

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

## DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Great Plains Wildlife Damage Control Workshop   Wildlife Damage Management, Internet Center  
Proceedings for

---

December 1983

### Current Events in Extension Wildlife Damage Control in the United States

James E. Miller

*National Program Leader, Fish and Wildlife, USDA-Extension Service, Washington, D.C.*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/gpwcwp>



Part of the [Environmental Health and Protection Commons](#)

---

Miller, James E., "Current Events in Extension Wildlife Damage Control in the United States" (1983). *Great Plains Wildlife Damage Control Workshop Proceedings*. 284.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/gpwcwp/284>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Wildlife Damage Management, Internet Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Wildlife Damage Control Workshop Proceedings by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

## Current Events in Extension Wildlife Damage Control in the United States

James E. Miller, National Program Leader, Fish and Wildlife, USDA-Extension Service. Room 3428-South Building, Washington, DC 20250

ABSTRACT: The Cooperative Extension Services (CES) within each state and territory of the United States and their federal partner, the Extension Service, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), have long recognized the need for, and responsibility of, providing educational programs in wildlife damage control to both rural and urban clientele. The system employed to implement these educational programs was established early in this century dating back to passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914. Through the years since that time, the strengths of this system have been the recognition of the need for a continuing spirit of cooperation with other federal and state agencies and a dedication toward programming 2 directions. These are: 1) from the "grass roots," local level with problem identification upward; and 2) from the federal level down with programs directed through the Land Grant University system to help people help themselves by providing them with educational assistance. Today, extension wildlife specialists working with the other elements of the system and its cooperators provide educational programs in wildlife damage control to a wide variety of audiences. These cooperative programs contribute significantly, not only to the direct educational efforts, but also to the technical advances in this area, the innovations and to the increasing literature sources. These programs contribute also to an increasing awareness and understanding by the public that wildlife damage control is an integral and essential part of managing our resources for the continued availability of food and fiber and the well-being of the nation as well as the perpetuation of a strong natural resources base for the future.

### INTRODUCTION

Extension wildlife programs from state to state vary considerably in program emphasis as reported by numerous authors including Benson (1977), Stoekdale (1977), Henderson and Boggess (1977), Miller (1981) and others, however, the area of wildlife damage control is 1 of the high priority program areas common in each of these references. To provide some perspective of the significance of this area of responsibility to extension in recent years, one only has to examine the emphasis placed on this program by extension specialist. For example, the 3 National Extension Wildlife and Fisheries Specialists Workshops conducted in 1973, 1977, and 1981 each included wildlife damage control as a major element in the workshop. These specialists plan their own programs via a program committee and requested input from each state CES specialist across the nation. As a participant in each of these workshops, I have been fortunate to be involved in and observe these specific sessions and each of them have been vital to the success of the total workshop program.

As previously indicated, extension programs are primarily determined by needs expressed from the people through the county extension agent office. Another recent example of the need for **wildlife damage control programs is provided by a** study of "Wildlife Information Needs of Kentucky County Agents" by McComb and Bonney (1983) which indicated that of 13 fish and wildlife topics identified, wildlife damage control was 1 of the 2 highest priority program needs.

The objective of extension programs in wildlife damage control is to provide educational assistance to help the recipients learn to help themselves. In providing this assistance, extension depends on available research from the complete resources of the Land Grant University system, 1862 and 1890 Institutions, from USDA research agencies, and from other federal and state agencies and particularly from the USDI, Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Another of its strengths is its delivery system which is geared toward 2-way communication -- both up from, and down to, the grass-roots level. This system provides factual, objective, practical, problem-centered and people-oriented information to a broad clientele from all levels of the community, rural and urban. One of the key elements in making this system work is the 3,150 county extension offices located throughout the nation where clientele needs are made known to the system and are either answered on the spot or fed upward to the system for factual response.

Through this 2-way delivery system, program needs including research are moved upward to the specialists level where they are studied and assimilated. The specialists programs are both reactive in responding to immediate problems and proactive in that he or she plans with the county agent, co-workers and cooperators to deal with emerging issues and recurring problems in future programs. Research needs are interpreted through the system to researchers at the Land Grant University and to others including USDA. As research information is available, this data is interpreted by the specialist and transformed into useful, understandable and applicable information which can be implemented by those who need it. This information is then transmitted via a variety of effective educational programs to the user. As you can see, this system relies heavily on the county agent offices and the specialists to ensure its effectiveness. For additional information on the specific mechanisms which make this system effective, see Miller (1981). I will avoid taking the time to delineate the many methodologies used by extension specialists, however, they involve not only the systems of information transfer, but also the implementation of these techniques.

