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Policy and Goals in the Private Sector¹

Rick Warhurst²

Today I am supposed to talk about policy and goals for predator management and control to enhance waterfowl production in the private sector. The private sector includes a wide array of interests. Each of you probably has a particular opinion. You have already observed some different thinking, some different languages, in reference to predator control from previous panel members. If you extrapolate that over the whole United States population, which would be the private sector, it would include a wide array of interests and thoughts.

In addition, there are a lot of different organizations, many wildlife conservation organizations. Obviously there are many different kinds of thinking, objectives, interests, etc., all having their own specific ideas on the subject. If you were to talk to John Grandy, of the United States Humane Society, you would probably get a different answer than I would give. Even though John did some work with waterfowl and knows waterfowl biology, his answer, I am sure, concerning control of predators to raise ducks would be much different than if you talked to Len McDaniel about the subject. I did not question some of the various other wildlife organizations, such as the National Wildlife Federation, Audubon Society, or the Sierra Club and others with which you are familiar, concerning their policy as it concerns predator control to enhance waterfowl production. I am not sure what their philosophies are completely. Maybe they do not have policies or philosophies or goals. However, I do not think they would be as enthused about controlling predators to raise ducks as some of us are about the subject.

Ducks Unlimited (D.U.) has a membership of 600,000, and all the habitat enhancement and development work that occurs, and all the money that is raised comes from those 600,000 people, which is a pretty small number when compared to the population of the whole United States. Our membership, which is primarily made up of duck hunters and people interested in seeing large numbers of ducks or waterfowl, has shown that they are willing to put their money up front so that they can enjoy the benefits of the sport of waterfowling and a wildlife legacy.

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Of course, that is why back in 1937 when Ducks Unlimited was founded there were men with ample financial means and foresight enough to realize that unless something was done by the private sector, particularly in Canada, there was not going to be a waterfowl legacy. They had come through the severe drought of the 30's and had observed the skies that once were blackened with ducks dwindle to a scant remnant of ducks migrating up and down the flyways. These men could see there were not going to be any ducks in the future unless actions were taken quickly. Hence D.U. was established. So D.U. has put their money to work on the ground in the development of wetland habitats. Through the years D.U. has followed a singleness of purpose concept, the enhancement and development of habitat so that there would be production habitat for waterfowl. In recent years we have begun working on wintering areas and in most recent years, since 1985, working on migration habitat (MARSH Program). But still the main emphasis for Ducks Unlimited is in the waterfowl production country. Yesterday, in the paper I presented, I covered a wide array of projects, showing a lot of slides of some of the different kinds of projects we've built. We have used many different techniques and methods to separate predators from waterfowl nests, waterfowl nesting hens, and eggs.

Ducks Unlimited does not have a policy on predator control or predator management. We attempt to analyze a specific management area and to determine what is the limiting factor or factors for waterfowl production on that area; such as, a lack of secure nesting cover, or brood water, or a combination of these types of things. Then we address our project development to overcome that limiting factor so that waterfowl production can reach its maximum capacity or ultimate production potential on this particular management area. Again, our project attempts to address the factors limiting waterfowl production on the proposed project site. The development of proper habitat and the expansion of habitat has been the aspect which D.U. has stressed most during its fifty years. We have attempted to restore or create new or otherwise enhance waterfowl production habitat, particularly wetland habitat. Restoration of wetlands is an example of the types of production habitat improvement projects that D.U. develops. Yesterday I showed several slides of some of the twelve hundred acres D.U. has of wetland habitat restored in west-central Minnesota in cooperation with Midcontinent Waterfowl Management Program. That project also included restoring or reseeded 3,000 acres of upland nesting cover. Other D.U. projects involve installing water control structures

on various marshes which no longer produce as a result of a lack of water level control capability, severe infestation with rough fish, or if water levels have been too high in the area wetland too long. A planned drawdown of the wetland is utilized to restore high productivity and diversity to the marsh. We install control structures to facilitate drawdown of water and to allow more intensive management of the wetland.

Ducks Unlimited has developed projects in areas where there are fewer egg-eating predators or a different predator base, such as the West River country of the Dakotas and eastern Montana. Yesterday I mentioned some results concerning some of our brood counts on a few of the West River projects. They do produce ducks. These wetlands are not in what is considered prime prairie pothole country, but when water is available in the West River country, those wetlands do produce ducks. They produce ducks at an equal rate or better than some of the areas that we consider prime duck production pothole country.

