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LONG RANGE OBJECTIVES OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

IN COYOTE MANAGEMENT^{1/}

by

James B. Ruch^{2/}

Introduction. I am pleased to have this opportunity to discuss the Federal role in animal damage control with this group because of your interest and because you have had a responsibility all through the years. That responsibility is bound to increase.

History. The Federal Government has been involved in animal damage control since the late 1890's. In 1916, Congress authorized the first Federal appropriation for predator control. The current program has been carried out pursuant to the Act of March 2, 1931 (46 Stat. 1468; 7 U.S.C. 426-426b), which directs the Secretary of the Interior to conduct campaigns for the control of animals injurious to agriculture, livestock, and people. The predator control program has been conducted in cooperation with the States and with local cooperators in all the western range States.

The protection of livestock and crops from marauding animals has become, in recent years, one of the most vexing and controversial aspects of wildlife management.

The use of poisons for control of predatory animals has become increasingly objectionable to some segments of the public. Questions have been raised by some conservationists, scientists, and the general public as to the benefits derived from this type of control and also regarding the possible adverse environmental consequences.

In 1964, former Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall directed his Wildlife Management Advisory Board to study predator and rodent control in the United States. Its report, commonly referred to as the Leopold Report made recommendations for certain program changes which became the basis for a major redirection of Federal animal damage control activities, beginning in 1965.

Present Efforts to Change. With increasing environmental awareness, however, there was continuing concern over the use of poisons for predator control. Public and Executive concern culminated in the establishment of a task force--the Cain Committee--which undertook a review of predator control activities. Its report, published in January 1972, contained a number of findings, conclusions, and recommendations. It formed the basis for Executive action which began immediately upon release of the report.

^{1/}Great Plains Extension Wildlife Damage Control Workshop at Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, December 11, 1973.

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President Nixon expressed concern and ordered action in his Environmental Message of February 8, 1972. On the same date, he issued Executive Order 11643 which, among other things, restricted the use of chemical toxicants for predatory animal control on Federal lands and in Federal programs. Simultaneously, legislation was sent to Congress to phase out direct Federal participation in predator control activities. Briefly, the Administration's proposal provided for intensified research to develop safer and more selective control methods, extension services, and Federal financial assistance to States for operational predator control programs.

In March 1972, the Environmental Protection Agency canceled the registration of toxicants used in predator control programs, halting interstate shipment, and withdrawing the registration for use of these chemicals on any class of land.

Research. Since the Executive order was issued, the Department of the Interior has redirected its research efforts to provide increased attention to damage assessment, predator/prey relationships, development of non-lethal tools, disease relationships, evaluation of toxic diseases and socio-economic studies. Developments are too recent to report any significant breakthroughs.

In the area of damage assessment, tests using radio transmitters on coyotes are being made to determine the cause of mortality. Preliminary laboratory results have been obtained using aversive or behavior modifying agents in reducing predation. Tranquilizers for use in direct control of coyotes causing damage are being explored.

In an effort to determine coyote densities in the Western States, an extensive survey was initiated last year (1972) and has been repeated this fall to obtain population density data. A series of transects were set up throughout 16 Western States consisting of over 300 scent post survey lines. These data will indicate trends in population densities.

Interim Measures. In recognition of the need to prevent a disruption of necessary damage control services while waiting for Congressional action, special programs were initiated in the summers of 1972 and 1973 on instruction of Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton.

Primary objectives of the 1972 program were: (1) to conduct a carefully planned special effort to reduce depredations in the most critical areas using non-poisonous methods; and (2) to maintain liaison with State officials, land-managing agencies, other cooperating agencies, and representatives of the livestock industry. In 1973, main emphasis was on evaluation of the effectiveness of non-chemical methods in a variety of situations.

A temporary office was set up in Denver in 1972 and again in 1973 to coordinate activities, facilitate communications, and provide other administrative services. The principal efforts were concentrated in and around lambing grounds and other summer ranges in the Western States.

We believe that the summer programs have shown that predator control can generally be carried out without the use of poisons in an environmentally safe manner. Furthermore, we believe that the lessons we learned this

past summer are applicable on a broad basis to future programs.

