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T. Bruce Lauber

Department of Natural Resources, Ithaca, New York

Barbara A. Knuth

Department of Natural Resources, Ithaca, New York

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Communicating about suburban deer management: Tailoring the message to the stakeholders

T. Bruce Lauber, Human Dimensions Research Unit, Department of Natural Resources, Furnow Hall, Ithaca, New York 14853-3001, USA

Barbara A. Knuth, Human Dimensions Research Unit, Department of Natural Resources, Furnow Hall, Ithaca, New York 14853-3001, USA

Abstract: Public input plays an important role in selecting suburban deer management alternatives. Agencies often communicate with the public to ensure that citizens have accurate information when judging management alternatives. Research has shown that suburban residents evaluate deer management alternatives on the basis of different sets of criteria (e.g., effectiveness, humaneness, etc.). We explored whether people's attitudes were more likely to be influenced by information if it addressed the criteria about which they were concerned. We conducted our research through two mail surveys of randomly selected residents of Irondequoit, New York, implemented 20 months apart. Some 512 people responded to both surveys. The first survey was used to: (1) determine those considerations respondents used to judge deer management alternatives; and (2) measure their attitudes toward contraception and other alternatives. We used these results to categorize respondents according to how important it was to them that a deer management method be: (1) effective; and (2) humane. The second survey contained a subset of questions from the first survey. Three versions of the second questionnaire were used, varying in the type of explanatory information contained: (1) effectiveness of contraception; (2) humaneness of contraception; or (3) neither topic. We used general linear models and logistic regression models to explore whether receiving effectiveness or humaneness information influenced attitudes toward contraception and whether the effect of the information was influenced by how important the concern described in the information was to respondents. We found that people were more likely to change their opinion about contraception if they received information addressing their concerns.

Key words: deer management, mail survey, stakeholders