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WHAT DO ANIMAL ACTIVISTS WANT? (AND HOW SHOULD WILDLIFE MANAGERS RESPOND?)

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ABSTRACT: National animal activist organization leaders were interviewed with the aim of better understanding their ideologies with respect to wildlife issues. Interviewees expressed considerable concern about traditional wildlife management practices and associated consumptive recreation activities. They easily identified a number of needed changes, while had difficulty identifying things they liked about the status quo. The top suggested changes related to using more nonlethal management methods and reducing allegiance with consumptive users. The most common "bottom line" concern expressed by interviewees was the alleviation or elimination of unnecessary pain and suffering in wildlife.

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INTRODUCTION

American's views of what constitutes "proper" wildlife management are changing. Historically, people gave widespread support to programs that involved the lethal take of animals. Today, such programs face mounting scrutiny. Much of the scrutiny comes from highly vocal wildlife special interest groups. New battlelines seem to be drawn almost daily between these groups and the governmental agencies and organizations given the mandate to manage wildlife resources.

As a result of the conflict mentioned above, biologically-trained wildlife managers have increasingly found themselves immersed in social conflict. Faced with this situation, wildlifers have had little choice but to face the reality that traditional biologically-based approaches to wildlife management are no longer adequate. They've increasingly realized that they must also base their policies and programs on a sound understanding of people's beliefs, values, and attitudes (Kellert 1986; Edgell and Nowell 1989). The point is simply this: if people who are polarized on wildlife issues can gain a better understanding of one another's stances, common ground may be found.

One wildlife special interest group about which wildlife managers need more information is the expanding constituency known collectively as "animal activists," that is, people who have aligned themselves with at least some animal welfare and/or rights concerns. While the terms "animal welfare" and "animal rights" are often intermixed in conversations, most of the available literature cites differences in the underlying philosophies. Given the dangers in oversimplifying such differences, animal welfarists seem to be primarily concerned with the humane treatment of animals while animal rightists are focused on giving non-human animals "equal consideration," which equates to eliminating unnecessary human exploitation of animals (Hooper 1992).

What is known about animal activists? A recent study by Richards and Krannich (1991) showed that animal rights activists differ considerably from the average American citizen. The average activist was likely to be a middle-aged, well-educated, very well-to-do, white woman holding an executive or managerial position who lives on the East or West Coast and is a left-leaning liberal, an environmentalist, and a pet owner. Activists

in this study were found to be no more urban than the general population, however, as has been purported by other authors (Holden 1987; Animal Rights Network, Inc. 1990).

With respect to wildlife-related issues, Richards and Krannich (1991) reported that animal rightists were more likely than the general population to be concerned about wildlife habitat protection. Furthermore, animal rightists apparently view most human uses of animals as wrong, finding trapping and hunting particularly objectionable. When asked about fifteen ways that humans interact with animals, they considered the use of leghold traps to capture wild animals as the most extremely wrong treatment of animals. Decker and Brown (1987) reported that animal rightists are likely to oppose the underlying assumptions and precepts upon which current wildlife management practices are based. For example, some groups feel that "natural" harvestable surpluses are actually "manmade" purely for the purpose of satisfying consumptive users' needs. Kellert and Berry (1980) reported higher mean animal knowledge scores for humane organization members than for the general population.

Given the need for additional research on the characteristics of animal welfarists and rightists, a study of national leaders of animal activist organizations was undertaken to better understand their "bottom lines" as related to fish and wildlife management. National leaders were selected as interviewees because they play a pivotal role with respect to setting goals, policies, and agendas for the animal welfare and rights movements.

METHODS

Data were collected using an interview schedule consisting of 43 questions. It was developed after an in-depth review of consumptive/non-consumptive wildlife literature as well as consultations with selected wildlife managers. The schedule was pre-tested by interviewing local animal activist representatives; appropriate changes were made.