1973 Legislation. We believe that the Administration's "Federal Animal Damage Abatement Act of 1973" could provide a satisfactory solution to the predatory animal control situation; satisfactory from the standpoint of necessary environmental safeguards and satisfactory from the standpoint of livestock and wildlife interests. This legislative proposal stems largely from the Advisory Committee Report on Predator Control, and centers around three principal tenets:

First: The management of resident wildlife species is generally a State function, and therefore should be controlled by the States, where such control is needed.

Second: Additional research is needed to develop environmentally safe, selective techniques, to understand predator/prey relationships and to determine the nature of livestock losses; without research, wildlife species cannot be safeguarded and environmental quality cannot be maintained; and

Third: Poisons are too environmentally hazardous and potentially damaging to the whole spectrum of animal life for use in most control of predatory and depredating animals.

The Administration's proposal was originally introduced in the 92nd Congress. The current bill closely follows H.R. 13152 as it passed the House. Like its 1972 predecessor, it is based on the conclusion that operational animal damage control should be a State responsibility. By providing specific authorities for a program of Federal research and extension services, and by providing Federal financial assistance to States for control programs, the proposed legislation would assure a continuation of meaningful Federal involvement.

The 1973 Administration Bill, H.R. 4759, (1) authorizes an expanded program of research, (2) provides for demonstration of control techniques and other extension services, (3) authorizes financial assistance to States for carrying out control programs, (4) provides criminal penalties for field use on Federal lands of any chemical toxicant to kill predatory animals, or use of such chemical toxicant with secondary poisoning effects, and (5) repeals the Act of March 2, 1931 (7 U.S.C. 426-426b).

Changes in H.R. 4759 were made as a result of our increased knowledge of how to control damage using non-toxic methods and to further clarify the intent of certain provisions.

State Actions Needed. Along with passage of the Administration proposal, a number of affirmative actions need to be taken by the States before the transition can be fully implemented, as former Bureau Director Spencer Smith has pointed out.^{1/} The animals we are talking about are generally "resident" species. That their management is properly a responsibility of the States is generally accepted.

^{1/} Presented at the Western Association of State Game and Fish Commissioners Meeting, Portland, Oregon, July 18, 1972.

There will remain a continuing Federal responsibility. Some forms are, or may become, endangered, at which point there is a Federal involvement. Some, if not all species occur on public lands, which raises questions concerning habitat management, and other land uses, including various forms of enjoyment, plus the raising of livestock. There are situations when public health officials, both State and Federal, become concerned with the prospect of disease transmission.

What about the Federal responsibility for the conduct of basic research and continuing management surveys, both of which are obviously necessary to support a management program? There is no apparent question about the responsibility for conducting management investigations and surveys. This is a companion function of applied management and should be conducted by the management agency. These surveys are a responsibility of the State wildlife agencies. There are some kinds of basic or fundamental research designed to gather information common to entire species or to a function where some degree of centralization or coordination of effort is most productive and prevents duplication. This is an area where the Federal Government, working in cooperation with the States, institutions, and private foundations, can perform a very useful function. The responsibility for these kinds of research should be shared, with the Federal Government assuming a role of leadership and coordination. The Administration bill provides for this kind of cooperative effort.

Our philosophy sums up this way: The basic operational management responsibility should be vested with the States. There are peripheral responsibilities which must be recognized. There are some shared responsibilities. The challenge and the need is for the State governments to take the initiative in developing the necessary legislative and financial support to assume and implement their portion of the responsibility.

There will be increasing responsibility upon extension systems. For one thing, Interior will increase its research efforts and will place increasing emphasis on extension for disseminating research results. Also, through many Federal and State actions, there is increasing regulation of all chemicals and methods, including those used for controlling damage caused by wildlife. The increased regulation requires more knowledge and more dissemination of information to the public on the availability of certain materials; and, on how they may be used. The public attitude requires that we disseminate information on the best and most humane methods, and advise the public of the need for conducting such programs.

The BSF&W has consistently embraced the extension approach for controlling animal damage wherever it can be applied and has relied almost exclusively on that approach in all of the States east of the Mississippi. The Bureau has used extension techniques in many programs, and has also been engaged in several kinds of cooperation in extension systems.

Conclusion. So, we believe that the management--and control--of resident species is a State responsibility. We are moving, via cooperative and Congressional action, to give meaning to that belief. The Bureau will continue to conduct research. There are areas of shared responsibility. And finally, we believe that extension has a very important role.