February 1991

INCORPORATING WILDLIFE DAMAGE CONTROL INTO A UNIVERSITY WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT CURRICULUM

William G. Misner
Department of Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN

Alex B. Coley
Department of Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN

INCORPORATING WILDLIFE DAMAGE CONTROL INTO A UNIVERSITY WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT CURRICULUM

WILLIAM G. MINSER, Department of Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37901
ALEX B. COLEY, Department of Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37901

Proc. East. Wildl. Damage Control Conf. 5:159-160. 1992.

Most university wildlife programs that do not include wildlife damage control course offerings probably lack those courses for 2 main reasons: (1) most professors in those wildlife programs likely did not have formal training in wildlife damage control in their own degree programs and therefore may not have developed the skills nor the interest to teach this subject; and (2) universities may lack funding to hire new personnel to teach wildlife damage control.

Wildlife damage control was integrated into an existing Wildlife Management Techniques course at The University of Tennessee, beginning in 1983. Teaching material and training were obtained primarily at Eastern Wildlife Damage Control Conferences 1 through 4. Wildlife damage control instruction was offered in 5 ways: (1) slide lectures and video cassettes on majorwildlifedamagecontrolsubjectareas,developedprimarily as a result of contributions of presenters at Eastern Wildlife Damage Control Conferences; (2) presentations on wildlife damage control regulations and problems by wildlife damage control professionals (public and private); (3) reading assignments in Prevention and Control of Wildlife *Damage* (by R. Timm, required text) and other readings; (4) review of case histories of wildlife damage complaint calls and solutions received at the university during a 5-year period (n = 285); and (5) assignments to students of wildlife damage complaint calls made by the public to the university during the semester. Students responded to complaints by phone, with guidance, throughout the semester, and presented weekly oral reports on problems and solutions to the class.

Formal classroom presentations on wildlife damage control were made during 2-3, 3-hour blocks of instruction. The value of instruction in wildlife damage control was evaluated through questionnaires to students and alumni. The resident class of 1990 received questionnaires the semester after wildlife damagecontrolinstruction. UniversityofTennesseewildlife and fisheries science alumni, who received wildlife damage control instruction (from 1983 to 1990), were also surveyed. The primary goal of the alumni evaluation was to determine the utility of the wildlife damage control instruction to their careers. Public satisfaction with student assistance calls was evaluated through a telephone-administered survey.

Students perceived wildlife damage control as an integral part of future wildlife management, and indicated a high degree of confidence in their ability to solve wildlife damage problems. Students felt the knowledge of wildlife damage control was relevant to most wildlife-related jobs. Course material was rated as being useful and students indicated they learned more about damage control than other topics in the wildlife and fisheries techniques course. A career in damage control held some appeal for most students, and many desired more instruction in damage control. The required text was rated as the most informative teaching tool; however, all methods of instruction received favorable responses. Fifty percent of students felt strongly that a separate course in wildlife damage control should be added to the curriculum.

Alumni responded that wildlife damage control was included in the job description of 61 % of those employed in natural resources, but 78% actually dealt with damage control as a regular part of their jobs. For alumni employed in wildlife management, damage control was an official duty of 72% of the respondents, however; 94% actually engaged in wildlife damage control. Alumni felt that damage control instruction adequately prepared them to handle damage complaints. Concerning the possible need for a separate course in wildlife damage control, 32% of alumni favored a separate course, while 46% felt it unnecessary, compared to 50% and 35% respectively for current students. After alumni had gained confidence in their abilities to solve wildlife damage problems on the job, they were apparently more comfortable with the level of training received. The most common suggestions by both students and alumni were to increase material concerning damage to agriculture and forestry operations, and add instruction in identification of the species causing the damage.

Citizens who made wildlife damage complaint calls to the university and were assisted by students, were surveyed by telephone. All respondents indicated our students conducted themselves in a professional manner and were able to communicate the necessary information effectively. Most respondents were satisfied with the advice they received from our students, and all said they would contact our department again should they need help with other wildlife damage problems.

Although most alumni and students were relatively satisfied with the level of training they received in wildlife damage control, many were likely unaware of the additional information they could have received in an expanded course. Because of limited time, mostof the training in our course was completed through slide lectures during 2 afternoons. An expanded course could provide for coverage of additional material, more field trips, and more hands-on experience.

All students graduating from our wildlife and fisheries science program are required to take wildlife management techniques. Because wildlife damage control was integrated into that course, all of our wildlife graduates should be able to provide sound professional advice, or at least know how to search for answers for those inescapable wildlife damage calls that come from the public to wildlife professionals. Lack of funding and manpower are often given as reasons f expanding university curricula into areas of need. certainly impediments to our program as well. How using continuing education opportunities (i.e., the Wildlife Damage Control Conferences) for improving f expertise, we were able to incorporate wildlife damage into our curriculum without additional funding or man