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REMARKS BY JACK H. BERRYMAN, CHIEF, DIVISION OF  
WILDLIFE SERVICES, BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE,  
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
WASHINGTON, D. C., BEFORE THE SECOND GAME, FISH AND  
PARKS COMMISSIONERS SHORT COURSE, COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY,  
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Animal Control as a Tool in Managing Wildlife

I am delighted to be here to describe one aspect of the animal-control program of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife.

First, I want to commend Colorado State University for its vision in sponsoring this course and you, Commissioners, for your interest and willingness to give your own time and energies to engage in a program of continuing education to keep abreast of a rapidly changing field in which you make vital decisions. I think it is splendid.

I know you are interested in the direction of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife's animal-control program which is supervised by the Division of Wildlife Services. This has, however, been discussed on several occasions, the most recent only on March 15 at the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference at Pittsburgh. Some of you were present.

So, I intend to pass over the events of the past two years very lightly and dwell on animal control as a tool in managing wildlife -- an area where you have policy responsibilities and a subject that has not previously been discussed by Bureau personnel since reorientation of our animal-control responsibilities began last July.

Suffice to say, Secretary of the Interior Udall accepted the "Leopold Report" on predatory animal and rodent control in the United States on June 16 last year and established a new Division of Wildlife Services on July 1. In addition to control, the new Division was given responsibilities in wildlife enhancement and pesticides surveillance, but these are separate subjects. Secretary Udall pointed out that control would be governed by rigid guidelines and criteria, using selective, efficient and economic methods based on sound ecological

principles -- only at such times and places as there was a clearly demonstrated need. The report signaled a change in the ecological conscience of the people of the United States.

Several significant events since have occurred, the most important being the drafting of a new animal-control policy, now in the review stage.

Under the new policy, animal control will have four major goals: (1) increased public health and safety; (2) improved agricultural production; (3) better resource management services; and (4) enhanced urban and industrial services.

In pursuing these four program objectives, we intend to rely increasingly on the land and resource managing agencies; on public health officials; on industry and agriculture; and on their responsible officials and elected representatives in determining when and where there is a demonstrated need for control.

I want to speak primarily about one program goal -- Resource Management Services, which includes animal control as a wildlife management tool -- and how we intend to work with Fish and Game Departments in determining demonstrated need for control.

I think it is generally accepted that animal control per se is not generally a needed tool in managing wildlife. In fact, a certain amount of predation may be important in holding some of the larger ungulates -- deer and elk for example -- in check in remote areas.

There are exceptions, however, and we can categorize the situations where animal control is an important wildlife management tool, or otherwise necessary, somewhat along the following:

(1) Prior to and following an introduction of native or exotic species in locations where predation might be a factor curtailing increase of a small release in a new and strange habitat. For example, the release of chukars has generally been preceded by a predatory animal-control program to minimize the impact of predation as one limiting factor upon a small but very expensive release of birds.

(2) A reduction of predation upon remnant populations of game animals whose numbers have fallen to such low numbers that the reproductive potential is not sufficient to overcome total environmental pressures. Remnant herds of antelope are a good example. It has been demonstrated in several studies that the small bands of these animals will begin to increase when the predation factor has been reduced.

Similarly, predation along with other limiting factors, such as disease and competition with domestic stock, should be considered in mountain sheep and goat management projects aimed at increasing the number of these relatively rare game animals.

The same may be true when deer or elk are being harvested very closely and losses due to predation are not desired. I think, however, that the reverse is generally true.

(3) The protection of rare and endangered or threatened species often requires a reduction in predation which affords maximum protection to these animals. A good example is the protection of the rare nene goose in Hawaii from the ravages of the fierce little mongoose.

Also, it is frequently possible to increase bird production on managed waterfowl areas by controlling small carnivores -- provided the management objective is waterfowl production and not management of the native fauna.

(4) Fish and game departments, especially here in the West, frequently engage in range restoration programs aimed primarily at improvement of browse conditions. Rodent control, until the seedlings are established, is generally essential to the success of the overall plan -- rodent control as a wildlife habitat manipulation tool.

