

SUMMARY COMMENTS

Merrill L. Petoskey, Deputy Administrator, Natural Resources and Rural Development Unit, Extension Service, USDA, Washington, DC 22050

Thank you for asking me to participate in this conference, the first of its kind in the eastern United States. We are glad that some funding from the Renewable Resources Extension Act has helped to make this conference possible. Jim Miller, National Program Leader for Fish and Wildlife, Extension Service-USDA, provided early impetus in planning the program, and as a member of the conference committee, served as chairman of publicity and encouraged wide participation. We are pleased that, along with SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry and the New York Department of Environmental Conservation, the Extension Service, USDA, could join with Cooperative Extension Service at Cornell University to help sponsor this conference.

A conference of this kind in the East is long overdue. With its large population centers and diversified agriculture and forestry, the East has many wildlife damage problems that are not found anywhere else. Similar problems may need different solutions here.

Because of other commitments within USDA, I could not be here for the entire conference, however, the sessions I attended yesterday and today, and the comprehensiveness of the program have been impressive. It is disappointing that more of the user groups and private sector that are involved in damage control aren't here. Those that are have done an outstanding job in their presentations and demonstrations. But, somehow, as government seems to be phasing out of -- or de-emphasizing -- its involvement, someone should and must take up the slack. As resource managers and researchers, we must make more effort to interest the users and industry and to involve them, even more.

As a manager and administrator of natural resources programs for over 35 years, I have a deep and abiding respect for the stewardship responsibilities that natural resources professionals exhibit. I am particularly proud of wildlife professionals. I must admit, however, that it disturbs me to see or hear about some wildlife professionals in one part of the profession looking down their nose or being critical of others in a different specialty, particularly when both specialties are similar in importance. I think the comments last night on the effects of pests on the world food situation emphasizes the need for improved pest control. It is easy to become so research-oriented or specialized or enhancement-oriented or endangered species-oriented or nongame-oriented that we forget that we are all in this thing together. I wish we could forget these sub-

groups and work together. We darn well better be working together and supportive of each other's work.

This is true of all areas of the natural resources profession. We also need to keep in perspective the fact that about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the land in this nation is privately owned. We want to perpetuate and ensure wildlife and fish for future generations of Americans. Therefore, we have to learn to work with these private landowners/managers, and provide educational information to them that helps them set and attain their objectives for owning that land.

Without any reservations, if we expect them to manage their land and give consideration to wildlife and use by sportsmen and other users, we must also be responsive when they suffer extensive economic or other losses or depredation from wildlife. Most of these landowners, as several of the papers in this conference have pointed out, are willing to accept some level of loss, damage and/or frustration because of wildlife problems; however, we have a responsibility to provide them with some means of relief when their patience and tolerance are gone.

I have been pleased to hear that we are all taking a closer look at real costs, in animal damage control -- total costs -- and that we are paying closer attention to social aspects as we go along. This conference has re-emphasized these important concerns.

In concert with these concerns, let me take a couple of minutes to inform you of the actions of the Department of Agriculture. In the last four years, there has been a significant effort within the Department of Agriculture by Jim Miller of our staff, Dale Jones, Forest Service, who spoke to you at the opening session of this conference, Barbara Holder and Hugh Black of the Forest Service and me, plus a number of other agency administrators and staff members to develop and implement a fish and wildlife policy for USDA. This policy, originally signed by the Secretary of Agriculture in 1980 and updated during Secretary Block's administration in 1982, recently became a departmental regulation (giving it more permanence) which applies to all departmental and agency personnel of USDA. A couple of sections of this policy read, I quote:

"Departmental agencies will provide research, educational assistance, 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 land. The Department

will work to achieve such recognition by private landowners and users."

"Within its authorities, the Department will assist with the improvement of opportunities for recreational use of fish and wildlife such as hunting, fishing, 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."

Further in this policy, it outlines the Department's responsibilities for wildlife damage control.

