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February 1991

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PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES: WHEN DOES $2 + 2 = 5$?

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Pros. East. Wildl. Damage Control Conf. 5:3-7.1992.

Perception and reality. One and the same, or are they two frogs, and you keep mice and rats in little cages instead of different? There are certainly a diversity of perceptions. Are killing them with warfarin, as any decent soft-hearted farmer does, there also multiple realities?

The theme of this conference, "Human and Wildlife Interactions: Public Perceptions and Management Realities," suggests to me that the reality of what wildlife managers do is often affected by the public's perception of the problem. In considering animal damage, there's the question of which solutions the public finds appropriate and acceptable. Attitudes and perceptions nowadays, whether correct or based on misinformation, are often translated into policy and law. "Management realities"- why can't we just go ahead and solve the problem the way we want to? After all, we're the scientists and wildlife managers; we know the problem better than anyone. "Get out the traps and the toxicants, and we'll have the situation under control in no time, thank you. Er-Could you please not look over my shoulder while I work? Come back in a few days and I'll have things cleaned up, yes Ma'am!"

Reality. Is it an absolute, or is it only a shadow, perceived by each person in terms of his or her own experience? Plato aside, we often feel frustrated by having to work in a society where everyone's opinion seems to have as much weight as what WE know to be the real facts; and effective, decisive action is delayed, postponed, or made impossible by debate, litigation, and public opinion generated by inaccurate publicity, or worse. "Why can't a trapper just do his job, without being bothered by all these damned unemployed long-haired kooks who want to preserve every last acre as wilderness?" "C'm on, look at the FACTS! Be REASONABLE!!!"

So- how do we resolve the problem of what we believe is reality versus what the public thinks is true? I'd like to borrow from an editorial in the magazine *Science*, which appeared some months ago. *Science* is engaged in a conversation with the illustrious "Dr. Noitall":

Science: Dr. Noitall, you are the world's greatest authority on public relations, the man who could get Brezhnev elected in Orange County, the man who could sell crepes suzette as the breakfast of champions.

Dr. Noitall: A vast understatement of my true worth.

Science: We have come to ask you why scientists seem to have such a poor image.

Dr. Noitall: How can you possibly ask such a simpleminded question? You are the people who have brought us nuclear war, global warming, and acid rain. You enjoy dissect

Science: But we're not in favor of nuclear war.

Dr. Noitall: You discovered the atom. You had your chance to stick with phlogiston, and you didn't do it.

Science: We are not in favor of global warming. In fact, we're the ones who alerted the public to this danger.

Dr. Noitall: That shows the naivete of scientists. The Bible records the execution of messengers who brought bad news. We no longer execute such people, but we certainly don't have to like them. You tell me I have to give up my air-conditioned gas guzzler for an itty-bitsy, crowded, four-cylinder, nondescript vehicle, and expect me to like you.

Science: But it is our job to tell people when $2 + 2 = 4$.

Dr. Noitall: That's exactly where your views are wrong. A recent poll shows that 50% of the people think $2 + 2 = 5$, and almost every network agrees with them. Those people have rights, they believe sincerely that $2 + 2 = 5$, and you take no account of their wishes and desires. Simply imposing $2 + 2 = 4$ on them is not democracy.

Science: But there is really no serious scientific disagreement on the question.

Dr. Noitall: That is exactly where the problem comes in. The Establishment is lined up monolithically on the side of $2 + 2 = 4$. A dissident scientist representing the $2 + 2 = 5$ school cannot get his articles published in Establishment journals. Peer review is utterly unwilling to look with favor on such viewpoints. Granting agencies do not encourage people who believe $2 + 2 = 5$ to serve on their boards.

Science: We can't take seriously people who make emotional rather than scientific arguments.

Dr. Noitall: That reflects a condescending attitude toward those who did not have the privilege of having an advanced education. Prominent political groups have already supported enactment of legislation, even if it is scientifically inaccurate, as long as the public wants it.

Science: Then how can we go about changing public opinion?

Dr. Noitall: In the first place, you could stop having funnylooking people in glasses and lab coats appear on television and before legislative committees. Pick real successes, such as actors, actresses, and rock singers, and let them present your side of the story. Making large amounts of money and being handsome is evidence of success in modern society. Such people are much more likely to understand big subjects than professional types. And stop defending unpopular causes. It is now understood that atoms, asbestos, CO₂, and cholesterol are bad. Attempts to say that they're all right in small doses is only going to get you an image as an apologist for the bad guys.

Science: But even if we pick attractive spokespersons, how can we convince them of the truth?

