

## History and future of wildlife damage management conference

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**Abstract:** The Eastern Wildlife Damage Management (EWDM) Conference was developed (1<sup>st</sup> conference held in 1983) to focus on people-wildlife interaction issues occurring in the eastern U.S. Developed as a Renewable Resources Extension Act activity, the purpose of the conference was to improve wildlife resource management and increase outputs of agricultural and forestry commodities. A primary planning issue for the 1<sup>st</sup> EWDM Conference was whether to represent the conference focus as wildlife damage "control" or "management." Control was selected initially, but the title evolved since then to be replaced by "management," reflecting the central role of wildlife conflict mitigation in wildlife management. The EWDM Conference series has provided a forum for professional discourse on emerging wildlife problems, technologies to address problems, and mitigation efforts. Both biological and human dimensions aspects of wildlife damage management have been featured. Six important traits of the EWDM Conference series include: (1) impact-focused, outcome-oriented management; (2) community-based management (co-management); (3) technology development; (4) integration of biological and human dimensions; (5) showcase for collaborative effort; and (6) wildlife damage management positioned as an essential component of comprehensive wildlife management.

**Key Words:** Eastern wildlife damage management conference, people-wildlife conflicts, people-wildlife interactions, wildlife damage management

The Eastern Wildlife Damage Management Conference series, now in its 9<sup>th</sup> production, was the brainchild of Jim Miller. A familiar name and long time friend and colleague of many of us in wildlife extension work, Jim had seen the benefits of two other conference venues focused on wildlife damage issues and concerns—the Vertebrate Pest Control Conference and the Great Plains Wildlife Damage Control Conference—both of which predated the eastern conference series. Jim identified the need for a similar conference series with a focus on eastern wildlife damage management concerns, and served as a catalyst to initiate the conference series and subsequently as an enduring source of support for it.

Cornell had a long history of a fairly energetic wildlife damage management program with people like Bill Hamilton, Bob Eadie, and Jim Caslick working in this area of research and outreach for many years. That tradition continued during the late 70s and early 80s under the leadership of Dr. Jim Caslick, with me in a supporting role, so Jim Miller approached us with the idea of launching the 1<sup>st</sup> Eastern Wildlife Damage Conference. As we considered the suggestion to undertake a major conference focusing on wildlife damage management in the East, Jim Caslick and I turned to extension colleagues John Kelley and Gary Goff to help out, and the four of us, together with Jim Miller, became the conference committee for the

1983 event. Since then Jim Miller has been a constant leading figure in these conferences.

### **EWDM conference objectives and precepts**

The 1<sup>st</sup> EWDMC, conducted in 1983, was developed as a Renewable Research Extension Act (RREA) program activity, so it will come as no surprise that we described the purpose of the event in terms of RREA objectives:

- Improving wildlife resource management
- Increasing outputs of commodities (agriculture and forestry)

We also declared that there would be two key precepts for the 1<sup>st</sup> EWDM Conference. We worked with the belief that increasing the effectiveness of wildlife damage control:

1) Is a core objective of wildlife resource management.

2) Is a positive force in improving our nation's economy, the quality of life, and maintenance of healthy wildlife populations.

Others shared this view, demonstrated by their participation as sponsors or cooperators on the program committee and other functions to make the conference a success: USDA--Extension Service, USDA--Forest Service, USDI--Fish and Wildlife Service, NYS--Department of Environmental Conservation, SUNY--College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Cornell University--College of Agriculture & Life Sciences and Cornell Cooperative Extension.

### **Planning issues: 1<sup>st</sup> EWDM conference**

Among the heady issues of the day, one in particular stood out in our deliberations when planning the conference. The question we deliberated was, do we call the conference damage "control" or damage "management". Essentially, this concerned the legitimacy of wildlife damage management in the wildlife profession. We had some pretty intense discussions about what image would be projected by the name of the conference, focused around the control versus management wording. I was among the staunch proponents of "management," but others felt as strongly that "control" was the familiar term that would resonate with those actively engaged in wildlife damage mitigation work. That school of thought won the day, but as the current name of the conference demonstrates, we have come around to the thinking that if the wildlife damage control work was really part of management, then why don't we simply and straightforwardly label it as such?