(5) Many Fish and Game Departments make contributions to predatory animal control as a goodwill gesture to the ranchers and stockmen with whom they share the range, quite often public range. Or, the contribution assures a vote on the State's animal-control board and gives the Department a voice in where animal control measures will be applied.

I think we must be very frank and open about this. If the contribution is made under the guise that it will improve conditions for wildlife, then it must be shown that there is a demonstrated need and that it will, indeed, improve conditions for wildlife; that is, if the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife is to supervise the program.

On the other hand, if the contribution is made as a goodwill gesture to the ranchers and stockmen to assist them in managing stock, it is necessary only to show that there is a demonstrated need to protect livestock. The source of funds becomes a secondary consideration. We must stop beating around the bush on this one.

(6) In some States, the Fish and Game Departments have statutory authority for all animal-control activities. Here, of course, control is not aimed at improving conditions exclusively for wildlife, but for acting as the State's agent in control work. Here again, if the Bureau is to participate or supervise, there must be demonstrated need.

"Demonstrated need" comes up over and over again. These are key words in our new approach. But, how do we determine "demonstrated need?"

As mentioned earlier, we intend to rely increasingly on the land- and resource-managing agencies in determining need as we develop State work plans.

In the case of the Fish and Game Departments, we propose to sit down with representatives of each and actually map out where control is desired and needed, how it will be accomplished and what the estimated costs may be.

Quite obviously, this will involve the Fish and Game Departments more deeply in appraising needs from year to year and from place to place. If the Bureau is to be responsible for supervision and operation of a direct control program, it also becomes obvious that it must reserve the right to make a final determination of whether a demonstrated need exists.

As control programs are planned and developed, we propose to make certain that there will be minimum adverse impacts upon non-target species, especially those thought to be threatened. Some have viewed this protection of threatened species, particularly resident species, as an invasion of States' rights.

We do not view it in this light at all. It is incumbent upon any control agency to avoid non-target species whether we are talking about herbicides, other pesticides, or steel traps. Protection of non-target species, and the environment generally, is part of a balanced responsible control program.

Many "resident" species are in legal and administrative limbo -- so-called "pests" that are not covered either by State or Federal statute. The gopher and starling are examples. We seem to have fallen heir to these.

There are others that some States have washed their hands of and classed as "pests," including muskrats and the introduced nutria, among others.

Then, there are resident game species that, under some circumstances, cause damage. Deer, pheasants, beaver, and, in some States, the bear fall in this category.

The respective State and Federal responsibilities are not always clear and there are no hard rules to follow, except in those States that have delegated control responsibilities to the Bureau with the exclusion of resident game.

Within the framework of State law and regulation, the Bureau accepts a research responsibility for developing control methods and a responsibility for disseminating this information to the public. Through research and educational media, we try to assist individuals and agencies with control problems -- occasionally even on resident game species. And, with some birds and rodents, we engage in direct control unless the problem is being resolved locally.

I should point out, however, that we are not "shopping around." We have quite enough problems without seeking others. And facetiously, we don't want to invade States' rights in the matter of animal control, although the "pests" seem to have fallen into the Federal bailiwick. Who is responsible for those pesky little house mice?

Now, a word about bounties. We -- the Bureau -- seem to get a great deal of credit for bounties. We are not, and do not intend to engage in the use of the bounty system as a means of suppressing an animal population. Further, we do not believe it to be a useful animal population management tool. Experience in many States over a long period of time has demonstrated its inadequacies and other shortcomings.

Let the record show that we do not favor the bounty system and that we encourage States to abolish it as an animal-control tool. The Bureau is looking over its position very carefully in relation to the control of animals upon which the States have placed bounties. The degree of Bureau participation under these circumstances is not clear at this time.

To sum up, there are situations where animal control is a valuable wildlife management tool and situations where it is wholly unjustified. In cooperation with the State Fish and Game Departments we hope to identify both situations as we conduct our program on the most responsible basis possible.

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