In order to obtain a wide spectrum of views, the study's population included leaders of national animal activist groups, wildlife management agencies, citizen conservation groups, and professional wildlife management societies that were known to be substantially

involved in wildlife issues (leaders of organizations that focused primarily on international issues were not interviewed). Only the interviews conducted with animal activist leaders are analyzed here, however.

A list of 19 potential animal activist interviewees was compiled based on discussions with key representatives of animal welfare/rights and wildlife management organizations, a review of animal welfare/rights and wildlife management literature, and researcher knowledge. Addresses and phone numbers were obtained from either the "Animal Organizations and Services Directory" (Reece 1992) or "The Conservation Directory" (National Wildlife Federation 1992).

A letter describing the study and requesting participation in it was sent on March 17, 1992 to the directors of all animal welfare and rights organizations on the list. The letter asked directors to fill out and return an enclosed form if they or another national representative of their organization (if more appropriate) would be willing to be interviewed. Directors who did not return their forms were contacted by phone to assess their willingness to participate in the study. The directors of two organizations, Culture & Animals Foundation and Delta Society, returned handwritten notes indicating that they felt their organization's mission did not match the focus of the research study. Only one organization asked not to participate in the study, namely, the World Society for the Protection of Animals (no explanation was given).

Interviews were conducted with representatives of 13 of the remaining 16 organizations (81.2%) on the list of potential interviewees, as follows: American Horse Protection Association, Inc., (AHPA); American Humane Association (AHA); Animal Protection Institute of America (API); Animal Rights Mobilization (ARM); American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA); Animal Welfare Institute (AWI); Committee to Abolish Sport Hunting (CASH); Defenders of Wildlife (DW); Friends of Animals, Inc. (FOA); Fund for Animals, Inc. (FFA); Humane Society of the United States (HSUS); People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA); and Wildlife Refuge Reform Coalition (WRRC).

Two of the remaining organizations, Wildlife Damage Review and Wild Horse Organized Assistance, Inc., were not interviewed due to the researcher's time and/or fiscal constraints. The final group, the Animal Liberation Front, could not be contacted by phone to set up an interview, in spite of repeated attempts.

Interviews were completed between March 27 and July 27, 1992. They were conducted in person except in two cases, where phone interviews had to be conducted due to logistical problems. For 10 of the 13 organizations (76.9%), the national director was interviewed. In the other three instances (23.1%), a representative of the director, usually the key person in charge of wildlife-related programs for the organization, was interviewed.

The researcher began each interview by informing the interviewee that the questions would focus on wildlife, not pet or laboratory animal, issues. Interviews were tape recorded except when interviewees objected to this

practice. All 43 questions on the questionnaire were not asked of all interviewees due to the inappropriateness of some questions for some organizations and interviewee-imposed time limitations (when possible, the most pertinent questions that remained unanswered after the "live" interview were asked later via a phone interview). Although the duration of interviews varied, they averaged about three hours. Responses were content analyzed by the researcher.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interviewees* responses to selected questions from the interview schedule are summarized and discussed below.

"Animal Welfare" Versus "Animal Rights"

When asked if they considered their organization to be an "animal welfare" or "animal rights" group, or neither, the majority of interviewees (61.5% or 8/13) expressed initial concern about such "labelling." They made comments such as "labels ... are misleading," "that's a game of semantics," and "groups tend to hate the animal welfare/rights labelling." Two animal activist leaders (15.4%) never did categorize their organizations, noting that they either do not agree with the idea of labels (AWI) or thought the labels no longer reflect useful distinctions, that is, they are pedantic (FFA). One leader (7.7%) felt their organization embraced both categories (FOA). The other interviewees either labelled themselves or stated that the general public tends to label them as follows: animal welfare (46.2% including AHPA, AHA, API, ASPCA, HSUS, and WRRC), animal rights (7.7%, PETA), animal liberation (7.7%, ARM), wildlife ecology group (7.7%, CASH), and conservation organization (7.7%, DW). The term "animal protection" was used interchangeable with "animal welfare" by three of the six "animal welfare" interviewees during their interviews.

