December 1993

How To Involve Local Communities in Wildlife Damage Control Decision-Malting

Scott R. Craven
University of Wisconsin-Madison

How To Involve Local Communities in Wildlife Damage Control Decision-Malting

Scott R. Craven
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Introduction

In most cases the impetus for wildlife damage control (ADC) comes from the individual or group victimized by the problem, i.e., the farmers losing crops to migrating waterfowl or the homeowners frustrated with the loss of valuable ornamental plants to marauding deer. These "victims" or "stakeholders" are clearly best positioned to describe the nature and extent of the problem, how they feel about it, and to comment on what action could/should be taken to reduce or end the problem.

In addition, given the concern and empathy many people have for animals (see relevant review in Supplement to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Animal Damage Control Program, 1993), a significant number of people not directly impacted by a given problem may have intense feelings about the animals involved and the need for, or type of, control. This broad concern was demonstrated again in 1992 with the nationwide uproar over plans to control (shoot) wolves (Canis Lupus) in Alaska to reduce mortality in ungulate herds.

This complex of stakeholders often means that some wildlife control decisions (lethal control, contraceptives, etc.) are as much political as biological. Thus, wildlife damage practitioners should strive to evaluate stakeholder concerns at the start of

Stakeholder input may be essential to asses: the real need for control, the scope of any proposed control program, and the level of opposition, especially in cases likely to be controversial such as lethal control, urban issues, and problems with high-profile species such as deer, wolves, and certain birds.

Stakeholder input can be obtained through one-on-one contact with the individual or group which makes a request for ADC services but, as noted, concern may be much broader than just the victim(s). Thus, some type of group sampling may be necessary. Postal surveys are a widely used technique for data collection in wildlife damage problems (Craven et al. 1992). Surveys can cover a large geographic area, include questions on a variety of topics, and reach large samples, but they take substantial time and are subject to a number of problems in their execution and interpretation (Craven et al. 1992). Surveys are backed by an extensive literature and are not discussed further in this paper.

Another means of data collection is direct public involvement, bringing together the various stakeholders-direct, indirect, and even potential-to discuss a given wildlife damage problem and the options for problem resolution. There are many types and levels of public involvement and potential outcomes but the goal of all "is to reach better decisions" (Heberlein, 1976).

Public (stakeholder) involvement in wildlife control decisions is the subject of this paper. I am not aware of any "handbooks" to guide wildlife control practitioners through an episode of public involvement, although the thoughtful review of various forms of public involvement by Heberlein (1976) does provide a wealth of useful information. In addition, a variety of committee/public input experiences have taken place across the country and much can be learned from their successes and failures.

Public involvement in the decision-malting process

The ADC decision model used in APHIS-ADC programs (Figure 1) calls for stakeholder ("sociocultural" in APHIS-ADC terminology) input at the "Evaluate Wildlife Damage Control Methods" stage. At that point in the process, potential methods are screened first by legal and administrative concerns and then by environmental concerns, including sociocultural issues. If, for example, a controlled hunt is unacceptable to the public as part of an urban deer control program, then that method is eliminated from the process. The end result is one or more practical methods which can be applied to the given problem. Thus, public involvement is not just desirable in certain cases; it is an essential component of the decision process. Public involvement could also be useful at other stages in the process, i.e., assessment, formulation of strategy, and perhaps in monitoring and evaluation.

Identification of public (sociocultural) concerns as defined in the ADC model is the real purpose behind public involvement. A wildlife damage practitioner must determine the need for public involvement based on the visibility and level of controversy inherent in the problem at hand. Even though public concerns are part of the decision process, there are circumstances of urgency (e.g., an immediate public health threat) and the nature of the problem that may preclude the need for public involvement. For example, non-lethal control such as exclusion or live capture, problems involving few individuals or a common "pest" species such as pigeons (Columba livia) or raccoons (Procyon lotor), or a problem with direct and clear public benefits may not elicit significant public interest. However, under the circumstances noted earlier, stakeholder input is frequently essential. How, then, is the method of stakeholder input selected?

The various forms of public involvement are summarized in Table 1. The potential function of each form of public involvement is rated poor to excellent. The issue of representitiveness is also rated. I will discuss the role of 4 types of group contact: committees, advisory groups, workshops, and open public meetings. The other forms of public sampling are more obvious in terms of their utility and will not be discussed.

In general, group contact offers the potential for extensive and rapid "give and take" of information. Of the 4 types mentioned, all are "good to excellent" forums for giving information, e.g., to inform the group about an ADC problem, need for control, etc. However, the potential to get information (feedback) is very different.

