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PERCEPTIONS OF WILDLIFE DAMAGE CONFERENCE SCHEDULING: RESPONSE TO A SURVEY

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Pages 186-190 in C. D. Lee and S.E. Hygnstrom, eds. *Thirteenth Great Plains Wildl. Damage Control Workshop Proc.*, Published by Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service.

Background

The Wildlife Society's Wildlife Damage Management Working Group formed an ad hoc committee to study the perception of some members of the recent development of an overabundance of wildlife damage related professional meetings. The committee consisted of Grant Huggins (chair), Jim Miller, and Phil Mastrangelo.

There are currently 3 major wildlife damage management Conferences in the U.S. The Vertebrate Pest Conference (VPC) is held in California every even-numbered year. The Great Plains Wildlife Damage Control Workshop (Great Plains) is held in the spring and the Eastern Wildlife Damage Management Conference (Eastern) is held in the fall of odd-numbered years. The committee gathered participation trends at these Conferences over their most recent 2 meetings as background information (Table 1).

The committee then developed a brief survey to gather additional input. Three groups were surveyed: USDA-APHIS-ADC State Directors, State Extension Wildlife or related Specialists, and the general membership of the National Animal Damage Control Association (NADCA). Direct mailings were made to the ADC State Directors and State Extension Wildlife personnel, and the NADCA membership survey was distributed through the NADCA newsletter, *The Probe*.

The Survey

1. How are you are involved with wildlife damage management?
 USDA-APHIS-ADC
 Cooperative Extension Service employee
 Federal employee - not APHIS or Extension
 University Faculty Member
 Nuisance Wildlife Control Operator
 State Agency employee
 Other (describe)

2. Since 1993, your residence has been primarily in what region?
 East of the Mississippi River
 Within the state of Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, or Washington
 The central U.S.
 Other (Alaska, Hawaii, Foreign)
3. Check each of the Conferences you have attended:
 7th Eastern - 1995 (Jackson, MS)
 6th Eastern - 1993 (Asheville, NC)
 12th Gt. Plains - 1995 (Tulsa, OK)
 11th Gt. Plains - 1993 (Kansas City, MO)
 17th Vert. Pest Conf. - 1996 (Rohnert Park, CA)
 16th Vert. Pest Conf. - 1994 (Santa Clara, CA)

4. Rate the following factors in terms of their importance to you in making your decision to attend a conference (0 = not important, 1 = somewhat important, 2 = very important).

- travel time
- attractiveness of site
- registration/travel cost
- content of announced program
- have a paper to present
- availability of travel funds

5. Which of the following best describes your opinion regarding conference scheduling? (*check only 1*)

- I like the current format. I wouldn't change anything.
 - I would favor maintaining the VPC as is and combining the Eastern and Great Plains into one odd-numbered-year meeting.
 - I would favor a different format as follows:
-

Results

Twenty-nine of 39 surveys sent to State ADC Directors, 23 of 71 surveys sent to Extension Wildlife Specialists, and 110 of 484 surveys distributed through *The Probe* were returned, giving response rates of 74%, 32%, and 23%, from the 3 groups, respectively. Question 1 was asked only of NADCA membership since involvement of the other 2 survey groups was self-evident. Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators (NWCO) and ADC employees together comprised 62% of the NADCA respondents to the survey (Table 2).

Question 2 was designed to delineate respondents' region of residence within the traditional geographic scope of the 3 conferences (West, Great Plains, or East). Each group had the most respondents from the East and the least from the West (Table 3).

Question 3 sought to determine participation by the various groups in the 3 Conferences. Eighty-three percent of ADC State Directors, 96% of Extension Wildlife Specialists, and 55% of NADCA respondents

attended at least 1 Conference. Of the NADCA subgroups, Extension Service employees (86%) had the highest and NWCO (24%) had the lowest percentage of respondents who attended at least 1 Conference. Conference participation was biased by region of residence; all groups exhibited highest attendance at the Conference located within their region (Table 4).

Question 4 asked for a rating of various factors' influence on the respondent's decision to attend a Conference. Overall, the availability of travel funds, program content, and meeting cost were relatively important factors, while paper presentation, travel time, and site were relatively unimportant factors (Table 5). There were not large differences among any of the 3 survey groups regarding the importance of any factor.