Attitudes Toward "Managing" Wildlife

When asked if they were more in favor of "managing wildlife" or "letting nature take her course," almost half of the respondents (45.5% or 5/11) selected the management option. However, three of these respondents expressed concern for how this management would be accomplished. As one respondent noted, we have "no problem with management of wildlife ... the problem is what management means." Three respondents (27.3%) said it depends on the circumstances. Only two respondents (18.2%) preferred letting nature take her course, noting that "... nature's having a tough time because humans are interfering" and "management usually involves catering to special interest groups," respectively. One respondent (18.2%) had no position on the issue.

Attitudes Toward Killing Wildlife

Interviewees were asked about circumstances under which the killing of wildlife by humans might be acceptable. The results, summarized in Table 1, support Richards and Krannich's (1991: 371) finding that "... animal rights activists have strenuous, ethical objections to the traditionally acceptable harvesting of wildlife through hunting and trapping."

Table 1. Animal activist group leaders' attitudes toward circumstances where wildlife might be killed by humans.

CIRCUMSTANCE	RESPONSE CATEGORY (Percentages)				N
	Acceptable	It Depends	Not Acceptable	No Position on Issue	
When someone wants to hunt, fish, or trap <u>for sport</u> ?	0.00	15.4	76.9	7.7	13
When someone wants to hunt, fish, or trap <u>for meat</u> but isn't in a subsistence or survival situation?	20.0	40.0	20.0	20.0	10
When <u>native people</u> hunt, fish, or trap <u>for subsistence</u> ?	81.8	9.1	0.0	9.1	11
When <u>non-native people</u> hunt, fish, or trap <u>for subsistence</u> ?	45.5	45.5	0.0	9.1	11
When someone wants to hunt, fish, or trap for a <u>trophy</u> ?	0.0	0.0	88.9	11.1	9
When wild animals <u>damage agricultural crops</u> (ex., starlings eat a farmer's grain)?	12.5	62.5	12.5	12.5	8
When wild animals become <u>household pests</u> (ex., mice move into a kitchen)?	12.5	62.5	25.0	0.0	8
When a wild animal <u>carrying a disease</u> known to be harmful to humans is found in the vicinity of humans (ex., ground squirrels have a bubonic plague)?	75.0	12.5	0.00	12.5	8
When <u>predators</u> are causing the population of an endangered species to decline (ex., red foxes eat least terns)?	0.0	87.5	12.5	0.0	8
When a wild animal <u>threatens the life</u> of a human (ex., a grizzly bear attacks a backpacker)?	75.0	12.5	12.5	0.0	8
When a human faces a <u>survival situation</u> where the only source of food is wild meat (ex., a hiker must kill fish to survive)?	100.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	9

Desired Changes in Wildlife Management

Interviewees expressed considerable displeasure with traditional wildlife management practices in their answers to a question concerning ways they would like to see current wildlife management programs change (see Table 2). The top five suggested changes related to using more nonlethal management methods and reducing allegiance with consumptive users.

Support for "Status-Quo" Wildlife Management

Animal activist group leaders' concerns over current wildlife management practices became even more apparent when they were asked, "In what ways would you like to see current wildlife management programs stay the same?" The most common response, given by 44.4% of the respondents (4/9), was "I don't know" or "I can't think of any." Three additional respondents (33.3%) included negative comments about current practices in their answers such as "it's (wildlife management) not

working" and "the problem is that we want to manage too much." Respondents did like some aspects of wildlife management, however, as shown in Table 3.

"Bottom Line" Concerns

The most common "bottom line" concern that interviewees had with respect to animal welfare and rights issues was the alleviation or elimination of unnecessary pain and suffering (61.5% or 8/13). This supports Schmidt's (1987) study of fund-raising solicitations by animal rights organizations. He reported that "... the most common animal rights or welfare appeal was animal suffering or animal welfare in general ..." (p. 55). Other bottom line concerns included alleviation of human exploitation of animals (15.4%), the elimination of hunting in general (7.7%), the elimination of hunting on public wildlife refuges (7.7%), and protecting the ecological community (7.7%).