Open public meetings are widely perceived to be dominated by special interest groups and activists, and therefore biased. Gundry and Heberlein (1984) summarized this debate over "representativeness" of public meetings and stated that the notion that "the people

involved, as well as the opinions gathered, in public meetings are not representative of the client public or their views" is generally accepted. Unless mandated, an open public meeting, dominated by one side or the other will do little to move an ADC program forward. If an open public meeting must be used, Gundry and Heberlein (1984) stated 3 conditions that improve the representativeness: (1) the meeting must be well publicized; (2) all parties must have easy and equal access; and (3) all participants at the meeting must be consulted about their opinions.

Workshops, advisory groups, and ad hoc committees all provide excellent potential for getting information (Table 1) and for "representativeness". Such group activities do not just happen; they can be reactive or proactive and may be established by a stakeholder group, the ADC unit involved in a problem, or by a third party such as a unit of local government. The preferred alternative is a proactive group established by the ADC unit or an independent third party.

A reactive group, by definition, has been mobilized because of a problem. If it is initiated by a stakeholder group, then there is a preconceived agenda and the group is not likely to be representative. In the River Hills suburb of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a citizen ad hoc committee came together to address a large urban deer population and problems with deer-vehicle collisions and landscape damage. This group was very supportive of plans to remove deer with lethal methods. After substantial expenditures of time and funds, another citizen group emerged to block lethal control and promote live capture and cultural alternatives such as the use of deer resistant plantings. The result was a predictable, lengthy, sometimes heated exchange over the "control strategy" portion of the ADC model (Figure 1). The 4 principle actors: wildlife damage professionals, local decision makers (government), the "pros" and the "antis", were all working separately. This scenario has been repeated over and over across the country and is frequently counterproductive.

Deer management also offers examples of more successful strategies. McAninch and Parker (1991) described a facilitated approach to resolution of an urban deer problem in Minnesota using a task force appointed by the resource management agency at the request of local government. Participants were selected to represent a diversity of views. The authors concluded that, "perhaps when problems can be limited to a particular area, and stakeholders are identified and given an equal opportunity to participate in the input process, wildlife management programs might best be formulated by community residents and local staff from resource agencies." On a broader scale, Craven (1992) described the success of an ad hoc committee appointed by the resource agency in Wisconsin to address management strategies related to high deer populations and attendant problems. As in Minnesota, the committee was selected to represent a broad range of interests. The committee formulated recommendations based on consensus, with opportunity for minority opinions. The process was very successful and led to several short- and long-term management changes.

From such experiences, common sense and the guidance of social science literature (e.g., Heberlein, 1976), 1 offer these recommendations for wildlife damage

Public input/opinion should be viewed as data for the wildlife damage decision-maker. It can be just as important as species- and problem-related data.

Excellent detail on the mechanisms of various types of public involvement/input can be found in references such as Heberlein (1976).

Be judicious in soliciting public input. As noted, there are many cases where it is unnecessary. If representative input is unlikely, input may be counterproductive. If the ADC Decision Model is likely to break down at the "Formalate Strategy" level without public input, then it is essential.

All wildlife damage situations offer a "teachable moment", an opportunity to inform the victim and the public about aspects of wildlife ecology, human impacts, and wildlife damage control.

The public may not be compelled to act (i.e., support a program) based on someone else's problem. If a specific problem such as crop or structural damage raises the need for control of a species or use of a technique that may be controversial, it may be productive to broaden the scope of concern to include a secondary facet of the problem, such as ecological damage (deer and native plant communities), disease concerns (rabies or Lyme disease), or nonselective problems *like* deer-vehicle collisions. The broadened scope will touch more people and thus is more likely to galvanize the public into action.

Universal support for any program is *unlikely but consensus,* and thus the necessary public or political support to proceed with a program, usually is.

A group created by a resource management or political entity for a specific purpose can seek balance in its membership. Such a group is more likely to be representative and less polarized in its collective view than a group instigated by a stakeholder, and is therefore much more productive.

Selection of group members should be based on a sincere attempt to include representatives of all major positions. However, the need to represent as many views as possible must be balanced against committee size. Large committees (> 15) can easily become dysfunctional. If simple majority is to be the criterion for *consensus then* establish a group with an odd number of members.

The specific individual chosen to represent a stakeholder group may be dictated by the group. If not, solicit individuals with the authority, knowledge, and credibility to speak for this constituency and to be listened to by their *constituency after* the group has completed its mission.

