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BALANCING THE NEEDS OF SOCIETY: LISTENING TO THE PUBLIC

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SUMMARY ONLY: Wildlife damage management, as a professional activity, is involved in a broad range of management issues affecting agricultural productivity and profitability, human health and safety, and endangered and valued species management. Surveys by S. Kellert and others have indicated that the general public is agreeable to resolving wildlife damage issues, even utilizing lethal technologies. However, surveys and case histories have also indicated that the **process** involved in resolving wildlife damage issues invokes much public concern. By **process** I mean the specific methodologies, strategies, and resource and social tradeoffs involved in developing and implementing a wildlife damage management program.

There are many needs of society: comprehensive health care, adequate nutrition, appropriate education, freedom of religion, and others. Perched within this milieu of needs are the activities associated with wildlife damage management, a very small piece of the total picture, but made bigger by the nature of the controversies associated with them. Wildlife management policies in this country are not in place because biologists tell the public what to do and what it needs. It's the other way around. Wildlife policies are what the public allows the biologists to do in the public's name. Whenever science conflicts with political and social concerns, science always loses.

My working hypothesis is that marketing wildlife damage management to a tender public requires specific strategies for preserving the public's trust in the wildlife damage management professional, open and frank disclosure of operations, professional public relations, and a rigorous program evaluation system, including statistically valid social surveys. In addition, wildlife damage management as a profession needs to be viewed by the general population as sensitive and reactive to the public's needs, as well as competent, efficient, and cost-effective. This is not the easiest, nor the cheapest approach. However, I believe that it will be a successful strategy. It will require some critical evaluations, some soul-searching, the development of new operational paradigms, and additional training.

By listening to the public, I suspect that we can better anticipate the public's concerns. We can better justify our actions in relation to those concerns. And we can get on with the job of managing wildlife damage. That is, after all, the bottom line.

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