Opportunities and challenges within wildlife damage management

Robert H. Schmidt, Utah State University
Opportunities and Challenges Within Wildlife Damage Management

Robert H. Schmidt, Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, Utah State University, Logan Utah 84322-5210

Dr. Scott Craven, Extension Wildlife Specialist and Professor at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, recently presented the keynote address at the 17th Vertebrate Pest Conference, the largest national conference dedicated to wildlife damage management, held March 4-7 in Rohnert Park, California.

In his remarks, Craven discussed some of the factors that will affect the direction of wildlife damage management, especially the opportunities and challenges associated with this profession.

According to Craven, wildlife damage management is a growth industry. There is a continual and increasing need for the management of wildlife around homes and gardens, agricultural operations, and as part of traditional natural resource management. Although he prefers the term “wildlife damage management” over the terms “vertebrate pest control” and “animal damage control,” he believes all describe the same business — managing wildlife damage to meet human needs.

Craven noted many positive characteristics of the wildlife damage profession that demonstrate its health and vitality.

The National Animal Damage Control Association (NADCA) continues to grow as a coordinating group for the wildlife damage industry.

The National Animal Damage Control Association (NADCA) continues to grow as a coordinating group for the wildlife damage industry. Recently merging with the National Urban Wildlife Management Association, NADCA has experienced increased membership and a revitalized presence in the profession. In addition, the Wildlife Damage Management Working Group of The Wildlife Society has evolved to allow wildlife biologists and managers to focus their input into wildlife damage management. The TWS Working Group has also seen an increase in membership, development of an Internet discussion group (WDAMAGE) and has now sponsored three symposium sessions at the annual meeting of The Wildlife Society. “We’ve come a long way from the black hat, gopher-choker image of a few decades ago,” noted Craven.

Other significant milestones include:

- Utah State University’s Berryman Institute in increasing the stature of the field through its teaching, research, national awards program, and staff, as well as additional wildlife damage-related courses being taught throughout the US.

- The explosive growth of Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators (NWCOs), which are businesses that specialize in urban wildlife damage. The success of Critter Control, Inc., as well as the attendance of NWCOs at recent regional workshops specializing in wildlife damage, “...suggest strong demand for more opportunities.”

- There are three major conferences that focus on wildlife damage management: the Vertebrate Pest Conference (formed in 1962), the Great Plains Wildlife Damage Control Workshop (formed in 1973), and the Eastern Wildlife Damage Control Conference (formed in 1983). Their Proceedings are an important literature base for wildlife damage researchers and managers.

- The active role of USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Animal Damage Control program in developing a high profile in regional and national conferences, maintaining and enhancing the Denver Wildlife Research Center (now

Continued on page 5, Col. 1
Opportunities and Challenges...

the National Wildlife Research Center), and providing technical and operational assistance in many states.

- Increasing credible sources of technical information, including the recently-revised Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage handbook.

- The continuing development of new products and techniques, including methyl anthranilate, invisible fencing, and wildlife contraception.

In addition, he explained that there are opportunities to assure a broader role of wildlife damage management in wildlife conservation as a form of "ecological damage control." Wildlife damage managers have the skills, abilities, and knowledge to assist in the conservation of all wildlife species. Cowbirds, white-tailed deer, and other species can have a negative impact on preferred ecosystem structure and function, Craven noted. Wildlife damage management should evolve with conservation biology to form a firm partnership in conserving our wildlife heritage.

There are also numerous challenges facing wildlife damage managers, Craven explained. There are increasing demands to regulate this industry, and minimum standards and training for practitioners is even now being debated. The attitudes of the general public will continue to affect how wildlife is managed. Wildlife professionals tend to focus on the health of wildlife populations, while the homeowner is more concerned about the fate of individual animals. "This will require the judicious use of translocation as a damage management tool," Craven said.

The key is public recognition of the need for professional wildlife damage management. If managers can convey to the public a need for wildlife damage management, then the public will ask for the profession's assistance, explained Craven. We need to favor non-lethal strategies over lethal ones, and emphasize problem solving, not animal killing. In addition, "We need to police our own ranks, and make sure abuses are controlled." If managers are going to protect the tools that they have, then they must know their tools inside and out to prevent misuse.

Virtually all wildlife management programs and land use decisions have wildlife damage implications. Craven argued that we need to be involved in decisions at the outset. By being proactive, hopefully we can prevent damage before it occurs.

"The future of wildlife damage management looks very, very good," concluded Craven. "The challenges will provide some vitality in our field."

Wildlife Control Seminar Makes Points With Michigan Man

Editorial Note: The following letter was posted to the electronic bulletin board WDAMAGE on February 13, 1996.

I have just returned from the Second Annual Wildlife Control Instructional Seminar sponsored by W.C.T. Magazine and NADCA. The information exchanged at this conference was a tremendous help to me. I was astounded after listening to speaker after speaker extol helpful hints, techniques, and information.

I was told that I'd learn as much in the hallways during the breaks as I would in the conference room. That statement proved to be true! As a matter of fact, one NWCO that I had lunch with explained a way for my business to immediately save over $500 annually. I verified the information as soon as I arrived home. Sure enough, I was able to decrease this year's office expenditures greatly!

I was impressed with the content of the seminar including topics such as squirrel techniques, moles, updated bat control, Canada Geese, and raccoons in attics and chimneys. The speakers were well prepared and between the seminar and the hallway chats, I managed to put in two 16-hour days and left Sunday after the last dog was hung. Tired? You bet! Exhausted. Still, I'm already anticipating the third annual seminar next year!

This is a slow period for my ADC business but I'm looking ahead toward putting all the new ideas into practice. I commend Wildlife Control Magazine and the National Animal Damage Control Association for a very well planned and executed weekend!

Take care and good luck...

Jack Ammerman, Advanced Wildlife Removal
Flint, Michigan