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ANIMAL DAMAGE CONTROL AND THE WILDLIFE PROFESSION

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ABSTRACT

Conflicts between man and wildlife have always been a part of our history. We have tried to control the damage caused by wildlife and found that this was not always in the best interest of the resource. The role of animal damage control in our profession has changed and so has the public's view of it. As professionals we must strive to explain the need and value of wildlife damage management to our peers, the public and our detractors. This can be accomplished by participation in our professional organizations, the presentation of papers at scientific meetings, and open discussion of our programs in the public forum.

INTRODUCTION

Americans have always had conflicts with wildlife. Initially, explorers were interested in protecting themselves from mountain lions and bears. Later, settlers struggled to protect their livestock from wild predators. Today, land owners try to protect their animals and crops from depredation. Biologists work to insure endangered species a chance to recover and managers are trying to increase dwindling numbers of waterfowl by reducing predation losses. Wildlife damage control continues to provide a primary undergirding for the management of wildlife species.

Durward L. Allen (1974), in Our Wildlife Legacy, noted that the history of animal damage control (ADC) in our country goes back to the early 1700's when William Penn hired the first professional wolf hunter in Pennsylvania. Even then leaders recognized that a professional was needed to conduct a successful wildlife damage control program. Many of the founders of the wildlife management profession were practioners of animal damage control. The ability to control predators through hunting and trapping was a necessary skill for the early biologist. Yet, Allen went on to note that the last wolf in Pennsylvania was killed in 1892; a fact that he did not seem proud to report.

In the west, federal trappers were often an important government contact and ranchers depended on them. They helped landowners protect their livestock from predators. However, many of those predator free ranges turned into dust bowls because of excessive stocking and a poor understanding of range dynamics.

Early in his career, Aldo Leopold worked to reduce predator populations in a time when wolves and mountain lions were considered bad for wildlife. He said that: "In those days we had never heard of passing up a chance to kill a wolf. In a second we were pumping lead into the pack... I was young then, and full of trigger itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise." Later Leopold expresses eloquently that "too much safety seems to yield only danger in the long run." He knew that animal damage control was necessary but not to the extent that it was practiced then (Leopold 1970).

Predator control programs helped establish new wildlife populations in many areas and made ranching in the west possible. It was essential to bring those lands under control so our country could prosper. But by the 30's, the patriarchs of our profession and landowners began to gain a new appreciation for predators and their value to the range and the environment. Professionals began to slow the momentum of total predator removal programs.

In 1930, Aldo Leopold, as Chairman of the American Game Policy Committee, started questioning the foundations of the control practices (Cain 1978). Through the next 40 years, the debate on animal damage control policies

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continued in and outside of the wildlife profession. A report entitled "Predator Control-1971," completed for the Council on Environmental Quality and chaired by Stanley A. Cain, focused on the need to change the animal damage control policies of our government. In 1973, The Wildlife Society (TWS) issued a policy statement on the control of predators and their value to wildlife. It also made recommendations on conducting research and field operations in the area of animal damage control.

The Society wanted more research verifying damage claims and improving control methods. Furthermore, they wanted wildlife management training for professionals doing field operations and more data detailing the relationship between land use and predator-prey interactions. Professionals were beginning to question the need for complete control, the type of methods employed, and the long term ramifications of the practices.

This brings us to the time when many of us began our careers in wildlife. The question is where does animal damage control and the wildlife profession stand now? What must we do to maintain the needed tools for wildlife damage management as an integral component of wildlife science in the future, rather than mere relics of the past?

CONCEPTS AND TRENDS

Some of our associates are deeply committed to the ideal of protecting property from any wildlife damage. Others speak of ADC practitioners as zealous fanatics dedicated to destroying all predators. More than a few biologists do not believe that ADC is a valid component of the wildlife management profession. These beliefs create blinders that fit professionals on both sides of this philosophical fence.

The need for controlling wildlife populations has changed since Leopold's time. Our science has improved; we better understand the ecology of predator-prey relationships and have tried to evaluate the goals of wildlife management in light of changing social values. Working in the wildlife damage management field is like moving two steps forward and one step back. For all the progress that seems to be made, we forget that not everyone is moving with us. These polarizing forces come from within our own group, from the wildlife profession as a whole, and from the public.

