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WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT IN THE 90S— DOES THE PROFESSIONAL FIT THE PROFESSION?

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A recurring theme at animal damage conferences has been the lack of interest in, and recognition of, animal damage management or problem wildlife management as an important topic in the wildlife profession (Timm 1982; Berryman 1983, 1989; Jones 1983; Miller 1987; San Julian 1989; Schmidt 1989a). This concern has been raised by Animal Damage Control (ADC) workers in urban, suburban, agricultural and forested systems and, in fact, can be heard in nearly any landscape in which wildlife are in conflict with people's use of the land. While the scope of these issues involves the largest potential constituency the wildlife profession could ever serve, few professionals save those from ADC, Wildlife Extension, or the Cooperative Wildlife Research Units are present at the meetings. Why?

Do wildlife professionals see conflict resolution in wildlife management as a trivial pursuit, or one unworthy of our time and interest? Worse, are many agencies willing to relegate the wildlife concerns of a huge pool of voters to the best-guess advice rendered by biologists, cornered for a fleeting moment between other, more important management problems?

What is the present level of emphasis on problem wildlife management or conflict resolution in undergraduate and graduate curricula or in professional improvement or

in-service training programs? Are educators, academicians, and information specialists preparing students and training wildlifers to deal with the diversity of problems and publics that must be served today? Many who have considered the preceding questions have come away with feelings of alarm about the present state of benign neglect by the wildlife profession for the majority of the wildlife resources that we have the privilege and professional obligation to manage. How did we get to where we are today, where will we go from here, and how will we get there?

In a few short years, most of us will be living in areas classified as urban and, I suspect, a reasonable portion of the remainder of our society will be in suburbia. At the same time, several surveys have reported a distinct and continuing decline in the numbers of hunters and trappers, the primary constituency served by wildlife agencies (Brown et al. 1987, Applegate 1989, Schmidt 1989b). The issue of the composition of the constituency served by the wildlife profession by the year 2000 is a dead one - we'll be responsible to landowners and users with economic, aesthetic, and health concerns, many of whom will have little or no understanding of natural systems. Beyond those with concerns and needs for our services, the rest of our potential constituency will be a huge mass of urbanites, most of whom will be

several generations removed from any relationship with the land. Of course, hunting and trapping will continue to be practiced, but under much more controlled conditions in line with more precise management goals and well documented problems. A forewarning of greater accountability in the future is the willingness of environmentalists to negotiate, often from a distance, the details of legislation on wilderness, national forest, and parks management.

I'm afraid our profession has become a very protectionist group, partly as a result of our past and partly through our individual roots (Allen 1954). Many years of monumental efforts of protecting species and extending their distributions are hard to shake. Although we take great pride in our past efforts, we haven't given wildlife populations proper credit for reproducing well when afforded protection, and for adapting to the myriad of landscapes and environmental challenges we have forced them to overcome. For sure, the acres of managed land and the paradigms for regulating hunting or trapping induced mortality rates will continue to provide an excellent foundation for our profession. Yet, when will we balance our ability to increase and protect populations with an equally competent ability to decrease populations precisely to predetermined levels or to manipulate population behavior and movements?

Many professionals believe that we already control populations at precise levels by offering examples such as buck take per square mile, numbers of pelts, or total birds harvested. Today, a vocal portion of our clientele are concerned with our ability to reduce populations to desired (or tolerable or acceptable) levels of road-kills, plant damage, forest regeneration or stocking rates, incidence of infection, or predation losses. Worse, most of these folks expect

that, after 50 years of wildlife management, we know precisely how to achieve their goals. Two questions loom for managers, researchers, educators and administrators - will we accept responsibility for controlling all wildlife populations (hunted or unhunted), and are we prepared to shoulder these obligations if we decide such actions are part of the mandate of our profession?

Our roots and career motivations have led many of us to desire more time in natural areas, particularly when we're doing research or practicing management activities. I suspect a majority in our profession have their origins in an urban area and thus, have a natural desire to work in areas not currently disturbed or where human activity is not intense. In this domain, we used to commonly meet and serve the hunter and trapper, and only occasionally intercept a non-consumptive interloper. In those days we also advocated habitat management to landowners who were aware of the wildlife populations found locally. Even for researchers and educators, the "wild" in wildlife was defined as animals being in undisturbed areas. I recall my mammalogy professor apologizing for our small mammal trapping exercise being done in an urban lot, which today could be used for a rodent damage control demonstration.

Today, the hunter and trapper must sneak about "wild" areas or enter them en masse (opening day) because outdoor enthusiasts are behind every tree and many of them don't "see" plants and animals the way we do. In addition, modern day landowners of both natural and managed areas abound and often bear little resemblance to the folks with whom Aldo Leopold discussed soil erosion and loss of wildlife habitat. For sure, many still want reduced damage to economically important plants and animals (Miller 1985), but many others are preserving, conserving, or in some

manner managing their land under some well-intentioned but often ecologically naive plan. Some with this mindset, behave not only as if their concerns are morally and ethically right, but with a zeal similar to those on a religious crusade. After listening to the reverent tones with which these folks refer to the good old days, I sometimes wonder if they think our country was settled by pioneers in ripstop nylon and goose down, walking in Vibram soles, and chewing on Granola bars.

Although there are many reasons why times have changed, the conclusion I have reached is that we will be dealing with more ecologically naive users and landowners, and talking to more folks with uncommitted feelings on hunting and trapping. Indeed, we will need to serve the public and society not as advocates of hunting and fishing, but as professional ecologists able to utilize a wide variety of tools to protect and regulate wildlife populations. The inevitable truth is that soon, nearly every decision made by professional wildlife managers will involve problems of conflict between wildlife and people.

My greatest concern is that our profession will stand by while wildlife rehabilitators, pest control operators, health departments, city planners, and private consultants assist landowners (public and private) in dealing with "nuisance" and urban/suburban wildlife population problems. Our professional neglect will create non-programs and policies by default. The alarming concern with these controversies is that wildlife in direct conflict with people's living space or economic livelihood will likely not endure - witness the species composition in urban areas where

professional management and protection has been largely absent.

At times, I am not sure we can respond as a unified group to these challenges, since many in our profession seem unaffected or unmoved by the events surrounding their everyday activities. Some identify so closely with our traditional constituency (hunters and trappers) that they know more about the latest tree stands or turkey calls than they know about basic statistics or damage control techniques. Still others are preservationists and take issue with management programs where animals such as mountain lions or wolves must, on occasion, be killed, or where populations must be reduced to meet cultural tolerances.

Where is our profession headed? We are certainly diverse and include a wide range of viewpoints. Maybe we should be spending more time understanding each other, assessing the future, and taking good stock of our present position. Clearly, The Wildlife Society (TWS) is the forum for us to determine the nature of challenges that need to be confronted and our role and responsibilities in resolving the inevitable conflicts yet to come. Some will dismiss this notion and look to join other organizations, yet most will continue to look to TWS to serve their professional needs.

In 1987, the 50th anniversary of TWS, there were several members of TWS who remembered our profession and TWS as an offspring of a time when wildlife populations were threatened. I hope on the occasion of our 100th anniversary in 2037, many in this audience will be at conferences where speakers will recall the formidable challenges of the 90s as marking the maturation of TWS and the wildlife profession.

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