

THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY AND WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS

ROBERT J. WARREN, Daniel B. Warnell School of Forest Resources, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30605, USA

Abstract: The Wildlife Society (TWS) recognizes wildlife-human interactions as both a challenge and an opportunity whereby we can serve the wildlife profession and human society. TWS first officially supported wildlife damage management professionals in 1959 when it created the TWS Committee on Economic Losses Caused by Vertebrates. In 1994, this committee ultimately became the TWS Wildlife Damage Management Working Group (WDMWG), whose goal is to better understand and manage the biological, ecological, social, political, legal, and economic aspects of wildlife-human interactions. The WDMWG has sponsored numerous symposia, workshops, publications, etc., all of which are designed to serve TWS, wildlife damage management professionals, and the public. In addition, several recent TWS publications have been designed to serve wildlife damage management professionals. TWS also has sponsored or co-sponsored technical sessions at meetings and international conferences to help disseminate the most current information on wildlife damage management. Furthermore, TWS' Certified Wildlife Biologist Program can help the wildlife damage management professional achieve public trust and confidence in their scientific and technical training, as well as legal recognition in courts of law. Wildlife professionals are increasingly challenged by wildlife-human conflicts, which often are the focus of attention from the news media. Wildlife professionals should endeavor to minimize the negative and enhance the positive values of wildlife, even for those species that have become locally overabundant and are sometimes regarded as pests. TWS will continue to support wildlife damage management professionals in their efforts to objectively manage wildlife species for the benefit of society and the wildlife resource.

Key words: certification, The Wildlife Society, vertebrate pest control, wildlife damage management, wildlife-human conflicts

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INTRODUCTION

Change has typified the wildlife profession in many respects, but perhaps none so much as in the specialty of wildlife damage management. During the 20th century, several species of wildlife recovered from levels of scarcity to levels of abundance that enabled them to cause localized damage to humans. This pattern not only occurred in the United States and

North America, but also in many developed nations throughout the World. As wildlife and human populations increased, along with encroachment of human developments into wildlife habitats, wildlife-human conflicts became more common.

Wildlife-human conflicts are now all too common throughout much of the World, and the science of wildlife damage

management is now an integral and respected part of the wildlife profession (Conover 2002). Historically, however, this was not always the case. The early history of the wildlife damage management specialty was typified by confusion among agency administrators as to the exact role for this segment of the wildlife profession. The Wildlife Society (TWS) has long recognized the importance of wildlife damage management to the wildlife professional, and even devoted an entire chapter of the 1st edition of the Wildlife Management Techniques Manual to the control of nuisance wildlife (De Vos 1960). My paper will briefly summarize the history of wildlife damage management, some of the past and current efforts by TWS to support this specialty, and future challenges facing both TWS and wildlife damage management professionals.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT

During the early stages of the wildlife profession in the first half of the 20th century, most wildlife professionals were actively involved in management programs designed to restore many of the previously over-exploited wildlife species throughout North America. As such, many wildlife professionals were less than supportive of early efforts to manage damage caused by nuisance wildlife. The notion of wildlife being a pest that needed to be controlled was not widely recognized by the mainstream in the early history of the wildlife profession.

Ironically, it could almost be argued that the wildlife profession originated from a need to control damage caused by wildlife. In the late 1800s, the need to control damage caused by birds led to the establishment of the Branch of Economic Ornithology within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). This program was renamed the

Division of Economic Ornithology, which then became the Division of Biological Survey in 1896. As part of its efforts to better understand and control damage, this agency began collecting natural history data. The Division of Biological Survey was the forerunner to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Many of the early animal damage control (ADC) programs occurred in the agricultural and ranching sectors and dealt with controlling livestock losses to predators and reducing damage from rodent species. During the early 1900s, a number of different federal programs and agencies within USDA were involved in predatory animal and rodent control. With passage of the Animal Damage Control Act of March 2, 1931 (Public Law 776), the U.S. Congress authorized USDA to conduct ADC activities and to enter into cooperative agreements with state governments and local entities. In 1939, the ADC program was moved from USDA to the U.S. Department of Interior (USDI), where it remained until 1985 and where it was renamed several times. In 1985, Congress moved the ADC program back to USDA under the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS); subsequently, the ADC program was renamed the Wildlife Services (WS) program, the name it still bears today.

