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WHERE ARE WE? - NATIONAL SCENE

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When the question is asked, "Where are we?", we must compare our progress to where we were in the past or to a goal of the future. When we do this, it is apparent that much has been accomplished during the past ten years, however, the goal of alleviating bird damage to all agricultural crops has not yet been met. We have developed methods to combat crop losses (Avitrol, scaring devices), we know more about bird population dynamics, more about bird behavior and physiology. Yet, there is much more to accomplish, for we have a number of bird crop damage situations that have not yet been solved. Also, there are few answers to the bird roosting problem, and the question of using bird reproductive inhibitors needs to be answered.

When speaking of national bird damage control, people generally are thinking of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. Since the past Bowling Green Conference, which was held in 1970, a number of actions have occurred that have had a bearing on Bureau bird damage control efforts. These happenings were:

1. The President's Executive Order 11643, which primarily concerned itself with predator control programs and the use of toxicants on public lands. The order affects bird damage control projects in that it prohibits the use on Federal land of any toxicant that causes significant secondary hazards. Since the Federal Government has not been using such substances in bird damage control programs the order has little effect on its programs.
2. Public Law 92-516, an amendment to the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act. This act will have far reaching affects, in that among other things, it requires that Federal agencies use only registered products, that they be certified to apply pesticides and that pesticides be classified as to hazards they cause. The implementation of this amendment will have a direct bearing on Federal bird control projects.
3. New Animal Damage Control Abatement Act - The Act submitted by the Department of the Interior is being considered by both houses of the legislative branch. If enacted, the major responsibility for animal damage control programs involving resident species will in part shift to State governments. Migratory bird damage control programs would remain the responsibility of the Federal government. Research is emphasized in the Act.

These three happenings will or have had an effect on national programs. It is still too early to say what this effect will be in the long run. However, it is certain that there will continue to be Federal research and operational bird damage control programs. The objectives of these programs will be to:

1. Develop the safest and most selective methods possible for alleviating damage by wild birds and to obtain information on effects using such methods may have on the total environment.
2. Develop methods for appraising damage caused by wild birds and determine its economic significance.
3. Convey through public consultation and demonstration information about bird damage control methods to public officials and private individuals.

Hopefully, Federal bird damage control programs will continue to be supported by the public. This has been true in the past and it continues to be true today. However, budget restrictions, inflation, and the importance of other programs have resulted in a stable budget situation during the past three years. Funding for research and operational programs in budget year 1974 is essentially the same as in 1973. It appears that budget year 1975 will be similar to 1974. Even so, significant accomplishments can be expected. The need for a program is often expressed in terms of public response through letter writing, telephone calls, etc. It appears that such response has diminished from that of the late sixties. This probably can be attributed to the use of new damage control methods, and in part, due to the fact that we have more field activities underway, providing more public exposure than in early years. I would judge that public pressures to do more are fewer today than three years ago.

Our current programs and those of the future will be concerned with developing and using more sophisticated crop damage assessments. We need better methods not only to locate high damage areas and determine losses in these areas, but also to measure the effectiveness of these control methods. Emphasis must be upon preventing bird damage, not in dynamics, habitats, behavior and physiology, if we are to truly understand the bird damage problem. Above all, we must develop damage control devices that are effective and environmentally sound. We must consider that before a method can be utilized it must have Federal registration.

We have made great strides in solving some of these perplexing problems, hopefully we can continue to make progress.

Question: Should the states have control?

Answer: You're talking about the Animal Damage Abatement Act and not the Executive Order. The Abatement Act, in essence, turns the responsibility of some animal damage control programs over to the state. It does not deal with bird control. The Department of Fish and Wildlife Service is supporting this Bill. It is their Bill or their Act. I think that by turning the responsibilities over to the state, you may end up with a situation where we have less control of the programs than we do now. You also certainly require the state to, if they do it properly, staff up the government program properly.

Question: What about funding for the Abatement Act?

Answer: The Abatement Act turns over the research funding as well as the operational funding. The Act, unless it has been changed, specifically asks for funding for research for the Federal Government. What it is doing is sending responsibility of the operational programs this way.

Question: What about a public relations program?

Answer: In the context that in the past we have developed methods and not tried to get these methods out to the public so that they could use them. I am not saying we are going to develop a public relations program so that the public can be aware of bird damage. I don't think we have to do that. Once the problem is identified and attempts are made to solve the problem, the general public loses interest and they go on to other things. Where you have difficulty is maintaining your continuity in your program so that you follow through to the end result.