Question 5 posed 2 stated options for future scheduling of the 3 Conferences, and opportunity for a third "write-in" option. A majority of each group favored the format of combining the Eastern and Great Plains into 1 odd-numbered-year Conference (Table 6). Ten (9%) of the respondents who answered this question suggested another format. Three suggested keeping the 3 Conferences, but rotating them so they were held every third year. Three suggested having smaller, regional, 1-day workshops which do not compete for research papers.

Discussion

Each survey group had more respondents from the East than either of the other regions; however, the Eastern has attracted fewer participants than either the Great Plains or

VPC (Table 1). Perhaps this is related to the more recent creation of this Conference relative to the other 2, or possibly to relatively more continuing education opportunities in the region.

Respondents were most likely to attend the Conference in their region. Easterners were more likely to attend the Great Plains than the VPC, and those in the West were likewise more likely to attend the Great Plains than the Eastern. Therefore, if a single combined Conference was ever contemplated, the greatest participation would likely come from a Great Plains location. Great Plains respondents attended more of the VPC than the Eastern Conferences.

The lowest Conference participation among all subgroups was from NADCA members who identified themselves as NWCO, as only 24% indicated they attended at least 1 Conference. Those NWCO who did not attend a Conference rated program content and travel time as the most important factors in

their decision to not attend a Conference. From their survey comments, it appears that many do not find the announced programs to be of relevance to their concerns. Since they are in private business, apparently “time is money”, and they found the travel time to be too expensive. If NWCO participation is to be increased, these factors will need to be addressed in future Conferences.

There is no single governing body for Conference planning. As long as there are willing hosts and adequate participation, there should probably be no change in Conference structure. If participation should decline, perhaps this survey information will suggest areas for improvement.

Acknowledgments

Thanks are extended to Sydni Gillette, Paul Gorenzel, Marissa Lee, Phil Mastrangelo, Jim Miller, and Robert Timm for their assistance in this effort.

Table 1. Participation trends at 3 wildlife damage management conferences in the U.S. over their most recent 2 meetings.

Year	Attendance			No. Commercial Exhibitors		No. Paper Presentations			
	<u>E^a</u>	<u>GP</u>	<u>VPC^c</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>GP</u>	<u>VPC</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>GP</u>	<u>VPC</u>
	1996			339			18		
1995	150 ^b	191		11	8		30	38	
1994			318			8			63
1993	125	>200		11	11		38	37	
1992			327			*			85
1991	156	>250		12	18		50	39	
1990			359			*			77
1989	162	195		12	15		43	42	

^aEastern Wildlife Damage Management Conference.

^bGreat Plains Wildlife Damage Control Workshop.

^cVertebrate Pest Conference.

^dAn additional 58 Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks Conservation Officers attended as part of their continuing education curriculum. They would not have attended the conference if it had been held outside of Mississippi. *Commercial exhibits were not included in the Conference program.

Table 2. National Animal Damage Control Association members' description of their professional involvement in wildlife damage management.

<u>Employment Category</u>	<u>n</u>
USDA-APHIS-ADC employee	30
Cooperative Extension Service employee	7
Federal employee - not APHIS or Extension	2
University Faculty Member	8
Nuisance Wildlife Control Operator	38
State Agency employee	4
Other (describe)	21

Table 3. Survey respondents' region of residence since 1993.

<u>Group</u>	<u>East^a</u>	<u>Central^b</u>	<u>West^c</u>	<u>Other^d</u>
ADC State Directors	13	9	7	0
Extension Wildlife Specialists	11	6	5	0
NADCA Membership	61	32	15	2

^aEast of the Mississippi River.

^bThe central U.S.

^cWithin the state of Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, or Washington.

^dOther (Alaska, Hawaii, Foreign)

Table 4. Conference participation by region of residence, from those survey respondents who attended at least 1 Conference.