Beginning in the 1980s, the need to manage wildlife damage extended beyond merely the agricultural and ranching sectors. Since this time, urban and suburban sprawl in North America expanded human developments into previously rural areas. This trend occurred coincident with the widespread recovery of previously less-abundant wildlife populations. More humans and more wildlife in close proximity to one another essentially brought the need for wildlife damage management into the "mainstream of America." More and more urbanites and suburbanites had to deal with

wildlife damage problems. Even the U.S. Congress recognized this broader need for wildlife damage management, when it passed the Rural Development, Agriculture, and Related Agencies Appropriation Act (Public Law 100-202) in 1988. This Act authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to “cooperate with states, individuals, public and private agencies, organizations, and institutions in the control of nuisance wild animals and birds and those injurious to agriculture, horticulture, forestry, animal husbandry, wildlife, and public health and safety.” Today, USDA-APHIS-WS personnel work in both rural and urban areas to provide assistance and help alleviate damage or conflicts caused by wildlife to agriculture and livestock production, natural resources, urban and industrial property, and public health and safety (Chandler 2003). With responsibilities to the broader American public in urban and suburban areas, research and management programs in USDA-APHIS-WS have recently diversified to reflect the more diverse interests and wishes of the American public. For example, in Fiscal Year 2001, about \$9 million or 75% of the budget for USDA-APHIS-WS’ National Wildlife Research Center was devoted to developing nonlethal methods to manage wildlife damage, such as wildlife contraceptives and wildlife repellants (www.aphis.usda.gov/ws/nwrc).

The greater demand for wildlife damage management in many urban and suburban areas of the United States also spawned a successful private enterprise in wildlife control (Clark 2003), as well as several professional trade organizations and publications. The National Animal Damage Control Association (NADCA), the Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators Association (NWCOA), and Wildlife Control Technology magazine are excellent examples of this trend (www.wctech.com/asoc.htm). Several researchers have

advocated the need for uniformity in standards and training for these private nuisance wildlife control operators (Brammer et al. 1994, Barnes 1997, Hadidian et al. 2001).

PAST EFFORTS BY TWS

The first official action by TWS in support of the wildlife damage management profession occurred in 1959 when TWS President Charles Dambach appointed the Committee on Economic Losses Caused by Vertebrates. This committee was named after a subcommittee of the Agricultural Board of the National Academy of Sciences—National Research Council; from 1958 to 1960 the Academy had a Subcommittee on Economic Losses Caused by Vertebrates that functioned under their Committee on Agricultural Pests (Hey et al. 1965). The primary charges for the TWS committee were to: (1) encourage research in animal damage control problems; (2) encourage exchange of information between the many groups interested in vertebrates and members of TWS; and (3) devise ways to keep the wildlife profession informed on the subject so they would exercise good judgment in their own research and management work and especially in dealing with other interested groups. The original committee’s efforts were presented in a report that included a problem analysis and review of vertebrate pest control objectives, research and organizational needs, and recommendations for TWS attention and professional guidance (Eadie et al. 1961). Subsequently, in 1964, TWS President Jack Berryman charged the committee with development of a Policy Statement on Vertebrate Pest Control. In 1965, the committee was renamed the TWS Animal Control Committee and, in 1968, their efforts culminated in the completion of a TWS Policy Statement on Wildlife Damage Control (The Wildlife Society 1968).

Subsequent to the completion of its major accomplishments in the 1960s, activity on the part of the TWS Animal Control Committee dwindled and it was deactivated in the 1970s. A resurgence of interest on the part of TWS members in the 1980s led President Jim Teer to reactivate the committee in 1988. Then, in 1992, TWS Council approved the establishment of working groups under the auspices of TWS. TWS members associated with the Animal Control Committee actively responded to this new opportunity to change over to a working group organization. Subsequently, TWS officially created the Wildlife Damage Management Working Group (WDMWG) in 1994 to provide a focused work effort on the part of TWS and wildlife damage management professionals.

RECENT AND FUTURE TWS EFFORTS

As of 2003, the WDMWG is the largest and most active of all working groups in TWS. The objective of the WDMWG is to better understand and manage the biological, ecological, social, political, legal, and economic aspects of wildlife-human interactions. The WDMWG has served as sponsor or co-sponsor of numerous professional symposia and workshops, as well as several publications and technical guides, dealing with WDM. Two excellent examples of technical guides published by the WDMWG are one on Canada geese (*Branta Canadensis*; Smith et al. 1999) and one on white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*; DeNicola et al. 2000). Several WDMWG members also served on the TWS Technical Committee on Wildlife Contraception that recently published a comprehensive review on wildlife fertility control (Fagerstone et al. 2002) and developed a position statement that was approved by TWS Council in April 2002 (www.wildlife.org/policy).