I think the name change reflected how many of us view what we have been trying to do through our research or practices on the ground—be an integral part of the wildlife management process. We certainly worked hard at the 1<sup>st</sup> conference to legitimize the wildlife damage aspect as central rather than peripheral to wildlife management. We may not have used "management" in the conference title in the early days, but we sure worked on the message. Our first three speakers were selected to help set the tone in that regard: Herb Doig, assistant commissioner for natural resources, NYSDEC; Jack Berryman, executive director of IAFWA; and Dale Jones, president of TWS and director of fisheries and wildlife, USDA

Forest Service. These three gentlemen represented mainstream wildlife agencies and professional organizations of the mid 1980s. Here's a sample of their comments....

In his welcome to participants, Herbert E. Doig (1983:1) said: "We ... recognize the mandate to assure a balanced interaction between wildlife and people and have ... expressed this concern in one of the fish and wildlife program's primary goals: i.e., to manage fish and wildlife resources so that their numbers and occurrence are compatible with habitat capability and the public interest."

Jack H. Berryman gave the following comments in his presentation: "The first Eastern Wildlife Damage Control Conference provides a unique opportunity for all of us to constructively influence the future direction as well as the professional and public perception of this important wildlife management activity" (Berryman 1983:3).

"First, we must continue to express and defend the philosophy that wildlife damage prevention or control is a function of wildlife management" (Berryman 1983:4).

"Wildlife management must be more than a noble crusade. It must include a willingness to deal with the less attractive side of wildlife management and acknowledge that there are times and situations when wildlife becomes detrimental - sometimes even dangerous - to the interests of society" (Berryman 1983:4).

"Wildlife damage control cannot be separated from the practice of wildlife management or the conduct of wildlife research nor from the other functions of state and

federal fish and wildlife agencies" (Berryman 1983:4).

"We sorely need to improve the status, stature, and prestige of those engaged in wildlife damage control work; and, to accord them the same respectability that those engaged in other aspects of wildlife management now enjoy" (Berryman 1983:4).

Dale A. Jones (1983:13) summed up his talk with the comments: "Common to each of these examples is the clear link between wildlife damage control and sound wildlife management. They demonstrate, if further demonstration is needed, the inseparability of wildlife damage control from wildlife management."

In addition to the "control" versus "manage" issue, we had some other, perhaps lesser concerns. Two that I recall clearly were the following:

1) Role of "private" wildlife damage control crowd—are these folks legit? Are they professionals like the traditional agency and university types? Since the private sector was actively engaged in animal damage control work and the industry was growing, we decided to embrace them.

2) Biology versus human dimensions aspects of wildlife damage management—do we want to deal with critters and techniques, or with the reasons there's even a concern about wildlife damage management—impacts on people? We included human dimensions research. In fact, this conference series has proved an excellent venue for reporting many cutting-edge human dimensions studies.

### 1<sup>st</sup> EWDM conference characterization

We eventually got past the planning issues and had a fine conference. Lots of people participated, and our evaluations indicated participants thought the conference was a good idea that should be continued. Here are some statistics to characterize the conference:

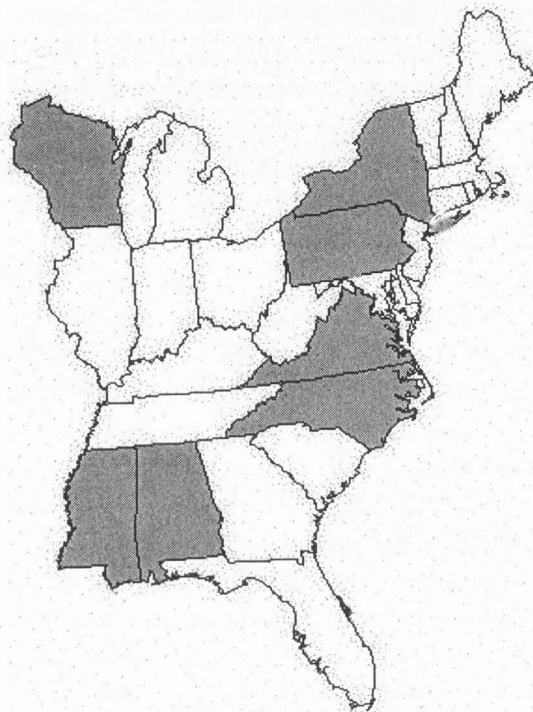
- >80 papers presented
- >100 authors involved
  - 46 agencies and institutions
  - 9 private sector entities
- 225 participants (attendees)
- 31 states and 4 Canadian provinces

Evaluation of 1<sup>st</sup> EWDM Conference included an immediate post-conference (on-site) inquiry and a 10-month mail follow-up (82% response). We generally found that attendees valued the professional interaction – networking and communication among attendees – that occurred. In addition, attendees reported that a lot was learned and much of it put to use after the conference. The conference has now been held 9 times in 7 states (Figure 1).