## RECENT PROGRAMS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Obviously, this Sixth Great Plains Wildlife Damage Conference is 1 example of continuing effort and involvement by extension specialists to bring useful and needed information together and to make it available to users, both to the professional and to other clientele. Extension continues to provide a vital element in program planning and conduct of the Vertebrate Pest Conference in California and in the recently conducted First Eastern Wildlife Damage Control Conference in New York, September 27-30, 1983.

Within the past 2 years through receipt in my office of examples of extension publications on a purely voluntary basis, the subject matter area of most common interest is wildlife damage control with aquaculture publications coming in a close second. In fact, if you examine "A Bibliography of Cooperative Extension Service Literature on Wildlife, Fish, and Forest Resources," compiled by Ruff (1982), there are 128 different extension publications listed from various states on the subject of wildlife damage control. This compilation was actually made during 1981, therefore, lacks those completed since that time. As previously mentioned, there have been a significant number of publications made available in the area of wildlife damage control during 1982-83 by CES specialists.

An effort is currently underway and almost completed which will be of significant use to wildlife managers, researchers, county agents, health departments, and to owners/managers of private land. This is the soon-to-be-available updated and revised edition of the Great Plains Wildlife Damage Control Handbook (Timm 1984). Other regional publications underway by extension specialists in this area include the Proceedings of the First Eastern Wildlife Damage Control Conference previously mentioned and a possible condensation of the Great Plains Wildlife Damage Control Handbook adapted to the southeastern region.

As examples of products currently available or efforts underway by extension wildlife specialists across the country, the following list includes some efforts I am aware of, and is by no means all inclusive:

1. EPA-RPAR process responses on strychnine, 1080 and other pesticides.
2. Handbooks previously alluded to.
3. Proceedings of this and other conferences on wildlife damage control.
4. Slide sets/audio visuals available or being developed.
5. Various publications on specific wildlife damage control by state CES specialists and in cooperation with other agencies.
6. Research identification at the State level on wildlife damage control needs.
7. Current efforts underway to stimulate significant additional USDA research in the wildlife damage control area. Also encouragement of cooperative research efforts and publications with the FRS on needed research, e.g., damage assessment, etc.
8. Involvement of extension wildlife specialists on National Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Task Forces and Committees, as well as cooperative studies using the IPM system.
9. Cooperative efforts and coordination with state wildlife agencies in wildlife damage control programs; cooperation and liaison with the FRS at the local and national level; and involvement and cooperation with the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) and participation in its Animal Damage Control Policy Committee, and participation by numerous specialists in the National Animal Damage Control Association.
10. Formation of and action taken by the Wildlife Damage Control Committee of the Wildlife Society chaired by Dr. Terry Salmon with participation by 2 other extension wildlife specialists, plus participation by FWS personnel, and other state, federal and private organizations and agencies.
11. Considerable involvement by specialists in the training programs for certified pesticide applicators, plus cooperative programs for other in-service training for professionals in wildlife damage control.
12. Trapper education and training programs.
13. The development of computer program modeling, risk benefit analysis, cost/benefits predictions, damage prediction models and crop loss prediction modeling programs are beginning to be pulled together in several states, either by or in concert with extension efforts.
14. A variety of other areas of involvement and interest by extension including cooperative demonstration and research efforts.

Other examples of extension continuing interest and involvement in this area is evidenced by the cooperative effort, in the development of the upcoming

Vertebrate Pest Conference (1984) and the planning for the Second Eastern Wildlife Damage Control Conference expected to be held in 1985. There will also be a portion of the Fourth National Extension Wildlife and Fisheries Specialists Workshop in Madison, Wisconsin, in October 1984, devoted to this important subject matter area.

#### DISCUSSION

As a matter of interest and opportunity, I would like to bring to your attention the fact that the recent USDA Departmental Regulation, DR 9500-4, "Fish and Wildlife Policy" is now in effect as of August 22, 1983. I can personally vouch for extension involvement in the development of this policy, which has some very positive statements in it about wildlife damage control. As quoted by Petoskey (1983), it outlines the Department's responsibilities for wildlife damage control. An excerpt from the policy states:

"Programs of the Department will seek to alleviate damage by plant and animal pests to farm crops, livestock, poultry, forage, forest and urban trees, wildlife and their habitats. Departmental agencies, through management and research programs, will develop or assist in developing new techniques and methodologies for the prevention of damage to agricultural or forestry production. They will also strive to reduce potential depredation through improved management of USDA programs. Such techniques and consideration will be incorporated into appropriate management and education programs."

