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—An Alternative Approach—

Gerard W. Wendt

Bureau of Law Enforcement, Pennsylvania Game Commission

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COMMERCIAL WILDLIFE PEST CONTROL PERMITS

--An Alternative Approach--

by Gerard W. Wendt*

The Pennsylvania Game Commission has, throughout our existence, tried many new approaches to solve our wildlife/human conflicts. In recent years, the District Game Protector has been plagued with calls requesting help with nuisance wildlife, especially in the high population urban areas. While the law provides for methods of dealing with deer and bear which cause damage to crops and related materials, little is included to simplify the situation created by small mammal wildlife pests. With limited manpower available, which has been further complicated as a result of the Supreme Court ruling regarding the Fair Labor Standards Act and overtime pay, it became imperative that we find a better way to handle these problems. Meetings and discussions with several of our urban Officers helped us develop a Wildlife Pest Control permit concept which was presented to our Commission, approved and implemented in the fall of 1983.

What is a Commercial Wildlife Pest Control permit? It is a special permit issued under authority of the Game Law at an annual fee of \$25.00. It is issued to interested individuals and exterminator firms and authorizes them to trap and remove wildlife for fees which they establish. The permit was designed to help the Officers in high population districts, but can apply in rural counties as well. Game Protectors were instructed that this system does not absolve the Officer of his/her responsibility in dealing with wildlife but offers an alternate approach and an avenue in which to channel complaints.

In selecting and approving applicants for these permits, we try to impress upon them the need to secure the homes or gardens from future infestation by similar wildlife. More

money is to be made in the animal proofing operation, than the actual removal of wildlife. This can tie into the reason that the Officer refers calls to the commercial operator, in that the Game Protector or one of his Deputies can possibly trap and remove the problem animal but, with conditions as they are, another will probably take its place. Whereas, the professional who holds the permit is prepared to close up the entrances, etc., which will eliminate future problems. We encourage numerous permittees in an area which will provide the caller with several to choose from and eliminate any question of favoritism or collusion.

Conditions and Authorizations of Permit: With the issuance of each permit, an attachment is included which spells out the authority and limitations granted and are as follows:

A. The validity of your Commercial Wildlife Pest Control Permit is conditioned upon receipt of any other required Federal, state or local permits and strict observance of all applicable laws.

B. Authorizes permittee to remove or destroy wildlife by safe and humane means at any time of the year.

C. Permittee shall have approval of property owner and confine activity to said property.

D. All skunks, raccoons, ground-hogs, bats and opossums shall be terminated in a humane manner within 24 hours. All other mammals and all birds shall be released in a suitable location within 24 hours.

E. Permit shall be carried at all times and presented upon demand of any Officer.

F. Each month a report of activities shall be submitted to the District Game Protector, listing the number of

*Assistant Director, Bureau of Law Enforcement, Pennsylvania Game Commission

each species taken. Report due by the tenth day of the month following, on forms supplied by the Commission.

G. The sale, trade, barter or give away of any live or dead birds or animals or parts thereof taken under authority of this permit is prohibited, except as otherwise provided in this permit.

H. All devices shall be tagged or labeled with permit number, permittee name and telephone number.

I. The use of pelts taken during trapping season is authorized.

J. A separate permit shall be required for each base of operations.

K. Any waterfowl or other migratory birds taken under authority of a Federal permit shall be turned over to the local District Game Protector for relocation unless otherwise instructed by the Officer.

L. Specific advance approval shall be secured from the District Game Protector before any attempts are made to take deer, bear, beaver, hawks or owls.

M. Permittee shall at all times hereafter indemnify and save harmless the Commonwealth from and against any and all detriment, losses, claims, demands, suits, costs and expenses not herein provided for which the Commonwealth may suffer, sustain or be subjected to, directly or indirectly, by reason of the issuance of this permit.

Results: With this program now almost 2 years old, indications are that it is working rather well. In the high human population areas it appears that the good businessman is capable of earning a substantial income and devoting his full time to wildlife removal and related home repair and animal proofing. In the less urban areas, it is not such a lucrative business and some are having a difficult time becoming successful.

This often creates higher prices and less acceptance from the public.

Problems: The only significant problem which has arisen is one created by a State Senator who insists that it is the responsibility of the Pennsylvania Game Commission to handle all wildlife and feels that he and his constituents should not be required to pay to have their wildlife problems solved. This originated from some personal conflicts with squirrels on his property which were not handled quickly enough by our Officer to suit the Senator and was compounded by complaints from a few people in his Senatorial district who were possibly overcharged by a permittee who was anxious to get rich. This problem has currently been solved by our Director and, hopefully, will not surface again. Aside from this, and a few other disgruntled people who don't want to pay for a service they always received free, the program is working well and has created the hoped for alternative.