Dr. Noitall: That is another misconception that you are going to have to get rid of. There are two truths in this world: one of the laboratory, and the other of the media. What people perceive as the truth is truer in a democracy than some grubby little experimental laboratory notebook. A stubborn insistence on the facts instead of the people's perception of the facts makes you look heartless and disdainful. You are going to have to come out as more reasonable and accommodating, as more benevolent, kindly, and pliable, willing to give and take, empathizing with the public's fears and frustrations.

Science: So how do we handle the $2 + 2 = 4$ problem?

Dr. Noitall: I'd suggest you start by conceding that $2 + 2 = 4\frac{1}{2}$. (Koshland 1990).

This past summer, I was standing by the elevator at a break during a convention, and overheard one participant say to another, "I never realized when I was in grad school that I'd mostly be a manager of people." Now, the strange thing about this incident was that this was a convention of musicians, which I was attending with my wife. How could a musician, whose professional life consists of working with choirs, orchestras, accompanists, and so on, NOT realize that he would be mainly a people-manager? Do we as wildlife biologists, having been educated and trained primarily in the natural sciences, similarly fail to realize that to be effective managers of wildlife damage we must also be primarily managers of people?

Back to our conference theme: "Human and Wildlife Interactions..." Sounds like the human factor is at least half of the story. After all, we are the ones who may perceive an interaction as a conflict, and it is our human value system that may define certain animals as "pests," "nuisances," or perhaps "target animals." How thoroughly have we explored solving wildlife damage problems primarily through the management of people, rather than the management of animals? I'll admit it's a tall order. We typically try to solve everyone's problems, even perceived problems, possibly because we're a service-oriented group of folks. Or is it because animal damage control has such a tarnished image that we want to solve problems so more people will see us as the "good guys?"

Actually, it's getting harder all the time to solve problems by managing animals, and to please everyone while doing so. People in this country hold increasingly differing views of animals. Just take a look at the attitudes of urbanites—particularly those whose only personal experience with animals is with family pets, going to the zoo, or watching what they perceive to be factual programs about animals on television or at the movie theater. Is it any surprise to us that the Animal Damage Control (ADC) program gets bad press, when three of the best recognized bears among a recent generation are (1) equipped with a Forest Service hat and a shovel, (2) a television star named "Gentle Ben," and (3) a bumbling cartoon caricature that lives in Jellystone Park? And thanks to Farley Mowat and the film-makers, people believe that wolves are friendly social beasts who primarily feed on mice. It's also clear to me that even among people who have little knowledge about wildlife and wildlife damage, almost everyone has a strong opinion on what to do about it; predation, for example. Sometimes I think the less factual one's knowledge, the more likely one is to be outspoken about the appropriate solution.

John Hadidian, who follows on this morning's program, can tell us more about what happens when people's Disney-influenced views of wildlife meet the reality of animals causing damage to resources. Most of the diversity of viewpoints we can understand and even predict. Some of them are misunderstandings and are even comical. Yet to me, a new and more serious deviation from reality has occurred in recent years with the growth of the animal rights movement. Please be clear that I am speaking of animal *rights* as opposed to animal *welfare* (Schmidt 1990). In this country, we have seen increased visibility of, and activity by, a small minority who believe that animals should have rights equal to, or exceeding, those of humans. While it is appropriate that such groups should be able to exist and solicit funding from those of like mind to support their activities, I think most of us draw the line when persons of such belief try to impose those beliefs on us, or take militant action in the form of vandalizing properly, stealing animals from research laboratories, committing arson at livestock auction facilities, and generally attempting to disrupt all management or uses of animals in the name of animal liberation.

Beginning in 1966, an "environmental ethic" was first defined by historian Lynn White, Jr., who stated that the West's Judeo-Christian heritage was the root cause of the ecological crisis. This thinking, he said, is based on the "axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man." White called for a "new religion" whose basis would be "the spiritual autonomy of all parts of nature" and "the equality of all creatures, including man" (White 1967, Bidinotto 1990).

In a somewhat obscure publication in 1972, Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess defined the "deep ecology movement" (Naess 1972). "Deep ecology" was defined principally in contrast to the Western establishment conservation movement, which Naess termed "shallow ecology" for being human-centered, anthropocentric and utilitarian. Further, "Deep ecol

ogy extends the ecological principle of interrelatedness to virtually every aspect of our daily lives. Human and nonhuman species are viewed as having inherent and equal value, from which it follows that humans have no right to reduce the natural diversity of the earth, either directly or indirectly. Direct actions include such things as agriculture, mining, forestry, and technology" (Borrelli 1988:72-73).

Naess went on to define "deep ecology" as including a philosophy of "biospherical egalitarianism"... the equal right [for all `ways and forms of life'] to live and blossom (Naess 1972, Chase 1987). "All living things have a right to strive, unimpeded, for their own kind of `self-realization.' Human society, therefore, must venerate all forms of life" (Chase 1987:64).