	<u>East</u>			<u>Central</u>			<u>West</u>		
	<u>East^a</u>	<u>Gp^b</u>	<u>VPC^c</u>	<u>EastGP</u>	<u>VPC</u>	<u>VPC</u>	<u>EastGPVPC</u>	<u>VPC</u>	<u>VPC</u>
ADC State Directors	1.2 ^d	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.9	0.4	0.0	0.6	0.9
Extension Wildlife Specialists	1.2	0.5	0.3	0.0	2.0	0.3	0.2	1.0	1.4
NADCA ^e Membership	1.4	0.5	0.4	0.4	1.2	0.6	0.0	0.5	1.5

^aEastern Wildlife Damage Management Conference.

^bGreat Plains Wildlife Damage Control Workshop.

^cVertebrate Pest Conference.

^dAverage number of the most recent two Conferences attended.

^eNational Animal Damage Control Association.

Table 5. The average importance of a factor in determining a survey respondent's decision to attend a Conference (0 = not important, 2 = very important).

	<u>Travel</u> <u>Time</u>	<u>Meeting</u> <u>Cost</u>	<u>Paper</u> <u>To</u> <u>Present</u>	<u>Program</u> <u>Site</u>	<u>Funds</u> <u>Content</u>	<u>Available</u>
ADC State Directors	0.9	1.9	0.8	0.6	1.6	1.8
Extension Wildlife Specialists	0.8	1.5	1.3	0.5	1.5	1.8
NADCA ^a Membership	0.8	1.1	0.8	0.4	1.6	1.6

^aNational Animal Damage Control Association.

Table 6. Survey respondents' preference for Conference format.

	<u>Leave</u> <u>As Is</u>		<u>Combine Eastern^a</u> <u>& Great Plains^b</u>	
	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>
ADC State Directors	48	13	52	14
Extension Wildlife Specialists	29	6	62	13
NADCA ^c Membership	42	24	55	32

^aEastern Wildlife Damage Management Conference

^bGreat Plains Wildlife Damage Control Workshop

^cNational Animal Damage Control Association

Discussion Session

On Thursday, April 17, 1997, approximately 50 workshop attendees participated in a discussion session facilitated by Jim Miller, USDA-CSREES. The primary issues raised include: The Future of Wildlife Damage Conferences, Research and Education Needs and Center for Wildlife Damage Management. I recorded and have heavily edited the points made in the discussion. I apologize if any points have been misrepresented.

---Scott Hygnstrom

Pages 191-192 in C. D. Lee and S.E. Hygnstrom, eds. Thirteenth Great Plains Wildl. Damage Control Workshop Proc., Published by Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service.

Future of Wildlife Damage Conferences

Pros

May not be able to attend if outside the Great Plains.

Interaction is needed to stimulate research.

Private applicators need certification credits.

The Great Plains Conference needs a governing committee modeled after VPC.

State agencies are increasing activity in wildlife damage management.

People will be limited as to how far they are willing/able to travel to attend a conference if the Eastern and Great Plains are combined.

Shift the Eastern and VPC to the same year to reduce competition.

Combining may cause a problem with doubling the number of papers.

There is no way all people can go to the TWS meeting.

What would we lose if we didn't have the Great Plains? Camaraderie, interaction.

Cons

With two conferences together, you get more.

Problems getting enough papers together for two conferences.

No problem with combining papers.

With limited budgets, people often have to pick one conference or the other.

Would like to combine to increase diversity of papers.

Paper dilution problem with lots of papers on wildlife damage management being presented at Regional meetings. TWS now taking papers on wildlife damage management.

Travel isn't a problem for getting to most meetings.

Observations

The Eastern Conference has no formal structure.

The VPC incorporates people outside of the system.

The focus has drifted from interaction to a need for getting something published.

Research and Education Needs

NWRC needs interaction to identify research needs.

Develop a surcharge on bait distribution - California has a \$500,000/yr income.

We need to examine the economic viability of vertebrate pesticides.

Our research on vertebrate pesticides is based on work done in the 1950s.

Research is a growing need that should be addressed.

Centers for Wildlife Damage Management

Coop unit approach - funding never happened.

Needs for regional centers will grow.

Field stations based at universities.

Great increase in students and technicians.

Staff based at universities.

Look at 1999 budget of the appropriations committee for funding.

Fund for Rural American - opportunity for funding centers - Berryman Institute has submitted a proposal.

NAFWFP - Larry Jahn (representative) may help in representing universities.