Avoid "reinventing the wheel", especially with controversial and common problems like urban deer. Many people have traveled the same path and held seemingly endless meetings and discussions. The same arguments and the same solutions surface again and again. Build on this base of experience by presenting some excellent summary

literature such as "An Evaluation of Deer Management Options" prepared by Mark Ellingwood and Suzanne Caturano for the New England Chapter of The Wildlife Society and the Northwest Deer Technical Committee early in the input process.

- Be specific about why the group was convened and what is expected of it. The more specific the charge given to the group, the more useful the final product is likely to be.

- Provide concise, clear and sound background information for the group. Utilize information sources perceived by the public as non-biased, such as publications produced by the Cooperative Extension Service or case studies of similar problems in other places. Avoid excessive emphasis on the negative aspects of a given species or only on the need for some form of control. Finally, if a lethal technique is likely to be the best or only option, be certain to explain the other options and why they were judged unlikely to succeed.

- The group activity should be chaired by an individual who is perceived as interested and informed but non-biased and who is familiar with group dynamics

Conclusions

There are no formal guidelines to help wildlife damage control practitioners to decide when it is necessary to seek public input on a wildlife damage decision. As all professionals realize, each and every wildlife damage problem from simple and local to complex and regional is unique. It is important to evaluate each problem and, on the basis of recommendations offered here, common sense, and personal experience, make the decision on the need for, and extent of, public involvement. Public input may complicate a control program, but in the long run such input is likely to make it stronger.

I firmly believe that the age-old question "Is it better (easier) to seek forgiveness than permission?" must be answered with a resounding No when applied to wildlife damage control programs. While proceeding with a potentially controversial control program without public input/support may solve that one problem, it may do irreparable harm to the image of wildlife damage control and the prospects for successful completion of other programs. The public in general, and the various stakeholders, must be convinced that any given control program is the right thing to do. Cultivation of a sense of trust within the public for wildlife damage control programs and the professionals who carry them out will pay great dividends in the long run.

In the final analysis, the ADC professional must make the decisions and assume responsibility for them. Public input can help shape those decisions and adequate consideration of that input will diminish the possibility that those decisions will be reversed by public pressure.

Literature Cited

Anonymous. 1993. Animal Damage Control Program, Supplement to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. USDA, APHIS-ADC, Washington, DC. 204pp. + Appendices.

Craven, Scott R 1992. Public involvement in wildlife damage management. The situation in Wisconsin. Proc. East. Wildl. Damage Control Conf. 5:198.

Craven, Scott R., Daniel J. Decker, Scott E. Hygenstrom, and William F. Siemes. 1992. Survey use and landowner tolerance in wildlife damage management. Trans. N. A. Wildl. and Nat. Res. Conf. 57:75-88.

Gundry, Kathleen G., and Thomas A. Heberlein. 1984. Do public meetings represent the public? APA Journal, pp. 175-182.

Heberlein, Thomas A. 1976. Principles of public involvement. Staff paper in rural and community development. Univ. of Wisc., Madison, WI. 26pp.

McAninch, Jay A., and Jon M. Parker. 1991. Urban deer management programs: A facilitated approach. Trans. N. A. Wildl. and Nat. Res. Conf. 56:428-436.

Table 1. **Fonns and functions of public contact.'**

	Function of public involvement				
	Informational				
Form of public involvement	To give	To get	Interactive	Assur-ance	Representa-tiveness
Open public meetings	Good	Poor	Poor	Fair	Poor
Workshops (small)	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Potentially good
Presentations to groups	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	No clear assurance
Ad hoc committees	Good	Good	Excellent	Excellent	Potentially good
Advisory groups	Good	Good	Excellent	Excellent	Potentially good
Key contacts	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	No clear assurance
Analysis of incoming mail	Poor	Good	Poor	Poor	Poor
Direct mail from agency to public	Excellent	Poor	Fair	Good	Potentially good
Questionnaires and surveys	Poor	Excellent	Poor	Fair	Potentially good
Behavioral observation	Poor	Excellent	Poor	Poor	Potentially good
Reports from key staff	Poor	Good	Poor	Poor	Potentially good
News releases and mass media	Good	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor
Analysis of mass media	Poor	Fair	Poor	Poor	Poor
Day-to-day public contacts	Good	Good	Excellent	Fair	Poor

' From Heberlein, T.A. April 1976. Principles of public involvement. Staff Paper Series in Rural and Community Development. 26pp.

Figure 1. ADC Decision Model and Methods Screen from Animal Damage Control Program, Supplement to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, USDA, APHIS-ADC, 1993.