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September 1989

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The Role of Private Enterprise in Wildlife Damage Control
by Lynn Braband

INTRODUCTION

In addressing the role of private enterprise in wildlife damage control, I will not be bringing the final word or a comprehensively exhaustive report. Rather, I will be presenting some perspectives as the representative of a firm with extensive involvement with wildlife damage control as a business. My comments will be divided into why, what, how, and the future.

First, why is the private enterprise involved with wildlife damage control? Because there is a societal need or, to use a more business-like term, a market. The private sector has been involved for some time in certain aspects of wildlife damage control. Examples include the control of commensal rodents by pest control firms, the removal of nuisance furbearers by trappers, and the repair of wildlife structural damage by carpenters. However, especially in the last ten years, firms have developed which specialize in wildlife damage control. Some of these companies started "accidentally." A contractor or chimney sweep was asked to remove a nuisance animal and began to wonder about marketing of this service. Some companies operated for several years before they realized that governmental regulations and permits were applicable. Other individuals investigated such requirements at the onset and sometimes found that the regulations to their circumstances were unclear.

What types of wildlife damage control is private enterprise involved with? Although diverse, most of the recent development has probably been in urban/suburban situations where the largest unfilled market existed. Following are two data sets which will help to describe the kinds of animals controlled. The first data set (Table 1) is a national survey done by personnel of our firm in connection with committee assignments for the National Pest Control Association (NPCA). Only NPCA members were surveyed, but this information still represents a significant portion of the private sector involved in wildlife damage control. As would be expected, almost all pest control operators were involved with commensal rodent control with progressively fewer survey respondents controlling other vertebrates. Some lower categories, such as armadillo, reflect limited geographical distributions.

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The second data set (Table 2) is from the Rochester, New York office of our firm, Critter Control, over a three year period. The numbers are of jobs conducted, not of all inquiry calls received. Also, although we were rather unique in our market area, there were others in the private sector doing wildlife damage control in Rochester. Collectively, squirrels, raccoons, bats, moles, rats, mice, and woodchuck comprised eighty percent (80%) of all jobs done by the Rochester office of Critter Control. A total of 1,337 wildlife damage control jobs were done. This high number for a three year period reflects the market that does exist, especially considering that Rochester is only a medium-sized city and that this three year period includes an initially slow "start-up" year for a new business.

How does the private sector control nuisance wildlife? Again I wish to refer to the NPCA Vertebrate Control Survey (Table 3). The most preferred control techniques were livetrapping (squirrels, raccoon, skunks, opossum, woodchuck, rabbits, muskrat/nutria, armadillo, coyote/foxes), pesticides (rats/mice, moles), and exclusion (birds, bats, snakes).

Livetrapping and subsequent translocation are controversial. Many individuals, especially in urban areas, favor this approach while wildlife professionals with training in population biology are often dubious of the wisdom of translocation. Frequently my customers are amazed at the New York State regulation which states that a property owner can destroy a nuisance animal such as a raccoon or gray squirrel but that a permit is needed for translocation. Many of my customers think the opposite should be true.

Concerning the future of private enterprise in wildlife damage control, I predict growth and consolidation. Private enterprise will perform an increasingly larger share of the actual field work in wildlife damage control, while many smaller operations will merge or be displaced by larger operations. Our firm, Critter Control, Inc., started in 1982 as a small operation in one location. Today, we have 38 offices in 18 states resulting from a 50% annual growth rate. Several individuals owning smaller firms have joined our company within the last year.

I would anticipate a maturation of current wildlife damage control services offered and the development of new services. As an example, our firm recently marketed what we refer to as the "A-TEAM" (A for animal) approach. We will respond to any large, difficult to handle nuisance wildlife problem nationwide. To date we have

received several inquiry calls which have resulted in two jobs: a large bat exclusion job in Little Rock, Arkansas and a consultation on a deer problem on an island off Connecticut.

CONCLUSION

Interaction between private enterprise and government agencies will continue to develop and mature. The development and adoption of licensing procedures and accompanying regulations will follow the increasing realization that wildlife damage control by private enterprise is no longer limited to individual part-time trappers. With this development will come the addressing of concerns such as liability insurance, training and continuing education. As an illustration of such developments, our firm, upon request, had significant input into the updating of Michigan's nuisance wildlife control regulations. Professional involvement by private enterprise in such activities as leading government sponsored workshops on wildlife damage control and committee assignments in professional umbrella groups (such as NPCA and The Wildlife Society) will continue and grow.

The final subject I wish to comment upon is ethical conduct by private enterprise in wildlife damage control. Currently, there are problems out in the field. When there is a buck to be made, there are always those who will do almost anything to make it. Standards of conduct are needed. Government, of course, has a role in the development and implementation of appropriate regulations. Additionally, professional organizations usually develop standards for their memberships. Will the existing diverse professional groups, such as The Wildlife Society, NPCA, and National Animal damage Control Association, be the appropriate vehicles for the development of such standards, or will the need evolve for a new professional organization to meet the needs of private enterprise involved in wildlife damage control?

Spp.	# Jobs	%
Squirrels	352	26.3
Raccoon	249	18.6
Bats	180	13.5
Moles	101	7.6
Rat/Mice	98	7.3
Woodchuck	95	7.1
Sparrow/Starling	62	4.6
Skunk	55	4.1
Chipmunk	29	2.2
Vole	29	2.2
Pigeon	28	2.1
Snakes	10	0.7
Other	49	3.7
TOTAL	1337	100.0

TABLE 1. Response to National Pest Control Association 1989 Vertebrate Control Committee Survey on kinds of vertebrates controlled by NPCA membership. N = 440

DO YOU CONTROL:	YES (%)
Mice/Rats	99.8 %
Squirrels	74.0 %
Birds	72.3 %
Bats	70.6 %
Raccoons	55.0 %
Skunks	47.2 %
Moles	45.0 %
Opossum	38.0 %
Snakes	31.0 %
Woodchucks	20.0 %
Rabbits	12.0 %
Muskrat/Nutria	7.0 %
Armadillo	6.0 %
Coyote/Foxes	3.0 %

Adapted from: *Pest Management*, August, 1989

TABLE 3. Response to National Pest Control Association Vertebrate Control Survey, 1989, on control techniques of first choice of NPCA membership. N = number of respondents which replied that they do control the individual vertebrates.

KEY: L (Live trap), K (Kill Trap), E (Exclusion), (Pesticides), R (Repellents), F (Fumigation).

Spp.	N	Preferred Control Techniques (%)
Mice/Rats	439	P (53.9), K (22.4), E (17.6).
Squirrels	326	L (50.0), E (33.5).
Birds	318	E (45.2), R (32.5), P (18.8).
Bats	311	E (50.0), R (30.3), P (15.3).
Raccoon	242	L (61.5), E (25.2).
Skunks	208	L (61.3), E (22.3), R (10.8)..
Moles	198	P (50.0), K (20.1), F (17.2).
Opossum	167	L (70.2), E (22.5).
Snakes	136	E (37.9), R (24.2), L (16.4), K (15.5)
Woodchuck	88	L (58.3), F (11.9).
Rabbits	53	L (66.7), E (18.7), R (12.5).
Muskrat/Nutria	31	L (50.0), K (39.3).
Armadillo	26	L (66.7), E (25.0).
Coyote/Foxes	13	L (46.0), K (30.8), E (15.5).

Adapted from: *Pest Management*, August, 1989