As wildlife damage control educators, we have failed to take advantage of opportunities to help other members of the wildlife profession understand the role that damage control has in wildlife management objectives. The mainstream wildlife biologists know something about ADC but often don't understand how important it is to basic management goals. They attend professional meetings and read journals but few wildlife damage management practitioners publish or present papers outside of our immediate circle of peers.

Wildlife professionals have not done a good job of explaining to the public how they manage wildlife populations; consequently, ADC practitioners have done even less in explaining their role in managing wildlife. The United States has changed from an agricultural to urban population base and citizens have lost touch with the land resources that support our basic food chain. They have a high association with endangered species because of media attention garnered by these plants and animals. Yet, most individuals do not know that the whooping crane populations have increased because of coyote control programs or that National Audubon Society is working with Texas ADC to protect shore-nesting birds on barrier islands from raccoon and coyote depredation. The linkage between endangered and nongame species and the control of predators must be explained to the public. Field techniques for wildlife damage management are an important component for managing critical wildlife populations.

A strong warning is warranted at this point. By making our methods and procedures more visible, we will come

under greater scrutiny by the public and the animal rights advocates. Yet, wildlife damage management is an essential part of our profession. We must be prepared to explain our methods and the rationale for our management decisions.

A distinction between animal rights activists and animal welfare proponents should be made. Most of you could be classified as animal welfare advocates. You may not be card carrying members, but none of you delight in seeing animals suffer or you wouldn't be wildlife biologists. The hunters among you are good shots and work for clean kills. You hunt with dogs to retrieve downed game and spend a long time looking for game that you might have wounded. Animal welfare advocates are not against lethal control methods when needed but they are concerned with finding the most humane methods of control. It is unlikely that these groups will agree with all of our methods; nevertheless, we can gain their acceptance of the need to do the work.

In contrast, animal rights groups are dedicated to stopping all use of animals for food, clothing, and research. They are well financed and use celebrities to promote their cause. Their numbers are growing but their influence is disproportionate to the size of their membership. Wildlife biologists seem to ignore or react poorly to these groups and, when they do interact, it is often in an emotional manner. The uninformed public may often support the more vocal and glamorous animal rights arguments and further distance themselves from their resource base.

Animal rights groups hire lawyers that are willing to sue for their client's convictions. We can have our programs challenged and temporarily stopped by court action even when we have broad public support for our actions. Such is the case in the control of raven depredation on the threatened desert tortoises (G. D. Simmons, USDA-APHIS-ADC, Pers. Commun.). These legal mechanisms are part of our democratic society; so we must learn to play actively on the same field while maintaining our professional integrity.

ACTIONS

We must forge coalitions with other groups to educate the public about a resource base they may have lost touch with and do not understand. The process works as illustrated by this example. The North Carolina Bluebird Society worked hard in 1988 to clarify the legislation for control of sparrows, pigeons and starlings. They did not want their members prosecuted for protecting bluebirds by removing nests of exotic birds. As professionals we need to assist and join those organizations that represent a broad spectrum of public interests. By forming strong local alliances with other environmental groups, we can maintain the tools and methods needed to effectively manage wildlife species.

Physicians, druggists, farmers, veterinarians, grocers and sportsmen are all adversely affected by the animal rights movement. As professional wildlife biologists we must take a leadership role and seek to galvanize these groups into a productive and political organization that will represent our views to the public. Public opinion polls indicate a rising tide of environmental awareness and increasing desire to participate in wildlife related activities. Wildlife professionals do not have the luxury of standing on the sidelines and watching this wave roll through society. Many of us need to change our belief that the term "environmentalist" is a four-letter word. For our own self interest, we must be part of the philosophy and educational structure that supports this awakening. This involvement must be supported by clear resource-based objectives and a rigorous evaluation of results and recommendations.

Livestock losses have not been well documented because it requires time, money and energy. Nevertheless, expenditures for wildlife damage management cannot be justified without data. Many of us have not taken time

to fully evaluate control technology or other animal management options because our methods seemed to work, were inexpensive, and the pressure to get results was extreme. No longer can we look at damage control as an isolated activity that protects public or private property. Control is but one component of a complex management system that must be designed in a holistic fashion based on ecologic and economic facts.

