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EXTENSION WILDLIFE DAMAGE CONTROL IN COLORADO^{1/}

by

Dale A. Wade^{2/}

Wildlife damage control in Colorado may be more varied and difficult than in some other states. Colorado has a widely diversified agricultural, industrial and recreational business base and a great range of human density from the Denver Metropolitan area containing approximately half of the state population to the semi-desert and mountain areas where the population density is extremely low.

Approximately 40 percent of the land is federally owned, much of this in large tracts in the western two-thirds of the state. Privately owned land in this western area is primarily distributed along the more accessible valleys of major drainages. It is in this same area that huge increases in land prices have occurred, due to intense competition from land development and recreational interests for accessible scenic areas. The current search for energy sources has led to additional economic pressure where fossil fuels are known to occur. In many areas, agriculture can no longer meet this intense competition and land use is shifting to other interests.

Terrain types vary from semi-desert to grassland to dense forest and alpine tundra, with elevations from 3,400 feet in Prowers County near the Kansas border to 14,431 feet at Mount Elbert, Lake County, in central Colorado. The Continental Divide winds through the central mountain area from Wyoming to New Mexico. Four large rivers; the Platte, Arkansas, Rio Grande and Colorado begin in these mountains.

Colorado contains portions of three great physiographic provinces; the Great Plains, Rocky Mountains and Colorado Plateau. It has a wide variety of vegetative types: the Semi-Desert of greasewood, saltbush and sagebrush, important as winter range for livestock and game; the Plains, a grassland now devoted to extensive irrigation, dryland farming and grazing; and the Mountain-Plateau with Pinon-Juniper, Mountain Shrub, Ponderosa Pine-Douglas Fir, Spruce-Fir and Alpine Zones. The Mountain Plateau is important to a wide variety of wildlife species and to livestock production.

The Colorado Wildlife Commission and Division of Wildlife recognize this tremendous variation in habitat and climate as a highly significant factor and regulate game and furbearer populations by employing a rather complex set of

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harvest seasons. Land development for housing, recreation, highways and fossil fuels has had substantial effects on historic elk and deer migration routes, on game herds and on non-game species, thus altering the pattern, extent and location of damage problems. This will continue as a factor of major concern in the future.

Livestock and range management is equally as diverse, from complete confinement in production and feeding to permanent range pasture to migratory sheep and cattle operations. Some of these move livestock hundreds of miles from winter range in the semi-deserts of Utah and Wyoming to summer range in the mountains of Colorado. Operations vary from small farms of less than one-quarter section to ranches of several townships in size. Grain farms, orchards and truck gardens are an important part of the economic base.

Because of the variation in population density, topography, vegetation, weather, size and type of farming and ranching operations and other factors, damage problems occur from a wide range of wildlife species during all seasons of the year. Carnivores, rodents and birds cause a majority of these complaints, but severe winter weather may cause game herds to invade and damage orchards, haystacks and fields. Carnivores, particularly the coyote, also tend to migrate to wintering areas at lower elevations near livestock and game herds. Some livestock losses occur during all months of the year.

Colorado's damage control program is carried out by agreement and action from a number of agencies. The Colorado Division of Wildlife has responsibility for management of all resident wildlife species and administers the game damage control program. The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife has responsibility for management and control of damage by migratory birds. The Colorado Department of Agriculture is charged by statute with administration and conduction of predator and rodent control programs, with some additional activity in pest bird problems.

Management personnel recognize that complex biological, social, economic and political factors rule out simple answers to management of problem species and damage control. Effective and acceptable methods vary with area and interest groups with no method always effective and acceptable to all groups.

The Extension specialist position in animal damage control became active in July, 1972. The purpose of the position is to provide leadership for an educational program related to the management and control of problem wildlife species and to provide liaison and coordination between the Colorado Division of Wildlife, Colorado State University and other state and federal agencies involved in animal damage control. Position responsibilities include working with county Extension personnel to identify damage control problems and interest groups and to maintain communications between these local interests, Colorado State University and other agencies or organizations with similar interests. The specialist is also responsible for providing assistance in problem identification and analysis, assembling information, technical aspects of wildlife management, program planning and identifying research needs.

Extension activity in damage control includes:

Meetings with Extension agents and interest groups for discussions of animal damage control as a part of wildlife management.

Workshops to provide information on regulations, legislation and methods of damage control.

Field demonstrations of control methods and techniques.

Answering individual inquiries for information on wildlife and damage control.

Radio and television programs to discuss wildlife management and damage control.

News releases on topics of current interest.

Substantial involvement in predator research.

Liaison activity with state and federal agencies.

Development of publications and visual aids dealing with wildlife management and damage control.

Emphasis in this program is placed on:

The harvest of renewable resources as a part of damage control.

The need for flexibility in control procedures to meet varied conditions.

The complexity of factors involved in natural resource management and animal damage.

The lack of simple, universal answers to management of problem animals and species.

The need for extensive research and educational programs to provide the public with facts necessary to sound resource management.