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CONFERENCE SUMMARY AND A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

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CONFERENCE SUMMARY AND A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

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It is with mixed feelings that I agreed, somewhat reluctantly, to accept this challenge of trying to summarize the implications of this Fifth Eastern Wildlife Damage Control Conference. Even though it has been over 8 years ago, I still remember burning the midnight oil and working in the predawn hours on the last eve of the First Eastern Conference trying to prepare closing remarks for use by my former Deputy Administrator, Merrill L. "Pete" Petoskey. In fact, even though some of the guard has changed, at least one of the professionals who helped provide their insight as we prepared those remarks also provided valuable input to these closing comments Jim Caslick. Thanks, Jim, for your contributions, then and now.

Not to dwell on the past, but to reflect briefly on how some things haven't changed and how some things have, I can remember the caution and trepidation we shared as we worked with faculty, various agencies, organizations, and professional societies to gain confidence and support for the First Eastern Conference. In some ways, "we have come a long way baby!" in others, we still have a long way to go.

Having been a participant in most of the national and regional wildlife damage management conferences dating back to the early 1970s, I have enjoyed observing the growth in professionalism, organizational skills, quality of presentations, and commitment of those participating in these conferences. The support and encouragement over the years from honored professionals such as Jack Berryman, Dale Jones, Larry Jahn, Pete Petoskey, George Rost, and many others has been both respected and appreciated. I am confident, speaking both for those of us who are now older and grayer, and for those younger torch bearers such as Paul Curtis and Mike Fargione, and most of the members of the planning committee for this and future conferences, that the enthusiasm, commitment, and professionalism will continue to grow. I am equally confident that the need for such conferences and continuing education in this area of wildlife damage management will continue to grow, as will the complexity of our work.

Turning now to my assigned tasks of trying to provide a conference summary and a look to the future, let me first express appreciation to the Conference Planning Committee, to Cornell Cooperative Extension and Cornell University and particularly to Paul, Carol, and other faculty and staff for a wellplanned, organized, and well conducted conference. I also want to thank conference participants for your commitment of expertise, resources, and time to make this conference successful. The speakers, modera-

tors, and exhibitors each contributed in a positive and professional manner, and your efforts are respected and appreciated.

In attempting to summarize the activities over the past few days of this conference, I will not comment on each paper or presentation, or mention names of all the speakers. I wish to simply provide an overview of the insights, perceptions, and implications gleaned from each session. The details, names, and references will be provided in the proceedings which you will all receive later.

From the opening session, even though it was recognized that this integral element of wildlife resource management has progressed and grown over the years, we were reminded that wildlife damage management is still often overlooked and not well supported by many in the academic community. We were further sensitized that statements made by the still small, but active and visible, animal rights extremists groups, would inevitably lead us to the conclusion that they believe that only "nonhuman animals" have rights. However, based on polls and studies, approximately 70% of the American public have not been influenced by these groups. Therefore, we and others who understand and appreciate the need for wise management, utilization, and sustainability of wild living resources must get our act together and help this large audience, who are yet undecided, to become better educated. To do this we must be honest, forthright, and proactive; we must have better baseline data; we must recognize the complexity of our task and the diversity of our audience; and we must take seriously the mantle of stewardship deeded to us by the Almighty. We must also recognize the need for working together in a common cause, be cooperative, coordinate our efforts, pool our resources and expertise, and recognize the challenges that rise continually before us. To do so, we must put aside the turf battles, the "us and them" mentality, and move forward with shared responsibility and commitment.

Ecologically sound wildlife damage management is an important and integral part of wildlife management and the wildlife profession. It is necessary, increasingly important, and will continue to be so because of expanding human populations and their impacts on wildlife. However, we must be creative and define our future, rather than let others define it for us. To be successful, our approach will require sensitivity, integration, innovation, and improved technologies. We cannot serve as lawyer, judge, and jury on all wildlife management questions. We must not confuse our traditional or personal values and beliefs with

scientific facts. It is imperative that we determine what values people place on wild living resources and how these values can be accommodated in our management programs.

We heard about new ways of manipulating habitats and landscapes to help manage problem species in urban and suburban landscapes, and how businesses and agency professionals must be sensitive to the animal welfare values of our constituents. The complexities of regulations from state to state must also be recognized. We were enlightened about the importance of reexamining some combinations of control techniques and using them in an integrated pest management context. We also continue to learn of shifts in target audiences as we observe shifts in wildlife populations and adaptations. Damage situations evolve as certain commodities, products, and culture systems change, and we must be flexible in developing new damage management techniques to address those problems. We were again reminded of the need for evaluation, assessment, and research on wildlife impacts, and the value of timing our management efforts within that window of effectiveness. It is apparent that regional and national damage data are important. However, such averages may mislead us if we fail to pay attention to the impacts and differences in perspective that damage has on individuals, groups, communities, and specialty crops. We were reminded of how important it is to know what the specific management objectives are when we see wildlife densities exceeding our historic projections, and that cultural resources and concerns must be considered in our management options.

It was interesting to note that controlling damage by one species may stimulate increased damage to the community by other species. We heard about the need to carefully analyze seemingly conflicting data and review how such data were obtained. We were reminded of needs for site specific research and development of management options that are culturally acceptable and tolerated by the public. Also, some highly selective management tools may be so tightly restricted or regulated that, even if they take animals missed by other available techniques, the feasibility of their use may be limited. It was interesting to note the evolving nature of some programs from direct compensation, to abatement, to prevention as species adaptations and intensity of damage have changed through time.