Cutler (1980) at the North American Wildlife Conference stated that "The Department (of Agriculture) affirms the President's 1977 policy on predatory animals. When control is necessary, it will focus on the offending animals causing the problem--not the species as a whole." Man killed predators to protect himself and his property and the practice was accepted and encouraged. We know that lethal control methods are an integral part of wildlife management; however, the supportive research data and field techniques have often not been documented because of time and money constraints. It is critical for our profession that all hypotheses for resolving damage problems be tested. When lethal methods are recommended, they must be supported with the strength and conviction of good science.

FUTURE NEEDS

Traditionally, we vicariously uphold the image of the old trappers, profess our independence, and only reluctantly join organizations. We have also been hesitant to publicly state our positions, policies, research base or rationales for actions. If we are to move forward and truly make wildlife damage control a component of wildlife management, we must become active members of professional organizations. It is like throwing rocks into a quiet pond; each rock makes a wave and the larger rocks will make bigger waves. Nonetheless, the water will calm very shortly if only one rock is tossed in at a time. It is not until all of us throw our rocks in together that we can really see a difference and bring about the waves of change.

The Wildlife Society, in 1988, formed a committee on Animal Damage Control, which I chair. This committee represents a wave created by a few dedicated rock throwers. Our group is moving forward on several suggestions made in the past by leaders of the profession. If one looks hard, you can see the reflections of Leopold, Allen, Berryman, Miller and Teer embodied in the committee's charges. Robert Timm has completed a survey of universities and colleges to determine where wildlife damage management courses are being taught. He has received close to a 90 percent return on the survey. Some of his preliminary results indicate that several institutions do not believe there is much need for wildlife damage control courses. The Committee is developing a paper that presents the philosophy of wildlife damage control as it relates to wildlife management not just as it relates to the protection of a commodity. We are also tracking the progress of the Environmental Impact Assessment for USDA-APHIS-ADC. That process seems to be moving forward with the development of a document that will serve the agency well and be used as a primer for the program.

While the Society is making progress in this area, the job is far from over. TWS represents our profession but can only voice the will of its members. Wildlife damage management professionals must get involved at the state chapter and section levels in order to participate in regional and national programs. Change comes slowly in any organization and the Society is no exception. Publishing papers on wildlife damage through Society channels has been arduous and slow, however, more papers are being published. Change can best be executed from within an organization by taking an active leadership role.

We must move one step further and institutionalize the concepts, techniques and values of a profession that strives to stop animals from doing what nature taught them to do. Universities often have little room to add new

courses to overburdened wildlife curricula, yet almost all of them have a mechanism to support a seminar on wildlife damage management. Budding wildlife biologists who plan to work on endangered species, bluebirds, ducks, quail or urban wildlife must understand the philosophy of wildlife damage management. Offer to be the instructor of that seminar. Most university systems can easily facilitate such a proposal and few wildlife programs will reject the offer.

We must take and make opportunities to explain our role in the management of renewable wildlife resources to the urban segment of our population. Eighty percent of the American public lives in an urban setting. Our objective should be to gain their understanding and acceptance of our goals and methods. If legislators are going to react in a positive way towards sound wildlife regulations, their constituents must direct them or at least not oppose them. Urban wildlife education programs provide a clear path for reaching this large voting block of citizens in a positive way if we stress our desire to investigate all options for management. Urbanites represent a powerful ally interested in wildlife issues and one that can influence political action.

CONCLUSIONS

If you believe that you can remain inactive and allow others to make the decisions for you, you have no right to complain. To paraphrase Walt Kelly's Pogo, if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem. Jack Berryman (1989) in his keynote address to the Ninth Great Plains Wildlife Damage Control Workshop earlier this year said, "It is extremely important to participate actively in the professional societies; to attend, participate and present papers at the national and regional meetings -- in a word, to come out of our shells and rejoin the professional community." He has strong convictions and his comments are supported by years of research, field work and educational outreach. His recommendations have been tempered by the Washington reality and battle-hardened by years of struggle for sound wildlife damage control policies. Jack's recommendations and my conclusions are similar. Wildlife damage management practitioners cannot afford to be passive or reactive to issues in the wildlife profession or our society. They must be active and energetic in forming future wildlife policies and shaping the public's understanding of wildlife management.

Lynn Greenwalt of the National Wildlife Federation said it eloquently when speaking about animal damage control professionals. He said, "They are professionals of the highest order doing a job that is integral to the fabric of wildlife management." You must help shape the future of the wildlife sciences because you are the profession; so make waves, be responsible, be a leader and speak out.

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