

COMMUNICATIONS IN WILDLIFE RESOURCE PLANNING

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Abstract: Wildlife managers and planners are having difficulties communicating with each other. The need for improvement is urgent as wildlife agencies are increasing their planning activities within their own organizations and with other interests that are developing comprehensive area development plans. Single interest plans of various interests that could affect the wildlife resource must also be reviewed.

The communication problems entail a failure of wildlife managers to recognize the objective of their communications, a failure by planners to develop a clear set of terms and a broad semantic problem.

The solution to these problems consists of developing among wildlife managers an understanding of their objective and their audience when they initiate a message. Planners must establish a stable set of terms. Each discipline needs to familiarize itself with the terminology of the other.

If communications were satisfactory between planners and wildlife managers, there would be no need for discussion. Problems do exist, however, and I will attempt to define them and then offer some solutions. My objective is to improve communications between planners and wildlife managers and between both of these professional groups and the public.

If any of you are wondering at this point, why planners and wildlife managers need to communicate, let me describe

three general areas of involvement. These are: 1) wildlife agencies planning within their organizations for their own use, 2) wildlife interests planning in cooperation with other interests to form comprehensive area development plans, and 3) wildlife agencies engaged in the constant process of reviewing plans that will affect the wildlife resource.

Wildlife agencies are planning internally for several reasons. Modern management practices rely on short and long-range plans for both budget development and operations control. These agencies are aware that they must let other interests know their objectives and problems if they want any consideration in final development plans. A wildlife agency can either hire a planner and teach him the language of wildlife management or assign a wildlife manager to planning, in which case the manager must acquire the knowledge of the terminology of planning. No matter which way is chosen, the resulting plans must reflect the specific knowledge of the wildlife managers, comply with the rule of planning, and be understandable to all who will use it. It is also very desirable for the plan to be understandable to the general public.

Comprehensive area development plans are made by consolidation of many single interest plans into one plan that considers all uses in an area and then adjusts them so that the area's objectives are attained with minimum costs. In comprehensive planning, wildlife managers will be representing just one of many interests, each with its own language. Each interest must achieve an understanding of all the others so that conflicts can be identified and handled in the planning process. The final plan must be understood by all interests and by the public.

A steadily increasing task of wildlife agencies is plan review. In addition to comprehensive area plans where some type of area organization solicits single interest plans, there is a steady flow of tentative or proposed plans coming from many interests whose activities may affect the wildlife resource. These plans will each contain the special terms of each interest, but will all use the terms of the planner.

The communication problem between wildlife managers and planners consists of a failure by wildlife managers to recognize the real objective of their communications, a failure by planners to evolve a definitive set of terms and the existence of a general semantic problem. The solutions to these communication problems are really basic and are applicable to most problems of this type.

The originator of each message is responsible for its success. If the recipient of a communication is unable to grasp its meaning, the originator has failed. It will do no good to accuse the receiver of being ignorant. Remember, your objective is to convey your thoughts to him. A first step is for the originator of each communication to decide with whom he wants to communicate and how the receiver will use the message. This will help determine how the message should be delivered and the technical level of the language to be used. An oral delivery may be desirable when a proposal is being offered for immediate discussion, and in this case the style should differ from a written report. Written communication is imperative when the subject matter is complex and must be studied by the recipient and perhaps shared with others. Information of lasting value, such as inventory data or methodology, should always be transmitted in writing.

The choice of words is easiest when dealing with one's technical peers. It is when you must convey your thoughts to other disciplines that extreme care must be exercised. There is a broad language of science that is today shared by many of the branches of science and simplifies interdisciplinary communication.

Unfortunately, planners have shown a tendency to borrow from all, but develop few words of their own. Common words with a variety of meanings have specific restrictive meanings when used by planners. Demand, for instance, means several things to the layman, while to the planner it is used in the economic sense, meaning the numbers of people who have the desire to buy or participate, coupled with the ability to pay. Unfortunately planners are presently using several synonyms to express some of the basic thoughts of planning. Some, for instance, set goals while others establish objectives. One or the other should be designated as a correct planning term.

Management practices are forcing wildlife managers and planners to communicate with each other. It will be to their mutual benefit to do so, and this can be accomplished if the basic rules of communication are followed. The originator of each message must consider the needs and capabilities of the receiver and select a suitable method and style. Each discipline should increase its knowledge of the other's terminology and should avoid the use of words that obscure rather than clarify the thoughts to be exchanged. Planners must establish a stable set of definitive terms.