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RESEARCH AND TEACHING NEEDS IN
WILDLIFE DAMAGE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

by

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Wildlife damage control is a fairly unique part of wildlife management. But you will notice that I said it is a part of wildlife management. I believe that too many of today's wildlife managers, professors, and administrators look at this aspect of our profession as something different, something outside of management,... something to stay away from.

Wildlife damage control is a part of wildlife management and **it is**, perhaps, one of the most basic aspects of our profession. In fact, I would guess that nearly every professional wildlife worker has at one time or another been involved in wildlife damage control.' The involvement can run from trapping sheep-killing coyotes to removing a young raccoon from an attic to adjusting the length of a big game season to avoid landowner complaints due to crop depredations, but it is there in the background of every wildlife professional. Some of us, of course, put more time into wildlife damage control than into any other activity.

What I am leading to is that there is a definite need for more emphasis within the wildlife profession on wildlife damage control. This should be expressed not only in university curricula, but also in expanded research and management programs. Wildlife damage control needs to be included, not as a separate entity, but rather as an integral part of our professional activities.

I would guess that most of you got your training in wildlife damage control, as I did, through on-the-job experience and by your own personal interest in trapping or some other related activity. It was unfortunate that most of us did not receive any formal training in this subject in the university system.

Someone could and probably will say that formal training in this subject isn't necessary. I believe it is, and let me illustrate one reason why. Last year I initiated a course in Wildlife Damage Control and Prevention. Fifteen wildlife seniors and graduate students enrolled in the course. I had planned to skip many of the basics in things such as animal identification, trapping techniques, and so forth since these students had already been through 3 years of training at a minimum. But that quickly changed on the first day of class when I gave the students a short pre-test so I would know the present state of their knowledge on this subject. Five of the questions on the pre-test dealt with traps or trapping. When I checked the tests, not one of the 15 students answered any of those 5 questions correctly. At the next class meeting I asked how many of the 15 had trapped or been exposed to trapping previously. Not one individual raised his hand. Think of that-- 15 wildlife students and not one trapper! This lack of knowledge on a subject that is a basic part of damage control certainly indicates a need.

Wildlife professionals who come into frequent contact with the public are often asked questions about how to control wildlife damage. Conservation officers, research biologists, land managers, and most wildlife professionals are all identified by the public as wildlife "experts." Failure to provide sound answers to basic questions related to wildlife damage control results in a lack of credibility that likely extends to other professional activities and thereby creates a variety of public relations problems.

Training in wildlife damage control must be provided for. I doubt that we need special majors in damage control and we may not even need separate courses, but certainly this important subject should be integrated into existing wildlife management courses. After all, the same principles should apply here as in other aspects of wildlife management and all students in wildlife programs really should receive some exposure to this topic.

It would certainly be useful if some training in **wildlife** damage control could also be incorporated into at least some of the agricultural production courses taught at our land grant universities. Inclusion of this subject in the various Integrated Pest Management programs that are appearing at many universities is certainly necessary. Beyond that, there is a continuing need for an education effort in wildlife damage control directed to various groups of people, such as landowners, county extension agents, legislators, etc. Teaching in wildlife damage control will also provide future wildlife professionals with a benchmark in responsibility and ethics.

In order to effectively train students and to serve the public there is also a need for more and better research into wildlife damage control. Secretary of the Interior Cecil Andrus, in his recent announcement on predator control, called for more research into this problem area. I believe that wildlife damage control is perhaps the most fertile area for wildlife research today. We have done very little on this subject in comparison to how much there is to do. This is not the fault of those individuals doing research in this subject because they are doing the best they can with the resources available to them.

My perception of the needs in wildlife damage control research are probably not much different than yours. I see 4 major areas where research needs exist.

First, I see a need for more emphasis on research into the economics of damage control--cost effectiveness in preventing or stopping damage, not body counts and simple total loss evaluations to continue justifying programs.

Second, we need research into the development of new methods for preventing or stopping damage. We especially need non-lethal, publically acceptable methods.

Third, we must have unbiased evaluations of those methods, existing methods, problems that exist, and the results of control efforts.

And last, but not least, someone should be delving more deeply into the sociological aspects of wildlife damage control. Legal and moral responsibilities, ethics in control, public attitudes, and all those other: new things that have surfaced in the last 15 years of ecological awareness.

Secretary Andrus has instructed the Fish and Wildlife Service to place "greater emphasis on research and evaluation of control techniques" as "the key to long-term redirection of the ADC program." Andrus has further directed the FWS to prepare a 5 year research program to accomplish this goal.

It appears to me that this directive will have considerable, hopefully positive, influence on research **into wildlife** damage control problems. As this new research effort is developed we will see how this policy is implemented and what benefits it might bring.