A quick look at some of the wildlife species that were the focus of presentations at the 1<sup>st</sup> EWDM Conference reveals a familiar cast of characters: white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), black bear (*Ursus americanus*), beaver (*Castor*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), and Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*). We were concerned then about isolated or “emerging” problems with these animals. In the interim the problems have grown to capture broad public and professional interest. Some problems, like those associated

with black bear and deer, seem to be growing exponentially in many locales. Participants in this conference series were anticipating such problems.

Figure 1. Shaded areas indicate states east of the Mississippi where the nine Eastern Wildlife Damage Management Conferences have been held.



Although suburban and urban wildlife issues were being addressed by people in wildlife damage management (Gary San Julian spoke to this issue at the 1<sup>st</sup> conference), early on “mainline” wildlife management professionals did not generally consider those problems to be of legitimate



research and management concern. Today they are headline grabbers all across the East, and the professional and scientific literature is filled with papers addressing such concerns. The EWDM Conference was a leader in bringing suburban and urban wildlife damage management issues into professional dialogue.

We had a panel at the 3<sup>rd</sup> EWDM Conference at Gulf Shores, Alabama, in 1987 dedicated to controversies in wildlife damage control. In that session, I described suburban deer management as an *emerging* controversy. Well that one blossomed during the intervening decade of the 1990s! I raised questions about how the profession will deal with the development of alternatives to hunting in many developed areas--that story is still unfolding. For example, however unpopular urban/suburban deer management was among wildlife agencies in the 1980s, many have taken the bull by the horns and are addressing these concerns as part of comprehensive approaches to deer management. In addition, states have invested in research and pilot projects applying new technologies such as fertility control in mammals, usually in combination with some form of public hunting or government culling of deer. This conference has been vital to sharing ideas and experiences for dealing with such vexing wildlife management problems and solutions.

In that same panel at Gulf Shores, Mike Conover, then with the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, spoke about the situation with Canada geese. He raised the point that the origins of that problem were much of our own creation. Though he didn't use the term 'stakeholder,' he spoke about the way some stakeholders reap the benefits from wildlife while others bear the costs. He called

for a system of accountability where those who benefit compensate those who are harmed by damage-causing wildlife. Despite Mike's suggestions, that inequity prevails yet today, and of course Canada geese problems also grew over the last decade.

So for some people-wildlife conflicts, the conference has been a harbinger of things to come, though we have not foreseen the magnitude of all issues on the horizon. For example, the implications of growing black bear populations had not been fully addressed in the conference series, yet today we have some serious situations developing in black bear country.

#### **The future for EWD conference series**

Looking to the future, I think a key idea that needs further development in the conferences is that the focus of wildlife management should be on influencing the impacts of wildlife on people. That is, we need to be sure we keep an eye on the target--outcomes couched in terms of human values. We should focus on benefits of wildlife management to people, whether these are reduction in problem aspects of people-wildlife interactions or enhancement of positive aspects of people-wildlife interactions. Ultimately, the outcomes of concern to wildlife damage management are exactly the same as for any other aspect of wildlife management--benefits to people and to the sustainability of wildlife resources and their habitat.

In summary, as I look to the future for this conference series, I would hope that it continues to be a forum that leads the way in several aspects of wildlife management. Six

important ones I have identified are:

- 1) Impact-focused, outcome-oriented management,
- 2) Community-based management (co-management),
- 3) Technology development,
- 4) Integration of biological and human dimensions,
- 5) Showcase for collaborative effort, and
- 6) Wildlife damage management is an essential component of comprehensive wildlife management.

### **Conclusion**

Major conferences such as the Eastern Wildlife Damage Management Conference can play an important role in exploring new conceptual, technical, and philosophical developments in areas of a profession such as ours. My assessment is that this series of conferences has accomplished that. But its contributions--your contributions--if important in the past will become even more significant in the future. Wildlife abundance is a great challenge to wildlife management. The emphasis of this conference series places it in a vital position as a forum for the development of the profession in the area of people-wildlife interactions. Living with wildlife has entered a new era for modern North Americans. It will take the scholarship and skills of people in this room and many others to meet the challenges this new era presents. This Wildlife Damage Management Conference should be the premiere forum where such people regularly congregate to create the

solutions society will need and expect of the wildlife profession.

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