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The Current Program and Future of ADC in the USDA[1]

Bobby R. Acord[2]

The ADC program was transferred to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service in December 1985. The ADC mission continues to be the protection of American agriculture and other resources from wildlife damage. Changes have been implemented to enhance the program, and efforts are continuing toward additional improvements.

As most of you are aware, the Animal Damage Control (ADC) Program was transferred from the U.S. Department of Interior-Fish and Wildlife Service (USDI-FWS) to the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS) about 3 years ago. The APHIS-ADC mission continues to be the protection of American agriculture and other resources from wildlife damage. There have been a number of changes in the structure and organization of our program since the transfer to USDA. Today I'd like to discuss some of the changes we've seen since 1985 and outline the direction that ADC is taking to deal with some of the major issues confronting our program at the present time.

One of the measures undertaken by ADC to assure the long-term effectiveness of the program has been the formation of a Strategic Long Range Plan. ADC's Top Management Team (TMT) identified and assessed apparent program strengths and weaknesses, external influences and relationships, and conditions that would ensure continued program vitality. Based on these factors, the TMT identified a set of strategic goals for ADC and developed a plan for their achievement over a 5-year period. We are currently pursuing strategies to achieve many of these goals, and we're optimistic about where the full implementation of this plan is going to take the ADC program.

Another positive step taken to improve our program since the transfer to USDA has been the establishment of a National Animal Damage Control Advisory Committee (NADCAC). NADCAC is composed of 20 members chosen from nominees by the agriculture industry, conservation and environmental groups, land use groups, and wildlife agencies. The purpose of this committee is to make recommendations to the Secretary of Agriculture on policies and program issues regarding wildlife damage control. Issues and problems addressed include wildlife interfering in agricultural production, jeopardizing human health and safety, and creating nuisance problems in urban areas. NADCAC has been very supportive of ADC, and their recommendations have been extremely helpful in guiding the program.

One of the most important issues ADC is currently involved with is the completion of a :ogrammatic environmental impact statement ,EIS). APHIS is legally required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to conduct an EIS on the ADC program. The EIS under which we now function was completed in 1979 while the program was under the FWS, and covered only the western predator control program. This EIS was formally adopted by APHIS as an interim measure, but was to be replaced as soon as possible. Efforts are well underway toward completion of the new *EIS*, which will cover the entire program. **We have** been working closely with the *EIS* contractor, Dames and Moore, and the draft *EIS* is due to be released later this year.

One issue that's presented somewhat of a challenge for ADC since the transfer to USDA has been the resolution of migratory bird damage problems. These include waterfowl and blackbird depredations on grain crops, depredations by fish-eating birds at aquaculture facilities, and bird/aircraft strike hazards at airports. While ADC is

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responsible for addressing these problems, we have encountered some obstacles because we have had no management or regulatory authority. This authority lies with the FWS, and we are currently working closely with FWS people to overcome some of the regulatory obstacles to dealing with migratory bird problems. We're optimistic about these negotiations and are looking forward to being able to solve these problems more effectively in the near future.

Another area of particular concern to our program has been predator control on public lands. This issue is coming under increasing public scrutiny. There are a lot of people out there who are very much against any kind of predator control program being conducted on public lands. On the other hand, the livestock industry at times suffers tremendous losses to predators on these lands, and this industry relys on ADC to help protect their resources. The Forest Service (FS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are becoming very cautious and often more restrictive in allowing predator control on public lands. Increasingly these agencies want to dictate types of control tools used as well as the placement and timing of their use. These decisions are often being made by managers with limited ADC expertise in response to pressure from the public and environmental groups. This has made it more difficult at times for us to carry out our mission. We continue to work closely with FS and BLM policy officials, and are optimistic that we'll be able to address concerns on both sides of the issue and still do our part to protect the agricultural resource.

With the transfer to USDA there has been a change in outlook on the kind of work we ought to be doing, with increased emphasis placed on the protection of agriculture and human health and safety. This change has carried over to ADC's research unit, the Denver Wildlife Research Center (DWRC). The focus of research efforts has now shifted more toward solving specific ADC problems. A strong research effort is vital to the continued success of our program. All of the tools that we have now are our "life blood," and we need to maintain the use of these tools to 'accomplish our goals, but at the same time we have to start looking at a new generation of control tools--replacements for the tools we're now using in case we eventually lose these. The tools that are going to provide us with effective animal control in the ecological, cultural, and political climate facing us 10-20 years from now will be based on today's investments in long term research. USDA has requested funds to upgrade DWRC facilities and equipment to bring them into compliance with EPA's Good Laboratory Practices and the Animal Welfare Act. These improvements are needed, and they will allow research to better meet the future demands of the ADC program.

In addition to other research, DWRC is responsible for the registration of all the pesticides used in ADC. Pesticide registration is a complicated and expensive process. Costs for registration of a new chemical can range from $5,000 up to $20,000,000 or more, depending on the intended use for the product. Maintaining existing registrations is also expensive. For example, to maintain the registration of strychnine products, additional data requirements have to be completed by ADC and submitted to EPA within the next 2 years. Estimated costs for these data call-ins range from $500,000 to $3 million. Our program has been underinvesting in research to develop data necessary for the maintenance of pesticide registrations, and we're currently trying to catch up. ADC research is dedicated to developing new pesticides and maintaining the registration on those products that are vital to our program. The improvements to DWRC mentioned earlier will. help with this endeavor. Increasing costs, increasingly restrictive environmental regulations, and increased opposition to chemical control methods present a challenge to our efforts. ADC will continue to develop and maintain effective control tools that best serve the requirements of the ADC community.