Table 2. Changes in wildlife management desired by leaders of national animal activist groups involved in wildlife issues.

Percent of respondents listing this factor DESIRED CHANGE	(N = 13)*
Halt hunting opportunities (on at least some sites)	38.5
Use more non-lethal (ex., non-hunting) methods	38.5
Reduce allegiance with hunting community	30.8
Better understand and meet the needs of non-consumptive users	23.1
Reduce or end habitat manipulation related only to the provision of hunting opportunities	23.1
Get rid of animal damage control program	23.1
Obtain the funding needed to look at better ways to manage wildlife	23.1
Use more humane methods (ex., less cruel traps)	15.4
Take a "Leopoldian" view (i.e., more of a "systems" view)	7.7
Acknowledge the valuable role of predators	7.7
Assure that only target animals are caught in animal damage control program traps	7.7
Have wildlife biologists get rid of "the lay person knows nothing" attitude	7.7
Promote "natural" (less managed) populations	7.7
Emphasize better management, as opposed to removal, of wild horses	7.7
Use a different word than "management" to describe activities	7.7
Ban wild caught bird imports	7.7
<u>Dismantle wildlife agencies and set new goals</u>	<u>1.1</u>

♦Interviewees could list more than one factor; all 13 interviewees provided at least one answer to this question.

Table 3. Wildlife management practices and approaches that national animal activist group leaders would like to have remain the same.

Percent of respondents listing this factor DESIRED CHANGE	(N = 9)*
Don't know any or can't think of any	44.4
No position on the issue	22.2
Funding for certain wildlife programs	22.2
The willingness of wildlife agencies to talk to animal activists	11.1
The guarding dog program for animal damage control	11.1
An unspecified animal damage control device	11.1
The general wildlife management system	11.1
The fish and game commission being isolated from day-to-day ups and downs	11.1
Public involvement in programs.	11.1
The federal/state structure where the state manages non-migratory wildlife	11.1
Non-game program	11.1
<u>Endangered species programs.</u>	<u>11.1</u>

***Interviewees could list more than one factor; 9 interviewees provided at least one answer to this question.

Reasons for Valuing Wildlife

When asked why they value wildlife, seven of the eight (87.5%) animal activist group leaders who were asked the question responded that wildlife provides valuable human benefits. The next most common responses, given by half of the respondents (50.0%) in each case, were "because it's here" (referring to wildlife's intrinsic value) and because wildlife plays an integral role in the overall environment. Other responses included, "They're God's creatures" (12.5%) and "I care about all beings on the planet" (12.5%). Shaw (1977) reported similar reasons why people value wildlife. When Michigan Fund for Animals, Inc. members (animal activists) and deer hunters were asked "Why wildlife is valued," both groups rank-ordered the same three reasons as most important, namely, wildlife is part of the ecological balance (ecological value), people enjoy viewing wildlife (aesthetic value), and people enjoy just knowing that wildlife exists (existence value).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

What do animal activists want? Based on this study, they primarily want to reduce or eliminate unnecessary pain and suffering in wildlife. Of course, the big question is, what is "unnecessary"? To some interviewees, it would be suffering inflicted when an animal isn't killed quickly. To others, it would be any suffering purposely inflicted on any animal by any human unless it occurs in a survival situation.

Animal activists also want the emphasis to shift from the use of lethal to nonlethal management practices (most interviewees weren't against "management" per se, however, but they were greatly concerned about what programs comprise management). Most animal activists also want a shift in emphasis from labelling to listening. This means that they want wildlife managers to shift their focus away from the "us versus them" practice of categorizing people as "welfarists," "rightists," "protectionists," or whatever. Instead, they'd like wildlife managers to openly listen to activists and seriously consider their views when making management decisions. In other words, they'd like to be accepted as legitimate wildlife constituencies alongside more traditional "consumptive" wildlife constituencies. They base this desire on the premise that wildlife is a public resource so should be managed with everyone's needs in mind (this doesn't, however, imply that wildlife "belongs" to people, per se).