"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 considerations will be incorporated into appropriate management and education programs."

You can see the strong interest in and support of wildlife damage control and wildlife management that is now a policy and regulation of the Department.

We are pleased with the progress that has been made in recent years and look forward to the further implementation of this policy throughout all agencies and levels of USDA. We, in Extension, are committed to do our part and to work cooperatively with other agency, organization and institution professionals to do a better job of wildlife management, including wildlife damage control. I am very pleased at the professionalism, enthusiasm, interest in, and positive approach towards objective wildlife damage control that I see constantly exhibited by Jim Miller, the Extension Wildlife Specialists and other wildlife professionals working in this area I come in contact with. They know they are helping people help themselves and they realize that through these efforts they can also encourage these same landowners/ managers to better manage their lands for other wildlife species.

Those of you who work in this area have just cause to be proud of your profession. I applaud your contributions and am appalled at those professional wildlifers or agencies that are apologizing or ashamed that they have wildlife damage responsibilities. Control is an inherent and vital part of wildlife management, and if any apologies are necessary, it should be by the research and management agencies that have not recognized this part of their role and responsibility.

In fact, as was pointed out here, the opportunity to educate some of the many publics about wildlife -- positive and negative -- may be at its very best, when an otherwise disinterested person or family suddenly needs help in solving an animal damage problem. Educators talk about "teachable moments" -- this is surely one of the best moments that wildlife biologists have to teach. If we use this moment well, we can help solve the problem and at the same time, teach a little biology and maybe even some appreciation and understanding.

Along these lines, we must insist that government agencies, federal and state, and educational institutions across this nation increase their research and teaching contributions to the wildlife damage control area. It is ridiculous that most wildlife curricula are devoid of courses in wildlife damage control. In some institutions, wildlife instructors avoid even bringing wildlife damage control up in a wildlife techniques course or they approach it as a negative aspect of wildlife management, not as a positive and integral part. Their view is wrong!

It is also a serious void that so little research is being done in pest damage and control problems. In some cases, even when federal funds to support such research has been available to some state universities and institutions, wildlife damage control research often has not been approached positively, nor has been popular with some faculty members or administrators in wildlife departments.

It is high time for the agriculture, forestry, range and wildlife departments in land grant colleges and universities to start providing reasonable support to the wildlife damage control research and education area. In many cases, there are 30 to 40 or more agronomists, entomologists, and livestock researchers, with little or no thought given to research on wildlife damage control. New estimates of wildlife damage have been given. More and improved methods of damage assessment are needed. These facts are important in the political arenas involved in obtaining funding, that some of us deal with on a daily basis. Partially as a result of Jim Miller's persistence, I just forwarded a request for the Agricultural Research Service, Cooperative State Research Service, Economic Research Service, and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service administrators to join the Extension Service administrator and selected staff to evaluate the need for more research efforts in the wildlife damage control area.

New methods of assessing damage have been discussed here that will give us more reliable estimates for future use. We don't have to convince someone about the seriousness of their own problem, but my guess is that if we really knew more about the extent of unreported and widespread damage, on a broad scale, funding would come sooner. When human or animal health is involved, funding usually is easier than it is for those quiet, constant and widespread problems that may actually cause hundreds of times more damage.

Let me applaud this effort, this conference, and those of you in attendance. We have shared, learned and benefitted from your participation. We are glad to have been a part and we hope to be a part of the future Second Eastern Wildlife Damage Control Conference. We must continue to fight for total wildlife understanding, of which damage control is an integral part. Otherwise we will be doing a disservice to wildlife, future generations of Americans, and our profession.

I hope you leave with an increased feeling of confidence, comradeship and pride in your professionalism. I am glad to have the opportunity to participate in this conference and feel that when the proceedings of the conference are published, they will be a useful and valuable contribution to the wildlife management profession, the literature, and our stewardship for the future.