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The future of wildlife damage management

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In January 2018, I retired after a 35-year career in the wildlife damage management profession. I would like to offer my perspective on what the profession was like when I began my career, what it's like currently, and what I think the future holds. Thirty-five years ago in our program, wildlife damage management activities across the country focused primarily on protecting livestock from predators as well as protecting many agricultural crops like corn, rice, and sunflowers from bird damage. Since transferring from the Department of the Interior to the Department of Agriculture in 1986, we have seen a significant increase in the range and extent of wildlife damage requests for services. In addition to the protection of agricultural resources, the program has expanded services to address other agricultural resources such as aquaculture, forestry, and truck crops. Our personnel became involved in the protection of public health and safety by working at airports to prevent wildlife–aircraft strikes, wildlife disease surveillance activities involving avian influenza, chronic wasting disease, rabies, and many other diseases transmitted by wildlife. We also began emphasizing the protection of natural resources such as threatened and endangered species, as well as property.

Professionalism in the entire wildlife damage management field has increased substantially during my career. Today, wildlife damage control personnel are better educated, better trained, and able to address far more wildlife damage complaints than early on in my career. Thirty-five years ago, there were few colleges or universities offering degrees in the wildlife damage management field. Today, it is common to find numerous institutions with degrees in wildlife damage management fields. The public was relatively uninvolved in wildlife damage issues when I began my career. Now, the public has taken a much more direct approach to voicing their opinions regarding wildlife management in general and especially on the tools used to control wildlife damage.

Wildlife damage management research has made significant accomplishments during the past 35 years. The identification of acetaminophen as an effective brown tree snake (*Boiga irregularis*) toxicant offers promise in the very near future for island-wide bait drops

on Guam to begin to reverse the serious environmental damage caused by the invasive snake. Research has also identified effective immunocontraceptives such as Gonacon, which is now labeled for white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) and feral horses (*Equus ferus caballus*) and burros (*E. asinus*). The management of feral horses and burros (WHB) is the special topic in this issue of *Human–Wildlife Interactions*. As with most invasive species, the management of WHB is an urgent conservation that will also require an integrated approach.

One of the most destructive mammals during my career has been invasive feral swine (*Sus scrofa*). They impact virtually every resource area that we protect: agricultural and natural resources, public health and safety, and property. Through our research program at the National Wildlife Research Center, sodium nitrite has been tested and evaluated for several years and appears to be an environmentally safe and effective feral swine toxicant that will hopefully be registered by the Environmental Protection Agency within 2 years. That toxicant will be a very important control tool to address feral swine damage in the coming years. Continued research into more socially acceptable and effective control methods will be critical as we deal with new and emerging wildlife damage issues, especially dealing with impacts from vertebrate invasive species, not only here in the United States, but worldwide.

There have been many challenges and successes dealing with wildlife damage management issues during the past 35 years, and there will be many more in the future. There will always be the need for dedicated, trained, professional wildlife biologists to address these issues on behalf of the public, and this will continue to be a critical component if humans and wildlife are to coexist.



WILLIAM H. CLAY retired after an extensive career in USDA/APHIS/Wildlife Services, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Texas Rodent and Predatory Animal Control Service. He received a B.S. degree in wildlife management from Texas Tech University and is a certified wildlife biologist.