Many of the animal activist leaders interviewed in this study would like to see wildlife managers reexamine some of the central premises upon which traditional wildlife management programs have been based. At least one leader would like to go even further by rejecting the entire wildlife management system as it stands: "the fish and wildlife agencies need to be dismantled and reformed with a (new) purpose ... environmental protection."

Given the information above, wildlife managers will need to develop a variety of strategies for "addressing" the challenges of the animal welfare and rights movements. Such strategies will vary from making programmatic changes in line with animal activists' needs to gearing up for major confrontations with the aim of

countering the actions of animal activists. A few recommended strategies are described below.

Recommendation #1. Review the philosophical foundations of your wildlife programs and consider broadening them. For example, review the ethical basis of your programs to determine if they reflect current societal values. If they don't, appropriate changes may be warranted. The idea is to evolve along with your publics (Schmidt 1989). As one wildlife biologist interviewed during the current study noted, "A lot of us ... are very narrow-minded and we're just dealing with the animals and the trees and everything else out there and forget about the human aspect of it."

Determine if your program accepts animal activists' values as legitimate; if not, change the program's perspectives. Kellert (1985: 6) has suggested that conflict often emerges between wildlife advocates "... less because of naivete or ignorance, but from a complexity of basic values which distinguishes antagonists." Values belong to people. As such, they are legitimate, whether you agree with them or not. As one wildlife biologist interviewed during the current study commented, "Always recognize the legitimacy of their values ... the worst thing a public agency of any sort can do is to say that somebody's personal values are wrong, because you are saying they are a bad person." Remember, accepting a person's values as legitimate does not in any way infer that you agree with their values.

Finally, determine if your program takes a "We're the professionals ... we know what's best for you" approach; if so, adopt a more open-minded approach. Lay people can sometimes see solutions that are invisible to professionals. And, of course, don't forget that some animal activist representatives have received professional training in wildlife ecology and management.

Recommendation #2. Espouse an "I care about wildlife" attitude (Schmidt 1990). Let your constituents know that you care about wildlife. Publicly promote your goal of reducing pain and suffering in animals whenever you handle them. Enhance the humaneness of your programs by using non-lethal methods for collecting data and controlling populations, where practical. Continue to make every effort to make existing lethal practices as humane as possible.

Recommendation #3. Elevate internal and external awareness of your wildlife programs. First, go on an in-house "lecture circuit" to help all of your internal publics develop at least a foundational awareness of all of your wildlife programs so they can explain their rationale to "external" publics. Then, help all external special interest groups "see the big picture" with respect to why your agency manages wildlife the way it does. Involve the media proactively. In other words, involve the media in your program before there's a conflict.

Recommendation #4. Thoroughly document the need for lethal control measures. Whenever you prescribe the use of a lethal management tool, make sure that you have the data to support your action. Also, make sure you stay within your agency's statutory and regulatory authorities for lethally removing animals (Girard et al. 1993). On top of this, be familiar enough with these authorities that you can easily explain them to your constituents.

Recommendation #5. Identify potential "hot spots" in advance. Distinguish between wildlife management programs that are truly needed to establish, maintain, or restore ecological integrity and those that are culturally imposed, that is, they're in place primarily because traditional wildlife constituents want them there. Survey your internal publics about specific programs and practices that have the potential to create conflict in the future. Since culturally-imposed programs are the ones that are most likely to come under fire, review the rationale behind them first to see if it's time for a change. Alter or get rid of environmentally questionable programs. Predict potentially "tough" questions that you may get asked and develop appropriate answers; don't wait until they're asked to dream up answers (Hooper 1994).

