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THE WASHINGTON ADCP—A PRIVATE COLLABORATIVE EFFORT TO ADDRESS BIOLOGICAL, ECONOMICAL AND SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS TO REDUCE WILDLIFE DAMAGE

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ABSTRACT: The Washington Animal Damage Control Program (WADCP) operates within the general structure of the Washington Forest Protection Association. The general goal of the WADCP is to resolve wildlife damage issues in an economically feasible and socially acceptable manner. The four components of the WADCP are program management and administration; support of individual member activities; research, monitoring, and surveys; and promotional and educational activities. An overview of each of these components is provided.

KEY WORDS: animal damage, collaborative management, forest, Washington Animal Damage Control Program

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INTRODUCTION

The Washington Forest Protection Association (WFPA) was founded in 1908, originally as an organization to protect private forest from fires. At present, the WFPA works with and represents the interest of private landowners in the areas of forest taxation and economics, land use, environmental affairs, communication, educational activities, and forest policy. WFPA members represent a combined land base of nearly 5 million acres.

An increasing need to protect forest resources from animal damage led to the formation of the Washington Animal Damage Control Program (WADCP) within the general structure of the WFPA in 1959. The principal objective of the WADCP is to work with participating landowners to reduce spring black bear (*Ursus americanus*) damage to timber stands of Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*), and western redcedar (*Thuja plicata*). The WADCP, however, also provides expertise and technical assistance in damage management for a broad range of wildlife species including beaver (*Castor canadensis*), mountain beaver (*Aplodontia rufa*), porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*), ungulates (*Cervus* and *Odocoileus* spp.), and other wildlife species.

The general goal of the WADCP is to resolve animal damage issues in an economically feasible and socially acceptable manner. The program had 37 participants during 1995, with a total land base of more than 3.4 million acres of forest. Participants ranged from small private landowners to large forest management companies, two Indian Nations, forestry consulting firms, city watersheds, and three major landowners in the neighboring state of Oregon.

Success of the WADCP depends on four equally important components: 1) program management and administration; 2) support of individual member activities; 3) research, monitoring, and surveys; and 4) promotional and educational activities.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

A wildlife biologist manages the WADCP and serves as staff biologist for the WFPA. Three temporary employees assist the biologist.

WADCP participants derive damage management strategies as a group. This permits landowners and managers to support each other's activities, as well as to address public concerns with a common voice. An elected committee provides direction, advice and support for the program. An ongoing exchange of information among participants is facilitated by the supervisor through telephone conferences, monthly and annual reports, and annual group meetings.

Financial support for the program is provided by members. The assessment strategy reflects a set membership fee along with a charge per acre. The 1995 assessment was \$0.0165625 per acre. Budget and assessment strategies are evaluated and adjusted periodically by the full membership. Costs are kept low by operating with minimum staff and using temporary employees during periods of high activity. Landowners also provide financial support for direct control measures. For example, the WADCP supervises the establishment, maintenance, and stocking of bear feeders, but the purchase cost of feeders, food pellets, and labor is covered by the individual landowner.

The WADCP supervisor actively recruits new members to retain the vitality of the program. Non-member landowners are contacted when damage is reported by neighbors or identified through annual surveys. Control specialists present information on the WADCP and alternative management options, as well as spend time in the field with landowners to develop specific approaches that fit within their individual forest management practices.

The WADCP maintains a working relationship with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the Washington Fish and Wildlife

Commission. These regulatory agencies are kept aware of land managers' concerns, long-term forest management objectives and preventive control measures. A cooperative approach to develop wildlife damage management strategies enhances the effectiveness of the program. The necessity of minimizing negative impacts on wildlife is appreciated by the WADCP. Similarly, the WFPA believes that an awareness of their concerns and operations helps regulatory agencies to recognize the need for lethal removal of some problem animals.

The WADCP also addresses policy issues and helps to develop proposed legislation and regulations. The group provides information and presents testimony to the legislature, commissions and regulatory agencies. These efforts provide the landowners a voice in decisions that impact animal damage control measures. For example, the WADCP negotiated for over two years with several working groups in Washington to develop new proposals to resolve conflicts between wildlife and timber management. The resultant proposed law will provide landowners a faster and more efficient response to nuisance animals that impact public health or safety, or damage to commercial resources.

SUPPORT OF INDIVIDUAL MEMBER ACTIVITY

Participants' timber stands are monitored for animal damage by aerial surveys in the spring. The WADCP maps areas with dead or physiologically stressed trees. Later these areas are ground-proofed to establish cause of injury or death. Ground-proofing generally reveals greater numbers of damaged trees than can be spotted from the air. Damage management strategies are discussed with the landowner once the cause and extent of the problem has been identified.

When bears inflict damage to forest resources the supplemental feeding program is the preferred management choice of the WADCP. The program was initiated in 1985 and has proven to be an effective tool to reduce bear damage to timber stands. Initial concerns that bears would become dependent on the feeders have not been validated. Bears naturally wean themselves from the supplemental feed as they revert to natural forage, such as berries when they become available. The WADCP managed 610 feeding stations and delivered 357,150 pounds of pellets throughout Washington during 1995. Oregon participants in the program established an additional 90 feeding stations and used 60,850 pounds of pellets.

Occasionally, a bear fails to adjust to the feeding stations and continues to strip trees. Such animals are generally removed to another location or euthanatized if necessary. The established working relationship with WDFW enables the ADCP to quickly obtain appropriate permits and respond to problem animals. Most population management is accomplished sufficiently by sport hunters during the regular hunting seasons from August through

October, and forest damage management programs can focus on the behavior of individual animals.

RESEARCH, MONITORING, AND SURVEYS

Alternative wildlife management strategies need to be developed and existing approaches continually improved. The WADCP actively supports black bear research in cooperation with federal and state agencies, as well as universities. The WADCP has collaborated with the WDFW to develop indirect population measures to determine bear densities in a game management unit in the Cascade Mountains. The WADCP has also cooperated with the WDFW to investigate black bear habitat requirements in managed forests. University students interested in wildlife damage management have received either direct or indirect support from the WADCP. Currently, the WADCP is working with the USDA/APHIS/ADC/Denver Wildlife Research Center (DWRC) to improve the understanding of bear damage management in timber. One study will assess the efficacy of the supplemental feeding program and its limitations, while another study will determine the forage selection criteria of bears.

The WADCP has assisted in developing mechanisms for private timber interests to have an ongoing dialogue with producers and forest damage researchers. The Collaborative Research Team (CRT) was established as an informal group to assess research needs among a diverse array of federal, state, and private managers in Washington and Oregon. The CRT works closely with the Denver Wildlife Research Center staff in its Forest Animal Damage Project to suggest areas of forest animal damage that are need of research.

PROMOTIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The WADCP recognizes public interest in wildlife and the need for public support to maintain damage control programs. Ignoring public opinion could lead to changes in regulations or laws, as well as the general political climate towards how landowners can prevent wildlife from damaging private property.

The WADCP works to educate its members and the public on the problems they encounter with wildlife and on the available methods to alleviate these problems. Presentations are given to interested groups, such as professional societies, regulatory agencies, hunting clubs, and schools. Media coverage of program activities is encouraged. Newspaper, radio and television reporters are invited to observe the severity of animal damage with the WADCP team in the field. The supplemental feeding program for managing bear damage is demonstrated and conflict solutions and damage management options are discussed. A balanced approach to bear damage management, focusing on the bear supplemental feeding program has been favorably received by the public.