost) to trap a raccoon when a local trapper will do just as well for $35.

Unless you plan to operate "under the table," you must generate substantial revenue to have a viable business. Our company goal is $60/person-hour for all field personnel. This includes office and travel time. On a year-

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CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

January 18-22, 1994: American Sheep Industry Annual Conference, Nuggett Hotel, Reno, Nevada. Contact: Brenda Hamill, (303) 771-3500.

January 26-29, 1994: National Cattlemen's Association Annual Meeting, Reno, Nevada. Contact: Amy Guiterrez or Laura Clark, (303) 694-0305.

February 21-23, 1994: 1st Eastern Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators Short Course, Lexington, Kentucky. For more information, contact Tom Barnes, Extension Wildlife Specialist, Department of Forestry, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40546-0073.

February 28 - March 3, 1994: 16th Vertebrate Pest Conference, Westin Hotel, Santa Clara, California. Includes all-day field trip on Feb. 28 followed by three days of technical and management-related papers including concurrent sessions. Contact: Terry Salmon, Business Mgr., DANR-North Region, UC Davis, Davis, CA 95616-8575, (916) 757-8623.

April 12-15, 1994: 12th Eastern Black Bear Workshop, River Terrace Resort & Convention Center, Gatlinburg, Tennessee. The theme is *Human-Bear Interactions*. For more information, contact Michael R. Pelton, Department of Forestry, Wildlife & Fisheries, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37901, (615) 974-7126; FAX (615) 974-4714.

May 1-4, 1994: Northeast Association of Wildlife Damage Biologists Annual Meeting, Sheraton-Burlington Hotel and Conference Center, Burlington, Vermont. Contact: Rich Chipman, P.O. Box 1436, Montpelier, VT 05601.

September 21-25, 1994: First Annual Conference, The Wildlife Society, Albuquerque, New Mexico. Theme: "Excellence in Wildlife Stewardship through Science and Education." Contact: (301) 897-9770.

Position Available

DIRECTOR, DENVER WILDLIFE RESEARCH CENTER, USDA-APHIS. GS-486-15. Duties: Plans, develops, coordinates, directs, supervises, evaluates, and communicates the research activities of the Center. Qualifications: academic training and experience in biology, with specialization in wildlife; Ph.D. desirable. Contact: USDA-APHIS Human Resources Operation, Minneapolis, MN (612) 370-2200.

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Your contributions to *The Probe* are welcome. Please send news clippings, new techniques, publications, and meeting notices to *The Probe*, c/o Hopland Research & Extension Center, 4070 University Road, Hopland, CA 95449. If you prefer to FAX material, our FAX number is (707) 744-1040. The deadline for submitting material is the 15th of each month. Opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of NADCA.

Publications Available

PROCEEDINGS, "Ecology and Management of the Eastern Coyote," a symposium sponsored by the University of New Brunswick. $20 Canadian, includes shipping and handling. Contact: Dr. Arnold H. Boer, Wildlife Research Unit, Dept. of Forest Resources, Univ. of New Brunswick, Bag Service Number 44555, Fredericton, NB, Canada E3B 6C2.

NADCA MEMBERS will want to get a copy of the new 43-page publication entitled: *The Denver Wildlife Research Center Highlights Report, 1991-1992.*

The publication is a wealth of information at the cutting edge of new technology on ADC topics as they relate to agricultural crops, endangered species, nuisance, safety, health concerns, livestock, aquaculture and contraceptive research.

This report also lists 92 additional publications on varieties of subjects including birds, mammals, and predators, most of which are also available from the Denver Wildlife Research Center.

For your copy, free of charge, write: USDA, Denver Wildlife Research Center, P.O. Box 25266, Bldg. 16, Federal Center, Denver, CO. 08225-1266. Ask for miscellaneous publication no. 1515.

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Look Before You Leap

round basis, our actual average is closer to $50/hour and our bottom line tell us it needs to be more. If you haven't operated a business, you're probably thinking you could make it easily on $10 to $20/hour. While costs are lower in some areas, the fact remains that by the time you pay for everything, there is shockingly little remaining for you.

The following is a review of my costs for three of my busiest months, April, May, and June, 1993, based on a gross of $175,000.

Advertising	4%
Chemicals & other materials	13%
Employee Benefits	2%
Phones	1%
Equipment	2%
Insurance	2%
Office Expense	3%
Payroll	36%
Parts	3%
Business Taxes	4%
Vehicle Expenses	7%
Utilities	1%
Total Expenses	**78%**
Profit	**22%**

For three months, my expenses were $136,500, while my profit was $38,500. Wow, this looks great, but I can't spend it; I need busy season profits to get me through the slow season. My three slowest months, October through December of 1992, generated a gross of about $50,000 with a loss of about $35,000. The bottom line at the end of my fiscal year was a net profit of about 5% ($25,000).

There you have it. Owning a business can be fun and financially rewarding but, if it was easy, everyone would do it. Hopefully, these comments will help you make the right decisions if you are considering starting a business.

Ms. Kaye Stafford (left) presented a check for $1,000 from the Reed Joseph International Co. to Jim Miller (right), NADCA Vice-President at the 6th Eastern Wildlife Damage Mangement Conference.

Reed Joseph Continues Support of NADCA

An additional contribution of $1,000 was presented to NADCA at the recent 6th Eastern Wildlife Damage Management Conference held in North Carolina. The check was the second such amount this year given by Reed Joseph International, a manufacturer and distributor of animal damage control products. Vice-President (East) Jim Miller gratefully accepted the gift from Ms. Kaye Stafford, during the conference.

NADCA Awards Best Student Paper

M.C. Philipp, a student at Auburn University, received the award for best student presentation at the recent 6th Eastern Wildlife Damage Management Conference. His paper was entitled, "Perceptions and Knowledge of Alabama Fruit and Vegetable Producers Toward Coyotes." The award, which included a plaque and a year's membership in NADCA, is sponsored by NADCA as a means of supporting and encouraging both undergraduate and graduate students who are interested in wildlife damage control.

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Membership Application

NATIONAL ANIMAL DAMAGE CONTROL ASSOCIATION

Mail to: Wes Jones, Treasurer, Route 1 Box 37, Shell Lake, WI 54871, Phone: (715) 468-2038

Name: _____ Phone: (____) _____ - _____ Home

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Additional Address Info: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP _____

Dues: $_____ Donation: $_____ Total: $_____ Date: _____

Membership Class: Student $10.00 Active $20.00 Sponsor $40.00 Patron $100 (Circle one)

Check or Money Order payable to NADCA

Select one type of occupation or principal interest:

[ ] Agriculture
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[ ] University