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## DEALING WITH WILDLIFE PROFESSIONALS

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## DEALING WITH WILDLIFE PROFESSIONALS

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A relatively small, but highly influential audience that we need to address includes all professional wildlife biologists. But wildlife biologists come in all shapes and sizes. To be an effective educator, you need to properly identify your audience and a proper medium in which to deliver your message.

Within the realm of wildlife biologists, we have certain groups. Wildlife damage specialists, for example, should be considered as one of our sub-audiences. Within this group you have private industry (nuisance wildlife control operators), federal agencies (USDA-Animal Damage Control, and others) state agencies and universities. All employ wildlife damage specialists. When addressing these groups, it is often like preaching to the choir. We all speak the same language. But there is a need for continuing education and professional development within the groups. When you are preaching to the choir, you can usually get beyond the justification stage. You don't have to persuade anyone regarding the value of your activities — just get to the issue at hand. Another sub-audience to consider includes the wildlife enhancement specialists. It depends upon who you are speaking to as to how you will deliver the message. Wildlife enhancement specialists can be characterized as those who are responsible for promoting and protecting wildlife and their habitats. Again, we have private industry (consultants and contractors), federal agencies (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, etc.), state agencies and universities. When addressing these groups, it could be perceived as “preaching to the unconvinced.” Professionals in the field of wildlife damage management deserve the respect of their colleagues, but I do know of some wildlife enhancement biologists who don't care or have much interest in what we do. In fact some are downright antagonistic. Several years ago, people in wildlife damage management were considered

the black sheep of the wildlife profession. Monikers such as “coyote killers” and “gopher chokers” can leave a lasting impression. The field of wildlife damage management has come a long way in the past 20 years. I believe there is a higher level of receptivity within the wildlife group in general for wildlife damage management issues, but there are still some professionals who are not convinced. We need to target those audiences and deliver a message to them.

How do you deliver the message? Your next step is to choose the medium that reaches the intended audience. The medium should be far-reaching so that you have a multiplier effect, reaching as many people as possible. The message should be high impact, measurable, and documentable. When you are choosing the medium in dealing with the choir (the wildlife damage management specialists), there are several lines of communication that can be employed. For example, the National Animal Damage Control Association produces *The Probe*, a monthly newsletter that provides up-to-date information on wildlife damage management activities. In addition, The Wildlife Society has established an action team, called the Wildlife Damage Management Working Group that produces a newsletter that contains information pertinent to members of The Wildlife Society who are in the wildlife damage industry. The Wildlife Society also has publications such as *Wildlife Society Bulletin* and *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, that contain refereed and opinion papers on wildlife damage management issues. Lastly, The Wildlife Society sponsors an annual meeting that features sessions on wildlife damage management.

Another forum for communication among wildlife damage professionals is through

conferences, symposia and workshops. The Great Plains, Eastern and Vertebrate Pest Conferences are landmark assemblages. The proceedings of each contain a considerable body of information. Members of the emerging Berryman Institute have been very active in developing publications, training sessions and educational programs to educate wildlife damage specialists about wildlife damage. We also have trade magazines such as, *Wildlife Control Technology* and *Pest Control Technology*, that serve as an educational medium, especially for people in private industry.

What media are available for the “unconvinced” -- those wildlife professionals who are not yet in the loop. Again, The Wildlife Society plays an important role, with *Wildlife Society Bulletin*, and *The Journal of Wildlife Management*. The most recent issue of *Wildlife Society Bulletin*, in fact, was a special issue on predators and predation. Eight of the feature articles addressed wildlife damage issues. In addition, we have hosted three special sessions on wildlife damage management at the annual meeting. At last year's meeting in Cincinnati, the plenary session was entitled, “Living with Wildlife,” and featured four presentations that addressed wildlife damage management issues. If you have been reading *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, *Wildlife Society Bulletin*, you may have noticed that a small wedge has been driven between members of The Wildlife Society and the Society for Conservation Biology. I happen to be a member of both and I find it easy to ascribe to both of the areas. The Society for Conservation Biology produces a newsletter and the journal *Conservation Biology*. The journal is not infused with wildlife damage management articles, but there have been articles over the years that address conflicts with exotic species, overabundant species, predator control, and wildlife damage management in general. I think there are opportunities to communicate with wildlife enhancement professionals through the Society for Conservation Biologists -- through their publications and their annual meetings. In addition, there are several other organizations that attract special interest biologists, such as, the American Society for Mammalogists, American

Ornithologist's Union, The Society of American Foresters, Society for Range Management, Human Dimensions of Wildlife Study Group. We have opportunities through their publications and programs to further increase their understanding about activities within wildlife damage management.

Continuing on with the medium for the unconvinced, we should consider conferences. We can't expect to have a lot of wildlife enhancement professionals attend a wildlife damage management conference. Several enhancement-oriented meetings are available, however, in which we could spread the word about wildlife damage management. For example, regional meetings such as the Midwest Fish and Wildlife Conference, or the Northeast, Southeast, and Western conferences are meetings in which we can and do present information on wildlife damage management. Within the agencies there are lines of communication that provide opportunities to inform and increase the awareness of co-workers. Within the universities we have students, which I regard as one of our most important audiences. Today's students will be the decision makers and wildlife managers of the future. Therefore, I think we owe it to our profession to further strengthen our programs and curricula in the universities that address wildlife damage management issues.

I feel there is a need to increase our use of the Internet and other distance education tools. This is a huge medium that we are not yet tapping sufficiently. Currently, I am involved in a project to develop a website, on wildlife damage management. A webcenter, if you will, that will link to all electronic media dealing with wildlife damage management. We need to get on the web and into cyberspace. It is the fastest growing environment through which we can reach the public.

Once you have identified your audience and selected your media, you need to deliver a message. We need to increase the general understanding of the scope of wildlife damage management. We are not simply agriculture. We deal with human health and safety, urban issues, disease control, and natural

resources issues. Wildlife damage management is an integral part of wildlife management. We need to continually pass information on to the general public. We will move our profession into the 21<sup>st</sup>

century through communication. To effectively communicate, we must identify the audience, choose the medium, and deliver the message.