Drawing from the "deep ecology" philosophy, the animal rights movement began to attain visibility with the 1975 publication of philosopher Peter Singer's book *Animal Liberation*. In the first words of the preface, the author states: "This book is about the tyranny of human over nonhuman animals" (Singer 1975). That tyranny amounts to `speciesism,' akin to `racism.' A speciesist, Singer said, `allows the interest of his species to override the *greater* interest of members of other species' (emphasis mine) (Singer 1975, Bidinotto 1990).

The introduction to another book of readings on the philosophy of animal rights succinctly states "...there can be no rational excuse left for killing animals, be they killed for food, science or sheerpersonal indulgence" (Godlovitch et al.1972:6). Animal rights means: no animal testing of medicines or surgical techniques; no hunting, circuses, or rodeos; no bird cages or dog pens; no leather; no meat, milk, or eggs; no use of animals, period" (Bidinotto 1990).

The animal rights proponents have actually taken the concept of "deep ecology" farther than Naess intended. For in stating the concept of "biospherical egalitarianism," he added the phrase "-in principle" saying, "The `in principle' clause is inserted because any realistic praxis necessitates some killing, exploitation, and suppression" (Naess 1972:96). Robert Bidinotto, in a recent analysis of the environmental movement in America, points out that in our tradition, rights are moral principles arising from human nature. He argues that since animals are by nature unable to know, respect or exercise rights, the principle of rights can't be applied to them. He concludes, "Practically, the notion of animal rights entails an absurd double standard. It declares that animals have the `inherent right' to survive as *their* nature demands, but that humans don't. It declares that a human, the only entity capable of recognizing moral boundaries, is to sacrifice his interests to entities that can't. Ultimately, it means that *only* [nonhuman] animals have rights" (Bidinotto 1990).

While being founded as a country where religious freedom could flourish, we remain largely Judeo-Christian, not only in heritage, but also in contemporary belief. An overwhelming

majority of all Americans still consider themselves to be Christians. The long-standing, traditional Christian viewpoint regarding our human relationship with animals is that we are stewards, that is, caretakers, of the entire creation, including animals, and they are appropriate for human uses. Psalm 8 says, in part:

"When I look at the sky, which you have made, at the moon and the stars, which you set in their places-what is man, that you think of him; mere man, that you care for him?

Yet you made him inferior only to yourself; you crowned him with glory and honor.

You appointed him ruler over everything you made; you placed him over all creation: sheep and cattle, and the wild animals too; the birds **and the fish and** the creatures in the seas."

(Good News Bible 1976:597-598)

To consider animals as equals to humans is therefore a heresy. I am surprised that churches today have been slow to speak out on this clearly heretical view that is becoming so visible in American society.

The animal rightists currently have neither political power, nor the support of the majority of Americans. Their effect, to date, has been to stimulate public discussion about the appropriate uses of animals. This certainly heightens our sensitivity, as well as the public's, particularly when discussing such a sensitive issue as wildlife damage and control (Schmidt et al. 1992).

Another source of diverse opinion in American society involves our view of institutions and agencies. Jack Berryman will speak on the role of agencies in dealing with animal damage. In our more positive moments, we look to our appointed and elected leaders, and our created agencies and institutions to marshal resources, solve problems, and lead us forward into the 21 st century. Wildlife is a public resource, so it's appropriate that we delegate to public agencies the job of managing that resource for the greatest good. Yet, it's hard these days to avoid cynicism, distrust of government, and dislike of the tangle of bureaucracy that seems to paralyze. The phrase, "I'm from the government, and I'm here to help," has become synonymous with, "The check's in the mail" and "I'll still respect you in the morning." If our agencies and institutions seem at times to be overgrown superorganisms, requiring infusions of millions of dollars in life support, and succeeding only in maintaining their own existence, then we need a clear call to action. We need to be the vanguard of support for agencies that take seriously their responsibility for solving wildlife damage problems.

After our morning break, Rob Swihart will help us look at wildlife damage problems in their ecological context. We have, I think, made good progress in recent years in understanding the bigger picture, and in approaching the problem of an animal causing damage by asking what factors caused the problem to occur in the first place. A more thorough, more ecological

understanding of wildlife damage problems should lead us into new avenues of damage prevention. If we know enough about factors regulating population size, as well as animal behavior, we should be able to design management strategies that will reduce the potential for human-wildlife conflicts.