We were reminded of the tolerance threshold of producers, and that increasing agricultural production often leads to increasing damage. This may result in a willingness of growers to invest in research and development, as tools and techniques are lost to increasingly tighter registration restrictions. The change in public perceptions and values has also led us to expand our efforts in exploring and developing nonlethal technologies that are cost effective, environmentally safe, and socially acceptable.

We were encouraged to develop sound data bases in order to better educate outdoor recreation and resource management professionals so that we can meet continuing challenges from individuals, groups, the courts, and legislative inquiries. It was interesting, and I believe challenging, to be informed that increasing population densities of some wildlife species are threatening the biodiversity of other plants and animals. Hunter education was repeatedly identified as a critical need and we must better use regulated hunting as a tool to manage expanding populations of some species. This was further reinforced by presentations that emphasized the need for environmental education, so that diverse stakeholders can understand and support the public policy decision making process on wildlife damage management. We must strengthen our efforts in consensus building through inservice training and continuing education, while continuing to build better data bases.

Opening statements dealt with concerns of changing perceptions within and outside the wildlife profession. It was refreshing to hear of the progress being made in some educational institutions around the country to better prepare those who will follow us in this profession. However, it is still discouraging to note that it is an uphill battle to achieve the necessary administrative and monetary support for, and recognition of, wildlife damage management research and education. However, I believe we were all encouraged by the findings that students and alumni realize that such courses strengthen their future capabilities.

We face the continuing challenges of perception versus reality, the potential expansion of honest, factual data collection and analysis, and proactive education. However, I think we must take pride that within the wildlife profession, some of those old perceptions such as, "predators only prey on the weak and sick and serve as an effective method of regulating populations," are presently being refuted by factual data collection. Such perceptions and traditional beliefs die hard. We should be encouraged by the available window of opportunity and move forward. We must also take advantage of what we have learned, use our commitment, caring, and drive to educate people within and outside our profession, burst those balloons of perception, and help others accept reality and responsibility.

The increased awareness and concern about human health and safety related to wildlife problems serves again to remind us of the need to evaluate stakeholder preferences and tolerance levels, and how these can be used to involve them in the public policy decision making process. Tolerance levels for damage to crops, forests, other species, biodiversity, and endangered species can often be determined, yet there exists no acceptable tolerance level for loss of human lives.

We must help the public make the right choice of management options and accept responsibility for their own actions that may contribute to the creation of wildlife dam-

age problems. It was encouraging to note how cooperative interaction between agencies and citizen task forces can lead to strategic planning to help solve community problems. Case history studies of stakeholder and agency cooperation reveal steps useful in planning processes where the objective is conflict resolution of a highly sensitive, controversial, and visible wildlife damage management situation.

Throughout this conference, we have repeatedly heard about the need for and benefits of involving the public in wildlife damage management decision making. Cooperative interagency efforts in developing citizen task forces will provide facilitated stakeholder input and consensus building. Keys to success include selection of reasonable task force members, focusing on a specific objective (step by step process), allowing the task force some flexibility in conflict resolution, and facilitation by someone with a nonadvocacy objective. We also learned that involving stakeholders in policy decision making can help avoid or correct "knee jerk" legislative mandates, and result in cooperative interagency and interdisciplinary leadership. Such efforts must ensure good communication, good use of human resources, and media management. New techniques and programs highlighted the need for continuing research and evaluation of methodologies. Baseline data, supplemented and updated with new information resulting from careful analysis, is essential if we are to be able to withstand present and future challenges to our profession. As we look for effective nonlethal techniques for managing controversial or protected species, we must incorporate integrated pest management methodologies. We also learned that in order to reclaim habitats for endangered and threatened species, it is necessary to perfect new techniques for environmentally safe and selective control of other wildlife.

It is encouraging to learn that new coalitions between federal agencies and universities can result in strengthened research and educational efforts. These programs will increase the awareness of future professionals that wildlife damage management must be an integral element of all practicing wildlifer's knowledge.

In conclusion, my look to the future can be summarized by saying that I am confident, barring catastrophic national or worldwide occurrences, that professional wildlife and natural resources managers will be more needed in the future than ever before. Wildlife human interactions will continue to increase and become more controversial. I see our profession at a credibility crossroads. Our management programs, value judgments, and science are more in demand and concurrently being examined more vigorously than ever before. We must be honest, have legitimate data, and improve our capabilities to educate the public and involve them in our decision making. We must change the way we have been doing business, become more sensitive to present and future needs, and take some risks. It is imperative that we better identify and serve our changing audiences, be aware of where the majority of people live, and understand what the public's alternatives are if we don't serve their needs. We must be proactive, responsible, and sensitive; and we have to communicate and cooperate with other professionals and stakeholders.

My final task is to inform you that we have received a proposal to host the Sixth Eastern Wildlife Damage Management Conference in October, 1993. Three states have cooperatively submitted a proposal to host this conference in the Asheville, North Carolina area. Some of you who represent state agencies, federal agencies, and organizations have already been contacted about serving on the Program Committee. The three co chairs for this Sixth Conference are: Mike King, Tennessee; Ed Jones, North Carolina; and Greg Yarrow, South Carolina. Be thinking about reserving a spot on your calendar for this conference.

Evaluation and assessment are extremely important, both before we begin a management effort, during the activity, and as a follow up. That reminds me to encourage you to please complete your evaluation of this conference and leave it with the conference hosts. It has been a pleasure to be a participant in this conference. Thanks for your continuing support.