Recommendation #6. Occupy the "moral high ground." First, emphasize that your position is for the greater good and that the "... greater good is achieved by stressing population and community over the individual animal" (Girard et al. 1993: 16). For example, in a situation where you want to control deer because they are overgrazing plants, the following logic might be applied: "In ecological ethics, plants are as valuable as animals" (Girard et al. 1993: 16). Second, don't take sides on value-based issues: "I do not think ... that the wildlife management professional should be aligned with either extreme of the debate, but instead should seek to understand its nature and espouse a scientific orientation which rises above this values confrontation" (Kellert 1989: 31). Third, don't "attack" the animal welfare or rights movements. Probing the strengths and weaknesses of animal activists' thinking is one thing; attacking them is another. Attacking the movements may encourage people "... to see the debate as either being for one side or the other" (Kellert 1989: 32). Finally, notify your various publics of the potential risks associated with all of your wildlife programs and practices. As one wildlife biologist interviewed during the current study put it, "... nobody can ever predict 100% what the consequences of an action are going to be." If you hide such risks, they may come back later to haunt you.

Recommendation #7. Open up lines of communication with animal activists. Establish a professional relationship with animal activist groups before there's a problem. Get to know all of the "major players" because their views won't be uniform. Even if you know an organization's official national policy on an issue, still become familiar with the views of local representatives because their views may be somewhat different. Provide firsthand opportunities for animal activists to learn about your wildlife management practices. Let them witness the humane ways you handle animals. Include animal activists in task groups: before you can develop effective strategies to address animal activists' needs, you must identify their concerns. Be willing to negotiate: don't use the "domino theory" as an excuse. Don't hide behind the premise that if you "give them an inch, they'll take a mile."

Recommendation #8. Concentrate on animal welfare, rather than animal rights, concerns. Schmidt (1990: 460) suggests directing attention toward animal welfare concerns and away from animal rights concerns because

doing so saves "... time and resources of individuals and agencies by avoiding participation in winless debates." He suggests internalizing animal welfare concerns into the wildlife management decision-making process: "Animal welfare considerations need to become first-order decision rules in future activities in wildlife management ..." because "... society is evolving in that direction" (Schmidt 1989: 473). He further notes that "... it is unjustified to fear that supporting animal welfare issues will necessarily lead to rights being granted to animals" (p.460).

Recommendation #9. Generate or foster allies from supportive environmental groups. Nurture relationships with supportive individuals or groups by working on common ground issues such as protection of endangered species. Girard et al. (1993: 16) noted that if you don't generate allies from supportive environmental groups, "... potential opponents might otherwise be recruited from these groups"

Recommendation #10. Be willing to experiment. Don't immediately dismiss activists' recommendations as "irrational ravings." Such a "knee-jerk" reaction may be initially satisfying, but prove to be short-sighted in the long run. Be willing to experiment.

Recommendation #11. Develop a "confrontation plan." Make up a list of actions that extreme animal activists might take, then prepare contingency plans so you'll be ready to deal with the actions.

Recommendation #12. Don't let the extremists get to you. Keep things in perspective: although you may be repeatedly confronted by animal extremists, don't let them get to you. Remember that most people belong to the "neutral majority." This means that they don't have strongly-formed opinions on most wildlife issues, so are fairly easily swayed one way or the other. As Gasson and Kruckenberg (1993: 38) noted concerning the hunting/anti-hunting controversy, "The debate will be won by the group which best appeals to the largely neutral majority of the American public."

Recommendation #13. Retire early. Paradigms are shifting with respect to the perceived relationship that humans should maintain with non-human animals. "Anthropocentric" or human-centered paradigms are being replaced with "biocentric" or system-oriented ones. As one sabbatical interviewee noted, people are increasingly questioning the "... presumption that animals exist for human benefit ... and that human requirements always take precedence over those of other animals." The challenge for wildlife managers will be to adjust programs in ways that better meet the needs of changing wildlife constituencies while keeping programs ecologically sound.

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