I urge each of you interested in this policy who have not reviewed it to request a copy. This document has been circulated throughout the Department's agencies and to all USDA employees of the federal, state and county level. A copy was also forwarded from my office to each state CES fish and wildlife specialist and director and to each state fish and wildlife agency director. As this policy applies to the management of private and non-federal lands, it states:

"Departmental agencies will provide research, education, technical and financial assistance to inform, encourage and assist landowners to understand, apply and improve management practices for fish and wildlife habitats on private and other non-federal forest, range and agricultural lands. Fish and wildlife are valuable products of agricultural, forestry, and range management activities on private lands. The Department will work to achieve such recognition by private land-owners and users. Within its authorities, the Department will assist with the improvement of opportunities for recreational uses of fish and wildlife such as hunting, trapping, and viewing and will seek to protect or enhance the economic, ecological, educational, aesthetic, and scientific values of wildlife and fish on private lands when compatible with the landowners' objectives and in accordance with federal, state and local laws and ordinances."

Keeping the language of the policy *in* mind, along with the research needs identified by state CES wildlife specialists, we in Extension-USDA have been attempting since 1981 to encourage and promote increased research efforts in this area by the Department and State Research Stations. To this end, I have visited

with several department administrators about this need which is vital regarding management effectiveness, but is also critical to stem the continued efforts coming out of the RPAR process in EPA. Unfortunately, the lack of substantive data and justification for the need of some pesticides has left us as managers and the landowners who need these tools in a **somewhat "hands tied behind out back"** position. A prime example of this is the recent EPA decisions regarding strychnine and 1080 for rodenticide use. Even though the efficacy data and risk/benefit data indicates that these toxicants should be registered, we are in grave danger of losing them at an effective dosage for several rodent species unless this process can be turned around and EPA will begin to make objective decisions.

I am reluctant to try to predict whether these needs can be identified at a high enough priority to effect an increased research effort by USDA, but we are trying. A number of extension wildlife specialists have provided valuable input to the RPAR process and to recent hearings. Such efforts by these and other wildlife professionals must be continued or the list of available tools and techniques useful for wildlife damage control will be further diminished.

This is an area we all must work together on and we must encourage a cooperative effort such as in the report from the Animal Damage Control Policy Committee of the IAFWA, September 12, 1983, as follows:

"The Committee's initial review of EPA's rebuttable presumptions against registration (RPAR) of pesticide products containing 1080 (Position Document 2/3) and products containing strychnine (Position Document 4) for rodent control indicate severe shortcoming. in both these documents. EPA is not using the scientific data available and in our opinion is disregarding evidence that such products when used correctly are not a significant threat to non-target wildlife. The Committee recommends that the IAFWA request, through a letter to Administrator William D. Ruckelshaus, that EPA withdraw both Position Document 2/3 and Position Document 4, and utilize the best scientific information in any future rewrite."

The response to both these documents from USDA was much more detailed and cited numerous examples throughout both these documents where the decision rendered was based on assumptions, conjecture and unreasonable and unscientific species comparisons. I bring this to your attention because to my knowledge aside from the input by affected state departments of agriculture, extension and other USDA agency input, there was very little response from the wildlife community. There was, however, extensive input from the animal rights groups and other groups of this type, many of whom pass themselves off as wildlife professionals.

I believe it is imperative that the professional wildlife community and particularly those of us engaged in the wildlife damage control part of this profession become more involved in the RPAR process. I am tired of the assumption and conjecture used in this process in the name of protecting wildlife when in fact by the continuing restrictions placed on effective damage control tools, we ultimately will see further degradation of wildlife habitat for all species, not just those of interest to EPA. When the private landowner/manager is denied the avail ability of use of effective wildlife damage control tools, the 1 methodology left is the destruction of available cover/habitat for all wildlife species.

Presently, we have extension wildlife specialists in 32 states where at least a part of their work is devoted to providing educational programs in wildlife damage control. Some of these states have more than 1 wildlife specialist and several of them have described these positions as wildlife damage or vertebrate damage control specialists. These and other specialists and agents are contacted daily with requests ranging from how to prevent or control damage caused by a variety of species -- from voles to bears, snakes to eagles, and all other wildlife species in between. Let me stress again that the extension role is educational, not operational or service-type assistance. As such, some state CES agents and specialists receive and respond to well over 60,000 requests a year for wildlife damage control information and assistance as reported by Jackson (1980).

