How Wildlife Damage Control Personnel Can Cope With The Gas Shortage and Reduced Budgets, Yet Still Meet the Needs of the Public

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HOW WILDLIFE DAMAGE CONTROL PERSONNEL CAN COPE
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YET STILL MEET THE NEEDS OF THE PUBLIC

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As I see the situation, we are really addressing a two-sided issue -- one involves actual field personnel, such as Animal Damage Control (ADC), and the other contains those involved in extension. Some potential solutions which may be beneficial for one group may not be applicable to the problems encountered by the other.

ADC Personnel. The field personnel are faced with increased fuel costs and static or decreased travel budgets. In addition, there is rumor of a 10 to 15% mandatory decrease in gasoline consumption on a per-month-basis by ADC employees in New Mexico. I assume that ADC personnel in other states also will be restricted in their travel allowance. State funded ADC personnel have been trying to maintain a viable operation on a budget which probably has received no increase in the past two or three years.

There are some potential short-term and mid-term solutions to the fuel shortage. One of these involves the type of vehicle driven in the field. Not every individual has a need for a four-wheel drive or a pick-up with a large V-8 capable of towing a two-horse trailer and full load of field gear. These employees should have their supervisors investigate the possibility of purchasing one of the smaller, fuel-efficient vehicles which are currently available. Several are capable of 22 mpg or more even under field conditions. I call coyotes in New Mexico from a used Datsun 1200 which averages 28-32 mpg for off-highway driving.

Another possibility is to get the landowner or his employees involved in the control operation. These persons are normally in the field on a regular basis and most reside near the problem area. They could possibly check traps, snares, etc. and maintain the sets once the line has been established. Of course this will entail spending some time with the operators teaching them how to set control devices, where to locate them and how to handle animals once they have been captured. However, it may save many miles of travel on a regular basis for ADC personnel.
Perhaps changing to devices which instantly kill animals, as opposed to leg-hold traps, would reduce the need for having to check traps on a regular basis. ADC personnel may have to switch to such devices as M-44's, snares or kill traps in order to reduce the need for travel. The landowner or his employees also could assist in this operation if they have received proper training.

A final suggestion which may benefit some ADC personnel is the intensity of their efforts. In some instances there may be only one or two animals which are causing the damage. A very intensive effort for a short period might be effective in removing the problem animals. Then the ADC agent could concentrate his efforts elsewhere. This suggestion may cut down on extensive travel, particularly if the problem area is a great distance from the agent's home base.

Extension Personnel. Extension agents, by the nature of their training and mandates of their position, potentially have some solutions to the fuel shortage. We all know that there is no substitute for one-on-one training or assistance with an owner/operator when it comes to animal damage control. However, extension agents generally have a vast store of information at their fingertips which they can supply to those requesting assistance. Sometimes a lengthy, detailed telephone conversation will provide enough insight for the agent to suggest several potential solutions. Hopefully, one of these suggestions will provide the desired result and allow the operators to alleviate their individual problems. However, there are many instances when the operator does not have the proper training to utilize the best, accepted control mechanisms that are available. These situations call for solutions other than telephone conversations, supplying informational brochures, etc.

An extension agent has an opportunity to contact a large audience through mass media. Such mechanisms as T.V., video cassettes and radio tapes can provide answers to many of the more common problems. Training sessions in problem areas are another potential means of communicating with several individuals about related incidences of depredation. However all these suggestions must have wide publicity or those individuals needing the assistance will not be aware of where to find potential solutions or will not attend the training sessions. Some individuals will not make this effort no matter how good your publicity has been, but that is another problem and not a potential solution to the fuel shortage.

Another consideration is training "experts" in animal damage control from various areas throughout a state. Possibly the land grant universities could offer intensive short courses which would qualify persons to assess problems in their immediate area and either suggest solutions or handle the control procedures themselves. I realize this program would have to reach those who
already have an interest in this type of work and who have time to handle the problems but still earn a living. In addition, the public would have to be made aware of who this person is for their area, and possibly be willing to compensate in some manner for the services they received from them. This suggestion would reduce the total amount of travel ("experts" live closer to the problem) and also reduce the travel by extension personnel who might otherwise be requested to handle the problem.

Finally, landowner/operators should be requested to assist with control operations on their land. The suggestions previously given for ADC personnel would apply here and potentially reduce the number of visits required to alleviate a given problem.

In conclusion, I realize that several of these suggestions have many stumbling blocks such as trapping regulations which state that traps must be checked every 48 or 72 hours, qualifying people to use M-44's, setting up short courses or training sessions which can and will be attended, changing operations procedural manuals to include flexibility, and a host of other problems. However, the fuel shortage appears to be real, animals are still causing problems, and if we do not provide intelligent, viable solutions to these problems, the persons affected will find a solution to their problems as their first concerns are protection of their income and personal property.