

# **Tactical to Practical: The Human Component of Human-Wildlife Conflict Resolution**

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**ABSTRACT:** Often the greatest challenge in wildlife management is not the management of the animals themselves, but rather the human component of human-wildlife conflict. Persuasive and emotional dialogue is extensively used by private organizations and groups to promote specific agendas. In contrast, a persuasive educational format is often used by science-based groups to promote an agenda. We investigated the effects and importance of word choice using surveys involving wildlife and environmental issues. While topics were identical, survey questions were written to be Persuasive Educational or Persuasive Emotional in structure and were administered to students and to faculty-staff of Berry College. Based on results of surveys completed (n=568), responses could generally be manipulated depending on textual format. However, degree of direct exposure to wildlife and environmental topics presented appeared to influence the degree of manipulation achieved among students as well as faculty and staff. For example, perceptions related to issues involving mountain lion, a situation that does not exist in the state of Georgia, were readily manipulated depending upon the text presented. In contrast, challenges related to high populations of white-tailed deer such as deer-vehicle collisions and damage to horticultural plants and food crops have been issues in the state and at Berry College. Respondents indicated a need to maintain control of deer populations regardless of text presented attempting to alter that concept. This study illustrates the importance and potential impact of communication on perception to wildlife related concepts. We recommend that care be taken to identify concerns, interests and likely experiences and perceptions of an audience before delivery of information occurs. In some cases, written or oral communication on any particular topic may need to be modified to fit a particular audience in order to be effective.

**Key Words:** educational survey, emotional survey, wildlife perceptions

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