Rick Owens will, I suspect, give us a dose of realism as he considers the economics and effectiveness of damage control strategies in use today. The perception often is that people called upon to solve damage problems should have techniques that are 100 percent effective, or nearly so, and that these should be economical and easily employed. This leads to questions like, "Can't you just spray something on the side of the house to keep the woodpecker away?" "Isn't there some mouse poison that will cause them to dry up, so that if they die in the house, they won't smell?" Or the environmentalist's statement to the livestock operator: "If you'd just manage your sheep better, you wouldn't have a coyote problem." We, the public, want to have our cake, and eat it too. Not only that, but we want it to taste better with every bite! We want ADC personnel who are doing predator damage control to kill only the offending animals (though we'd prefer they use nonlethal methods); we aren't willing to allow any accidental loss of nontarget species; we want any control method used to be humane to the coyote, although we don't care whether the coyote is being humane to the sheep while clamped onto its throat; and we don't want the solution to be very expensive, unless of course the sheep producer is paying for it. Why should it cost hundreds of taxpayers' dollars to kill a single coyote, for goodness sakes? Oh, yes, and we want the problem solved right away, please.

In the real world, we're faced with choices daily that are almost always compromises between the public perception of what is possible, and the reality of what is practical, or legal. There's no doubt that we need more research directed toward defining the costs of damage, and the cost effectiveness of control. For example, we have very little idea about what the costs of wildlife damage will be if we do nothing about it, and we seldom do nothing. But that's the basis for making almost all economic evaluations of our activities.

Lastly this morning, Harry Hodgdon will reflect on policy decisions and their effect on wildlife damage management. Policies, although formulated and approved by a few, often are subject to political pressures that are generated by the desires and objectives of the many, or of the most vocal and powerful. Here, also, inaccurate assumptions, lack of information, and fear of alienation of one's support base can lead to the making of bad policy. Yet an informed public, well-organized support groups, and dedicated leaders can and do formulate and enact good policy. The Wildlife Society's membership has recently voted to become more active in the public policy arena. While the Society has in recent years recognized and been supportive of wildlife damage management as a valid aspect of wildlife management, there are still many wildlife biologists who fail to have an accurate or in-depth appreciation of the need for, or the scope of, animal damage control. Consider the training received

by today's wildlife biologists: "The new biologist is a product of an affluent society with good transportation and communication systems. The new biologist has political savvy **and can** articulate his or her opinion. Many of them have an urban upbringing, but they are feeling an urge to enjoy the **country and are anxious** to get back to the earth, animals, and nature. They consider themselves knowledgeable about animals, nature, and the environment, even when they have limited field experience." At one time, we were all 'new biologists,' ready to improve and preserve the world, to tap the earth's resources, and to have a meaningful impact on the social, political, legal, and ethical aspects of natural resource management. The 'new biologist' is constantly being replaced by a 'newer biologist,' as we have replaced those before us. Change is inevitable. We must learn to understand the depth and magnitude of these forces of change (Schmidt et al. 1992).

The gulf between public perception, the "new biologist's" perception, and management reality is a large one to bridge, and the chasm seems to be getting wider. How do we as managers of wildlife damage bridge that gap? I suggest we help to do so by being honest, by being forthright with information, whether it's what we think people want to hear, or not. We must be more sensitive to the opinions of others, while being unafraid to espouse our own opinions and our own values. We must also be trustworthy-trust that is built on truth, both in word and in deed.

The keynote address at the First Eastern Wildlife Damage Conference was given in this same place in September 1983, by Jack Berryman. Jack recognized many of the trends that have become today's realities. He predicted the coming conflicts and attacks upon the wildlife damage control profession. At that time he said, "the best defense-the best rationale for wildlife damage control programs-is a sound, professional, defensible, well-planned, properly conducted, and well-articulated program" (Berryman 1983). I cannot state it any better.

Public perceptions and management realities: how large is the gap we need to bridge? Do we have to convince the entire public that $2 + 2$ actually equals 4? Or should we follow Dr. Noitall's advice, meeting them halfway and concede that the sum is $4 \frac{1}{2}$?

I'd like to conclude by borrowing from my colleague and friend Robert Schmidt's letter of reply to the *Science* magazine editorial: "How can we live with ourselves when we concede that the answer is anything but 4. I mean, $2 + 2$ really equals 4! ... Scientists need to consider the public's opinions, and they don't always have to prostitute themselves to do it. Dr. Noitall's analysis was correct, but his solution was erroneous. Scientists don't need to concede that $2 + 2 = 5$. We can tell the public that $2 + 2$ equals a whole number between 3 and 7. For the public and scientists that really care, a more defined answer can be 4. For the portion of the public that has no real interest, somewhere between 3 and 7 is close enough. And everybody is correct" (R).

H. Schmidt, letter submitted to the editor of *Science*, February 15, 1991).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank my colleague Robert H. Schmidt for calling to my attention the *Science* editorial by Daniel Koshland, Jr. "Two Plus Two Equals Five," and for sharing his response with me. Jack Berryman, John Iadidian, Rick Owens, and Robert Swihart each provided me with an overview of their presentations, thereby assisting me in accurately introducing their topics. Robert Schmidt provided many helpful comments on an early draft of this address.

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