Several activities by TWS demonstrate the continued and increasing support by the Society's leadership for the importance of wildlife damage management to wildlife professionals. Significant portions of TWS publications have been devoted to wildlife damage management topics. In 1997, an entire issue of the *Wildlife Society Bulletin* was devoted to the topic of deer overabundance (Warren 1997). Subsequent issues of the *Wildlife Society Bulletin* have frequently included feature articles on wildlife damage management, such as the special coverage on the potential impacts of predation on avian recruitment in the Spring 2001 issue (Volume 25, Issue 1), which included 8 articles on this topic that were edited by Dr. Mike Conover. In 2001, TWS published a book on human dimensions in wildlife management (Decker et al. 2001). This book has particular relevance to wildlife damage management professionals, given the importance of public attitudes, values, and beliefs to the management programs of all wildlife professionals. Also in 2001, TWS published the Proceedings of the 2nd International Wildlife Management Congress (Field et al. 2001), which included numerous papers dealing with wildlife damage management on a global scale.

To continue its support for the importance of wildlife damage management to the wildlife profession, TWS Council revised and readopted the policy statement on wildlife damage control on September 24, 2002. Among the major revisions to the policy statement were to: (1) encourage research to improve our understanding of people's tolerance for wildlife conflicts and the social/biological factors that influence it; (2) recognize that wildlife damage control is an important part of modern-day wildlife management; and (3) recognize that nuisance wildlife are common in many urban situations and may need special

management attention to alleviate problems they create (www.wildlife.org/policy).

TWS Council also sponsored a special half-day-long session dealing with wildlife damage management at the 68th Annual North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference on March 28, 2003 in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. This session was titled "Trouble in the City: Human/Wildlife Conflicts in Urban and Suburban North America" and included numerous presentations and discussions dealing with wildlife damage management issues in the mainstream of the North American public. In addition, TWS Council agreed to co-host the 3rd International Wildlife Management Congress, which will be held December 1-5, 2003 in Christchurch, New Zealand. This international conference will include a major emphasis on wildlife-human interactions and wildlife damage management programs.

Finally, perhaps one of the most valuable of TWS' programs for wildlife damage management professionals is the Certified Wildlife Biologist Program (www.wildlife.org/professional). Maehr et al. (2002) recently published a review of the history of this program and its importance to wildlife professionals. A wildlife damage management professional who is certified by TWS can expect to benefit by enhanced public acceptance of their credibility and professionalism, as well as improved legal recognition as a professional in courts of law. It's interesting to note that the NWCOA also has a program for Certification of Professional Wildlife Control Operators (www.nwcoa.com) that is patterned closely after the TWS Certification Program.

THE PUBLIC, WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS, AND THE NEWS MEDIA

There are several future challenges facing both TWS and wildlife damage management professionals. Wildlife damage management professionals need to minimize the negative and enhance the positive values of wildlife, even for those species that have become locally overabundant and are sometimes regarded as pests. TWS recognizes these wildlife-human interactions as both a challenge and an opportunity whereby we can serve the wildlife profession and human society. Wildlife-human conflicts are now very common throughout much of North America and have received attention from the news media. However, the news media often focuses on negative wildlife-human interactions. They often dramatize the threats wildlife species may pose to humans and society. The November 12, 2002 issue of the *New York Times* included an article on deer-human interactions ("Out of control, deer send ecosystem into chaos"). Then, an article in the November 29, 2002 issue of the *New York Times* ("4 wheels, 4 legs and no winners") stressed the economic and human safety risks associated with deer-vehicle collisions. Finally and perhaps to be expected, the Editorial Page of the December 2, 2002 issue of the *New York Times* included an editorial entitled "Bambi's mother in the cross hairs." One can infer the gist of the Editor's position merely from the title, but in essence the plea was for increased deer control to reduce the risk from deer-vehicle collisions.

Thus, many wildlife-related articles appearing in the national news media have increasingly focused on the negative values of wildlife. They also often dramatize the threats wildlife species may pose to humans and society. Of course, the news media too often focuses on the sensational aspects of a story in order to attract their readership. This approach "catches the public's attention" and helps "sell newspapers."

However, this is a significant challenge for wildlife damage management professionals of today and tomorrow. The bottom line is that we all need to become more assertive in presenting the ecological basis for wildlife management and stressing the positive values of wildlife to society, even when dealing with wildlife damage management problems. When asked questions from the public or news media regarding a negative wildlife-human interaction, it is essential that wildlife professionals also equally stress the positive values associated with those species. Only by presenting a balanced perspective on this topic can we hope to professionally manage these species for the benefit of society as well as the wildlife resources.

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