

Student Voices

Avoiding conflicts between wildlife professionals and local hunters over efforts to eradicate exotic game species

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WILDLIFE DAMAGE management, by its nature, is conducive to a variety of conflicts within society, whether it is the method of management or the management itself. Conflicts within society are common, and people with diverse opinions and values may disagree about how wildlife or natural resources should be managed. Opinions can vary among different interest groups (e.g., backpackers, wildlife viewers, and hunters) that have invested time and money in the resource. Eradication efforts of big game to preserve threatened or endangered plants or wildlife have been a source of controversy among various local hunter groups, especially on island ecosystems, such as those found in Hawaii and New Zealand.

On the Big Island of Hawaii, for example, eradication of mouflon sheep and goats on the Pohakuloa Training Area and the eradication of feral hogs in Volcanoes National Park have upset local hunter groups for years. Traditional management programs are designed to protect rare or endangered plants in the respective areas and preserve habitat for endangered species. The source of controversy for local residents lies in the elimination of hunting, especially hunting of feral hogs. Feral hogs are a culturally important species in Polynesian culture, and hunting them can provide local residents with great satisfaction.

One method to mediate conflicts between wildlife managers and local hunter groups is simply to hire more local residents as technicians and biologists, especially individuals who are part of local hunter groups. At present, it is U.S. government policy to post any job opening nationally. Frequently, only the top 3 candidates are presented to the respective employer, who often does not see the original pool of applicants. While such a policy is commendable, it increases conflicts because local residents resent people they consider to be out-



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siders telling them what to do or how to manage their resources. One way to move local residents to the top of the applicant pool is to make involvement with the local community a priority and set a posting specific to the applicant's knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Another method for alleviating conflicts between wildlife agencies and the local community is to make outreach and educational efforts an integral part of any wildlife eradication program. It is appropriate for the wildlife agency to make every effort to relay to the local community the reasoning behind the use of lethal methods of wildlife control. Educational programs at the K-12 levels also can be appropriate to raise awareness about the ecological and cultural significance of protected resources. A key purpose of educational outreach programs should be to open lines of communication with the local groups and to portray a respect for local custom and tradition.

More recruitment of local technicians and

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biologists, and more outreach programs about eradication efforts of game animals can alleviate conflict with local hunter groups. Due to colonialism over the past century, knowledge about various uses of plants and the cultural significance of native birds in the Hawaiian Islands have often been lost along with the loss of indigenous cultures. The hunting culture, on the other hand, is pretty much intact. Building a cultural bridge between hunters and wildlife managers can be essential for the protection of our natural resources. *

HANS SIN received a bachelor's degree in wildlife ecology and management in 2000 from the University of Georgia's Warnell School of Forest Resources. Since then Hans has worked on various wildlife damage positions both on the mainland United States and in Hawaii. He completed his master's degree in wildlife biology at Utah State University's Department of Wildland Resources in 2006. He is also a Berryman Institute alumnus. Hans is currently working as the coqui frog control coordinator for the Department of Land and Natural Resources in Hawaii.