Another issue relative to pesticide registration that is confronting ADC right now is EPA's new Endangered Species Pesticide Labeling Program. The intent of this program is to ensure that the use of pesticides does not ***threaten the*** survival of any threatened or endangered species. This is a very complex program being implemented under the authority of the Endangered Species Act, which i» administered by FWS, and the Federal Insecticide Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) which is administered by EPA. The program was first announced by EPA in May 1987, and originally was to be fully implemented by February 1988, but is stilt on hold. It's been quite controversial because if implemented as originally designed, the net effect of the new labeling requirements would have meant severely restricting or eliminating the use of many pesticides registered for use by ADC. Currently EPA, USDA, and the USDI are all **working toward revising and improving** these labeling requirements to assure the protection of endangered species while still permitting the essential use of pesticides. This program will undoubtedly affect the way ADC operates in some areas, but we can't fully estimate the magnitude of this effect until the scope of the labeling program is completely known.

We all recognize the need to protect endangered species, and ADC is actively involved in efforts toward this goal. In cooperation with other agencies, control programs have recently been initiated to protect endangered species such as the desert tortoise, California least tern, and several species of Hawaiian birds. We are also involved in efforts to control damage caused by one endangered species, the eastern timber wolf in Minnesota. We have responded to this problem by removing those animals that are responsible for the livestock loss. This control program complies fully with the endangered species regulations, and is accomplished through the cooperation of ADC, FWS, and the Minnesota Department of National Resources. ADC involvement with the control of endangered species could increase in the future, either as a result of the natural expansion of endangered species populations, or the reintroduction of endangered species into their former ranges.

Another project we currently have underway is modernization of our Management Information System (MIS). This is a computer based system that records, processes, stores, and reports information that pertains to the operational activities of the program. The MIS was developed in the late 1970's to assist with the informational needs of western State programs, but it only became operational in Arizona, California, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and Utah. The MIS records and maintains data on resources, damage, control methods used, and animals taken. This system generates a variety of reports derived from these data, including some for internal use and others for submission to State or cooperator entities. Use of the MIS has enhanced the credibility of the ADC program with other Federal, State, and local agencies. However, due to equipment obsolescence, and the need for a uniform system to serve the entire ADC program, the current system has reached its effective limits. A long-range project has been initiated to redesign the system using updated, state of the art hardware and software, and we believe it will provide the database for a decision support system that will improve the overall efficiency of the ADC program. The new system is expected to be operational in all States in 2 years.

Animal damage is being recognized throughout the U.S. as a serious problem, and interest in the ADC program is high. Congress has responded by increasing funding for ADC. We've gone from a budget of 19.4 million at the time of the transfer to a proposed budget of 29.8 million for FY 1990. We're expanding to address a wider range of species and the entire spectrum of wildlife damage problems. We're developing additional cooperatively funded operational programs in the East, and there is widespread support for developing more of these programs. Right now we have cooperative beaver control programs to protect timber in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi, trout streams in Wisconsin, and endangered freshwater mussel habitat in Louisiana. We also have cooperative damage control programs for Canada geese in Wisconsin and Tennessee, coyote control in New York, gull control at a U.S. Army facility in Michigan, and a nuisance grackle control program in Georgia. Part of the increase proposed for FY 1990 will be used to begin cooperative programs in those States that already have funds set aside for this purpose.

We have strong support within USDA for the ADC program. In the early days of the transfer from FWS there may have been some misdirection of our program, but now we have genuine ADC people leading the program, and we feel we're heading in the right direction. C. Joe Packham, our Deputy Administrator comes from a strong ADC background, and has made great progress in leading our program forward. Employee morale is high, and our people are enthusiastic about their work.

We have embarked on an aggressive staff recruitment and development campaign so we can maintain a qualified and competent workforce. Two years ago, we hired the first ever Supervisory Training Program class for the ADC program. Twenty wildlife biologists were selected from across the Nation and underwent intensive training. These people have become a vital part of our workforce. This class was hired in anticipation of a real drain on our supervisory workforce within the next 3-5 years, due primarily to retirements. Another recruitment avenue we've started using is that of cooperative education students. We are seeing more incorporation of ADC issues and functions in the curriculum at some major universities, and we're working with some of these institutions to develop cooperative education programs. There is getting to be a greater appreciation for ADC as a science in the academic community, but we need to continue working on this.

One of the things that we as leaders in the field of ADC have got to recognize is that there are different perspectives on ADC work, and we've got to attempt to deal with them. As our population grows and becomes more urbanized, the people involved in producing our nations food and fiber are becoming a smaller and smaller minority. This results in an increasingly larger percentage of our population that are not directly affected by the problems that wildlife may create for agriculture or the threats it may pose to public health and safety. The environmental

movement has resulted in increasingly restrictive regulations and opposition to ADC activities. All of these factors highlight the need for an education program, that when presented to the public in an unbiased fashion, will show how important ADC work really is. It's important not only for protecting agricultural products and economic interests of the producers, but for protecting the economic interests of the American consumer as well. We have long-range plans for developing and implementing a public information/education program that hopefully will lead to a gr=eater understanding and appreciation of the need for control of wildlife damage.

We need to emphasize to people that we are not an animal control agency--we are a damage control agency. We emphasize the principles of Integrated Pest Management, and our sole interest is in resolving conflicts as efficiently and in as environmentally acceptable a manner as possible. At the same time there needs to be recognition that American agriculture is not going to provide the habitat and feed the Nation's wildlife free of charge. One of the most detrimental things that could happen to the wildlife resource is to be forced into indemnity for damage caused by its presence. An effective damage control program Is a much cheaper alternative. It's up to us to see that it happens!

With the current leadership and support we have from USDA, NADCAC, the agricultural community, our cooperators, and our workforce, we're looking forward to providing the American public with an Increasingly valuable service.