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BALANCING THE NEEDS OF SOCIETY: A PERSPECTIVE FOR WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT IN THE '90S

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It is a privilege and honor to have this place on your program. I sincerely appreciate the Conference making my participation possible. The job of a keynoter is, I believe, to set a tone, encourage or sound a note of optimism and suggest a challenge for the future. Well, there are plenty of reasons for optimism. And the only problem with challenges is which to highlight.

I am firmly convinced that the climate for wildlife damage management is extremely optimistic and provides unparalleled challenges — or more properly, opportunities. There is a momentum which I am sure you sense.

Let me first comment on some of the reasons or factors which lead to the climate of optimism and then to comment on the challenges.

First, there is strong, vigorous leadership, direction and support at the state, federal, academic and private levels. And, the improved morale is most refreshing. Despite the perpetual high decibel complaints of organizations from within the Washington Beltway, I sense improved satisfaction with the overall program among managers, cooperators and users, working professionals, and the scientific community.

As one example: On September 15, 1993, at its annual meeting at Lake Placid, New York, the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies adopted a resolution reflecting the general viewpoint of the states, most of which are cooperators. The conclusion of that resolution was:

“...the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies supports and commends the Department of Agriculture for its leadership, direction, and cooperation and for being responsive to the need to conduct a socially acceptable, environmentally sound, and effective wildlife damage management program.”

Also, there are some real advances in terms of professional recognition. At long last, universities are becoming more involved in wildlife damage management research and are offering course work. And, The Wildlife Society is actively involved through the Wildlife Damage Management Working Group under the Chairmanship of Dr. Paul Curtis of Cornell, who is also on this program.

I must pause for a moment to pay tribute to Utah State University for its foresight in establishing an Institute for Wildlife Damage Management. Its objectives are broad and it is already having an influence in academic, professional and management circles. Needless to say, I am very proud that it bears my name.

A very significant reason for optimism is that there are greatly improved prospects for developing new methods and approaches to the solution of an increasing variety of problems. A review of the program for this Conference is clear evidence of the broadened studies and approach to managing wildlife damage — lethal and alternative methods, the consideration of socioeconomic factors, damage assessment, and public involvement.

These are some of the reasons or factors which contribute to a climate of optimism and to my firm belief that wildlife damage management is on the threshold of entering into full partnership in the resource management community, and finally, for improving public understanding and acceptance.

Now, I would like to address the challenges in the context of the Conference theme: *Balancing the Need of Society*. But, I would like to examine what the words “balance the needs” mean and their relationship to the changing role of wildlife damage management.

The theme is hardly new. It is the byword of politicians and environmentalists alike. It has been the subject of endless rhetoric — balance — it is like motherhood and apple pie. And, we all subscribe.

But, what does it or should it mean to those responsible for wildlife damage management? Let us begin with the word “balance.”

Over the years those responsible for wildlife damage management have been the proponents of rational, sound and balanced management — multiple use — always striving for a balancing of uses — a balancing of material needs. Balance is not new.

These, however, are changing times and changing values and needs, and we must view the balancing of need in a new light — by including the social needs in the balance equation. I think there is the opportunity for those responsible for wildlife damage management to take a leadership role in espousing and practicing a new recognition of balancing the needs.

Now, let us examine “needs.” The increasing need for a variety of wildlife damage management services will continue. Human needs for food, fiber and shelter will, without question, increase with the expanding population making ever increasing and complex demands on our fixed resource base. These are survival needs; they also drive economic development.

Now there are some different needs for wildlife damage management services. These go far beyond the role of protecting food, fiber, and shelter — far beyond coyotes, black birds and rodents. There are rapidly emerging management roles to make it possible for people to enjoy wildlife while reducing the conflicts that the same wildlife cause.