We in extension recognize the need to provide these clientele with the most up-to-date, factual and practical information in a form which lends itself to implementation by the landowner/ manager. Extension programs stress the use of non-lethal, non-capture/preventive management where feasible. However, they also provide educational programs to help the private landowner/ manager utilize registered, legal toxicants, traps and other control measures including population control where needed. These educational programs emphasize selective control targeted toward the offending animal whenever and wherever possible, utilizing the safest and most humane methods and procedures available.

Extension programs also facilitate the involvement and cooperation of other natural resources professionals, including the personnel from State Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and from the FWS. We realize that about two-thirds of the land in this nation is privately owned and managed. I believe we all want to perpetuate and ensure the availability of fish and wildlife resources for future generations, therefore, we must work with these owners/managers not only to provide these resources, but to help them control damage caused by wildlife when it becomes excessive. If we fail to provide this assistance, we may see a different perspective among these landowners/ managers who control the availability of a majority of the wildlife habitat in this nation. We must be responsive when they suffer extensive economic losses, depredation or threats to their human and domestic livestock health.

One of the spin-off benefits of providing wildlife damage control educational programs is that the landowner/manager is often interested not only in controlling problems species, but in enhancing the habitat for preferred wildlife species. I know from my own experience as a state CES wildlife specialist that through wildlife damage control efforts, I was also afforded the opportunity to assist many landowners/managers with wildlife enhancement information and management recommendations. Many other specialists have also indicated that this avenue often provides them with their best opportunity to extend wildlife habitat enhancement information to better enable these same landowners/ managers to improve management of their lands for other wildlife species.

It is always a pleasure for me to be involved with wildlife professionals who work in the area of wildlife damage control and to participate in meetings such as this. However, we must encourage stronger wildlife curricula in our educational institutions with course offerings in wildlife damage control as a positive element in wildlife management. We must also encourage increased support for stronger research efforts in institutions and within state and federal agencies in

the wildlife damage control area. The wildlife community must also become more objectively involved in the RPAR process. And, finally, we as professionals must continue to strengthen our educational efforts for total wildlife understanding by the public of which wildlife damage control is an integral part. If we fail to accomplish these objectives, we will have failed in our responsibility to the wildlife resources, to future generations, and to our profession.

#### LITERATURE CITED

- BENSON, D. E. 1977. Cooperative Extension Service aids wildlife management. *Trans. North Am. Wildl. and Nat. Resour. Conf.* 42:295-299.
- HENDERSON, F. R., and E. K. BOGGESS. 1977. A public education program on predator damage control. *Trans. North Am. Wildl. and Nat. Resour. Conf.* 42:323-328.
- IAFWA 1983. Report from the Animal Damage Control Policy Committee. Milwaukee, Wis. 2pp. Unpublished.
- JACKSON, J. J. 1980. Needs of county agents for vertebrate control information in Georgia. *Proc. Vert. Pest Conf.* 9:60-62.
- MCCOMB, W. C., and S. A. BONNEY. 1983. Wildlife information needs of Kentucky county extension agents. *Trans. Kentucky Acad. Sci.* 44:106-110.
- MILT<sup>o</sup>R, J. E. 1981 a. Increasing educational program in fish and wildlife. *Trans. North Am. Wildl. and Nat. Resour. Conf.* 46:199-207.
- 1981b. Wildlife damage control and the Cooperative Extension Service. Keynote Address. *Proc. Great Plains Wildl. Damage Control Workshop.* 5:5-13.
- PETOSKEY, M. L. 1983. Summary Comments. 1st Eastern Wildl. Damage Control Conf. Ithaca, N.Y. Unpublished Proceedings, 1984.
- RUFF, R. L. (Ed.) 1982. A bibliography of Cooperative Extension Service literature on wildlife, fish and forest resources. Madison, Wis. 42pp.
- STOCKDALE, T. M. 1977. Portrait of one extension wildlife specialist. *Trans. North Am. Wildl. and Nat. Resour. Conf.* 42:300-304.
- TIMM, R. M. (Ed.) 1984. Revised Edition-Great Plains Wildlife Damage Control Handbook. Lincoln, Nebr. 660pp.
- USDA. 1483. Departmental Regulation 9500-4, Fish and Wildlife Policy, Washington, DC. 7pp.