

Letter from the Editor

Without change there can be no progress: Implications for *Human–Wildlife Interactions*

This issue of *Human–Wildlife Interactions* (HWI) features a potpourri of articles, case studies, and commentaries that are as diverse as the journal’s namesake. The species reported on include timber rattlesnakes, deer, sharks, bats, serows, Missouri box turtles, chuckwallas, eastern gray squirrels, and European starlings. The common denominators for each of these species are human beings.

In the first issue of HWI, published in 2007, we asked Jim Miller to contribute a paper chronologizing the evolution of the field of wildlife damage management and human–wildlife conflicts with an eye on the future (Miller 2007). In 2007, the field of human–wildlife conflicts was so new that many of its founders were still active. Jim Miller was one of them.

Jim at that time had worked as a wildlife professional for >40 years. He first gained experience as a field biologist, extension forester/wildlife specialist, National Extension Program Leader, and educator/professor. He served as president of The Wildlife Society. Throughout his career, he has been active in and supportive of the field of wildlife damage management. Jim passed away this past year. In this issue of HWI, we provide a tribute to his career and his vision.

In his essay, Jim chronicled the transition of the field through the early twentieth century. Historically, the brunt of wildlife damage was felt largely by people in rural areas of North America who dealt with problems caused by wildlife by killing the problem species, eliminating habitat, changing crops or husbandry practices, tolerating the damage, or moving to a new area devoid of such problem animals. Wildlife damage management has transcended the rural landscape and is now common where humans gather (Messmer 2000).

Concomitantly, many of the solutions implemented historically in rural landscapes are impractical because of the increased expansion of development into previously rural landscapes, the increased fragmentation of land

ownership, and the increasing movement of people into wildland-urban interfaces. Because of changing local, state, and federal ordinances and regulations coupled with dynamic shifts in demographics and public perceptions and attitudes about the role of animals in contemporary society, there are more constraints on the tools, techniques, and capabilities that an individual or community in urban or rural areas can utilize to address a wildlife damage problem. As Jim pointed out, human concerns about the humane treatment of all animals must remain a paramount concern for wildlife managers.

Ultimately, the power to make wildlife damage management policy decisions is the responsibility of government. For these programs to be successful at balancing the needs of society with human treatment of animals, good science-based information is essential. Ideally, this information is used by government to guide policy development and management actions.

However, when there is controversy regarding what constitutes successful wildlife damage management, there are often inherent and deep differences in stakeholder values and emotions. The typical response of the scientific community to mitigate controversy has been “we need more science.” Because stakeholder values differ, more science may only increase the polarization. Contemporary examples of this “information deficit fallacy theory” are climate change.

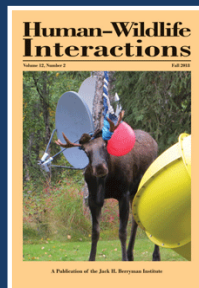
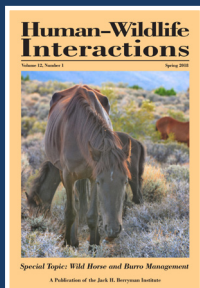
Success in managing human–wildlife conflicts to enhance human–wildlife interactions ultimately will not be achieved by reallocating governmental power, but rather by replacing power with increased stakeholder responsibility. Stakeholders must be engaged and asked to define their contributions. To be successful in these dynamic environments, managers will need to develop new competencies of empathy, respect, and adaptation to change; without change, there can be no progress.

Terry A. Messmer, Former Editor-in-Chief

Literature cited

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