June and I recently moved into a retirement community with landscaped cottages surrounded by woods, bounded on one side by the Occoquan River and on the other by the Potomac. We have two small ponds. Yes, we already have a small flock of “stay at home” Canada geese, some “suburban” deer and fox. The residents of our community are delighted and are even launching a small non-game project — nesting boxes, observation posts, trails, etc. It is perfectly clear there will soon be problems, and that numbers will have to be held in check. It is equally clear that this will not be accomplished by hunter harvest. There are similar situations all over America, especially in suburban locations. These conflicts need to be resolved so that people can continue to enjoy wildlife — to have their cake and eat it too.

In 1991 we stopped at the Mariana Islands and learned more about the brown tree snake problem. That dilemma must be resolved, not only for the benefit of the residents of these islands, but also to protect endangered birds over the entire Pacific from this most predacious snake.

More and more states are asking for assistance with problems with game species the ungulates, waterfowl and others. Aquaculture, both public and private, seeks assistance with increasing losses to birds.

Some of these are the aesthetic, altruistic or social needs — the interest and desire of people concerning the well-being of wildlife resources and their enjoyment, here and in other lands. These needs were once equated with the value of a sunset or the sound of a flight of geese. They defied measurement. But no more. Clearly there are changing needs — to prevent or reduce losses and in many situations to do so in a manner that does not remove the offending species. These non-material needs are real — they have become just as real

as the need for food and fiber. Some defy economic measurement but they can be measured at the ballot box and through other public actions.

My point is that successful management plans or philosophy must balance both material and social needs. Of course, to draw such a conclusion is only conceptual or an abstraction. To translate concept or philosophy to reality requires specific implementing steps. I am confident that a redefinition of “need” and “balance” provides unparalleled opportunity or challenge for progress. But that progress will not be realized and the opportunity lost unless the momentum gained is sustained and that will require positive and determined action. First, I think we have to ask where wildlife damage management is going to fit into broader resource management planning.

This Nation is moving towards a broader resource management philosophy. It is not at all clear what direction this movement will take. But it is inevitable that it will bring change. At the recent meeting of the International Association in Lake Placid, New York, William A. Molini, Director of Nevada’s Department of Wildlife and a past President of the Association, spoke of the “Challenge of Change.” He observed:

“That there is a move by our society, as reflected through legislative initiative, to achieve more holistic management of all natural resources is evident... This movement of change is reflected on many different fronts including preservation of old growth forests and wetlands, wilderness designation and management, Endangered Species Act implications resulting in the concepts of the National Biological Survey, biodiversity, conservation biology and ecosystem management. Anyone who believes that our business is not in a state of dramatic change is not paying attention.” He stressed that the challenge is to survive these changes and retain necessary wildlife management.

It is now time to carefully examine how current management philosophy can be expanded. It is going to be necessary to fit the plans for wildlife damage management into broader plans for the public land managing agencies, all of which are embracing “ecosystem management;” also into the plans of the state fish and wildlife agencies, most of which are responsible for all wildlife.

This philosophical shift is a major or landmark change in the way wildlife management is viewed — and, how needs and the balancing of needs are viewed. Wildlife damage management has long been a proponent of balanced use; ironically, it has often found itself in a defensive position. We do not want that to happen again.

I am certainly not suggesting any lessening of currently needed service; to the contrary, there is the opportunity for an expansion of services and the challenge for wildlife damage management to assume a leadership role in helping to shape the future and set an example in its planning and activities. New methods, approaches, concepts and the latest in technology will have to be developed and used with existing methods — all in combination. The field has indeed moved from control to management.

This is a moment when the new direction of wildlife damage management, an increase in needs for services and an emerging philosophy of resource use all come together: It is important to seize the moment and keep the momentum going. We are at one of those times when circumstances and favorable conditions present both challenge and opportunity. Broadening the view of “balance” and “need” to go beyond material, ecological and economic considerations and to recognize the total public interest is the real need in “balancing the needs of society.” It is the challenge and opportunity for the future.

The time is ripe. Thank you.