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## The Extension Approach to Wildlife Damage

Dr. H.G. Geyer

*Director of Environmental Programs, Extension Service, USDA, Washington, D.C.*

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## THE EXTENSION APPROACH TO WILDLIFE DAMAGE

by

Dr. H. G. Geyer  
Director of Environmental Programs  
Extension Service  
USDA, Washington, D. C.

The Extension Service is the educational arm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It is recognized as the largest, most successful informal educational organization in the world. Funded and guided by a partnership of federal, state, and local governments, it delivers information to help people help themselves through the land-grant university system. Programs embrace broad categories of agriculture, natural resources and environment, home economics, 4-H and other youth, and community resource development. Extension programs are non-political, objective, and based on factual information obtained from university, government, and other sources to help people make their own decisions. Extension is also unique in that it has the built-in flexibility to adjust its programs and subject matter to meet new needs.

The Extension Service has working arrangements with many agencies which have resources that are needed by people served by Extension. Examples of those activities are memorandums of agreement negotiated with EPA; NOAA-Sea Grant; and the Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service.

The interest in Extension involvement in wildlife programs is of long standing, particularly with the several wildlife organizations. They, too, have recognized the significance of Extension; the medium whereby the public is provided unbiased information that will enable people to make sound and beneficial decisions.

However, providing the type of information that will enable people to make sound decisions is predicated on the professional competency of the Extension wildlife staff. Here, we are continually challenged to not only upgrade competency, but to broaden our perspectives as well.

In today's complex society, we must not only be aware of the concerns of the diverse audiences, but more importantly, understand how and why these concerns evolve and to address them in an objective manner.

Predation or the control of species responsible for predation are at best controversial issues. They elicit a divergence of views influenced by socio-economic situations and values. Thus, effective predator control is dependent upon the individuals knowledge and understanding of the total interrelationships between agriculture and wildlife and other interested and concerned groups. The most effective means to achieve the objectives is through education. Farmers, landowners, governmental agencies, and the

general public, must be knowledgeable about wildlife and predation if rational decisions and effective programs are to be developed and carried out. Thus, unless all concerned audiences have a practical understanding of wildlife management which embraces habitat, carrying capacity, succession, and population dynamics, as well as economic implication, it will be difficult for them to appreciate the total concept of predation or predator control. For intelligent decision making there must be a full understanding of predation as a natural phenomenon and predation as a detrimental phenomenon that results in a variety of adverse impacts on the well-being of agriculture and society in general. Inherent in this effort is having societal appreciation that people management is vitally relevant for the achievement of objective goals.

For example, the current efforts to intensify forestry development on private lands and urban areas should give equitable consideration to wildlife. The public in general needs to understand the ecological and environmental implications, both positive and negative. To the farmer or rural dweller, values will be quite different from those of the urban dweller. A developed wooded area may become a roosting site for starlings. To the farmer, particularly one operating an open feedlot, or field raising swine or turkey, the birds may become an economic hazard, befouling and consuming feed as well as vectors of disease. To the urban dwellers, such sites may become a nuisance, especially from noise as well as the site becoming a public health hazard. Each of these situations represents a form of predation. However, the method or methods to control such predation will vary with the audience. In the eyes of the feedlot operator the only good starling is a dead one. The same philosophy may hold for the city dweller whose home is adjacent to the roost. However, those not confronted with the problem will have a different view. All of you are well aware of this. Witness the current, highly emotional issue over the banning of the leghold trap, or anti-hunting legislation.

These, coupled with the myriad of issues pertaining to the preservation of our natural resources, the Endangered Species Act; the Water Pollution Control Act; Air Pollution Control Act; Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act; and the Toxic and Hazardous Substances Control Act, are emblematic of a renewed interest and emphasis on wildlife and the quality of its environment. Hence, any successes and achievement of goals for wildlife management or predator control will depend on a well informed public. For many years, a number of wildlife groups and organizations have insisted that the Extension Service is best suited to carry out this educational role. True, Extension is involved, but not to the extent that it should be. There should be one or more qualified wildlife specialists in each state. From a practical standpoint, this is not enough. I sincerely believe that every state, if we are truly objective, could justify one full-time specialist for predator control alone.

Toward achieving these objectives, you are all aware of the Memorandum of Agreement negotiated between the Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Extension Service-USDA. The fulfillment of this

objective calls for a qualified full-time specialist at the ES-USDA level to work with the Fish and Wildlife Service, coordinating the dissemination of pertinent and useful information to State Extension Wildlife Specialists. Further, his duties would embrace working with the several national wildlife organizations and associations, maintaining liaison with other federal and state agencies on matters pertaining to wildlife, and more importantly, to work with you, the state specialist, in a manner to assist you to help the audiences you serve.

We are currently attempting to fill this position. We have full support from the Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, and the Administrator of the Extension Service. In addition, a number of Congressmen have expressed their interest and support via letters to the Office of the Secretary. You are already aware of the supportive views of several of the wildlife organizations and your own position voiced at the recent National Extension Wildlife Workshop held at San Antonio, Texas.

Because of our personnel ceiling situation, we were attempting to fill the position under the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA). This would permit employment of an individual associated with a university for not more than two years. It was hoped that, under this arrangement with an outstanding person in the position, the program could be developed to the point that it would then be filled as an authorized full-time position. This latter aspect is now being explored and hopefully, we may achieve such approval. We at ES-USDA are as interested as all of you in achieving this goal as soon as possible.