We also create islands to separate predators from waterfowl nests either by separating peninsulas from the mainland with electric fences or physical excavations. We often build nesting islands. I showed a slide yesterday of a scraper sitting in the water at Katy's Lake in Montana after breaking through the ice, so building islands is not always nice and easy. It can be very expensive. Definitely electric fences are cheaper to construct; however, they do have a great deal of manpower maintenance requirements. For this reason we prefer, if it is possible, to cut off a peninsula to create a permanent island.

The use of artificial nesting structures is another method that we have tried to decrease waterfowl nest predation. You would think everyone would agree that nesting structures are a good idea, but that is not true. Within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service there are different philosophies concerning the use of artificial nesting structures. Some say they are not natural, they do not look good out there on the landscape. Ducks Unlimited is, I guess, trying to produce ducks, so within reason, we do not care how they look, if I can be so blunt. We want to produce ducks; we want to restore waterfowl populations to acceptable numbers--numbers with which sportsmen can be satisfied, and that are satisfactory to the general public. Gay Simpson mentioned to me this morning that some of the local folks up in Alaska in the Chugach National Forest region are not real happy with the idea of hazing brown bears away from the artificial goose nesting structures D.U. constructed and placed in the forest's wetlands to enhance production of the Dusky Canada Geese. Brown bears have become a major predator of the nesting geese. Nest success has fallen to very low levels. Hopefully the nest structures will provide predator-free nesting sites for the Dusky.

Again, the private sector includes a wide array of interests and a wide array of different thoughts and philosophies concerning predators. Just what is

a predator? Some people would say a fox is just as important as a duck. It comes down to what our personal values are.

Hal Doty and Gay mentioned the North American Waterfowl Plan. It was signed May 1986, by the Prime Minister of Canada and our U.S. governmental officials. Ducks Unlimited is one of the first organizations to become involved with this and support the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. I mentioned yesterday that Ducks Unlimited has constructed some 3,200 development projects in Canada and in the U.S., including some 2,000,000 acres of wetland and waterfowl habitat that has been improved and enhanced for waterfowl production. One of the important aspects of this North American Plan is that it sets specific goals for different populations of waterfowl, and it also defines goals for habitat needs and habitat acquisitions.

Point number two of the specific Recommendations Section for Future Actions (p. 27) suggests that protection and improvement of over 1,000,000 additional acres of mallard and pintail breeding habitat in the pothole area of the north-central U.S. are also needed. That is a lot of acreage, especially in light of the fact, that for 50 years D.U. has been developing projects, and we have enhanced just a little over 2,000,000 acres. Over 1,000,000 more acres are needed. It's a big challenge. Ducks Unlimited has pledged over 550 million dollars over the next 15 years as a minimum for meeting these habitat needs. We have challenged some of the other wildlife organizations, to put it in the words of Dale Whitesell, our former executive vice president, "to put their money where their mouth is" so to speak--to get behind this Plan and to give their support monetarily to expand the habitat base for waterfowl and waterfowl production.

In summary, we do not have a policy and goal for predator management in Ducks Unlimited to control predators to enhance waterfowl production. We try to examine the limiting factor for waterfowl production on a proposed project site and address our project development to overcome this weakness to allow the specific management area to produce more waterfowl. If a lack of secure nesting habitat is the limiting factor, we address that by trying to develop electric fence cutoffs or electric fence enclosures, or constructing nesting islands to attempt to improve waterfowl production. The management of our projects within the United States is the responsibility of the cooperating agency. For example, if we develop a cooperative project with the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks, a Project Management Plan is submitted by the Game, Fish and Parks to us prior to D.U. contracting for development of the project. If we are both in agreement with the plan, the project is developed. The implementation of that plan is the responsibility of the Game and Fish Department. What about some of those predators out there on the islands and peninsulas that get trapped there after you get it fenced? Each year, just after ice out, the managing agency personnel clean off the islands or the various peninsulas. Ducks Unlimited does not have the personnel to do that. Again the cooperating agency

does the management. They remove predators from the islands and points.

I have tried to emphasize that in the private sector there are a lot of different interests and a wide array of philosophies. Some of the people may

not agree with our D.U. philosophy. Six hundred thousand people who are members of Ducks Unlimited contribute very substantially, and would like to see more waterfowl. We are willing to do whatever it takes to insure that waterfowl legacy for my children, your children and future generations.