

# WILDLIFE MANAGERS AND LAND USE

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Abstract. Wildlife managers, and particularly those involved in managing wildlife on private lands, must be much more than just wildlife managers. They must be able to incorporate wildlife programs into existing land uses that are both economically and traditionally more important to the landowner than wildlife.

While our profession has been preaching multiple-use management, I find most wildlife managers incapable of actually developing such programs, due primarily to their lack of understanding of other land uses and management. For this reason, landowners are mostly unwilling listeners to their wildlife management programs. Secondly, we lack credibility as on-the-ground managers, since most of our efforts are still directed to law enforcement, planning and research.

As pressures increase to use our private open-space lands more intensively, it is a must that wildlife managers become multiple-use managers and get more involved. If we don't, wildlife resources will continue to take a back seat and suffer accordingly.

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As wildlife managers, land use is one of our greatest concerns, and rightly so, for how we use our lands determines not only the kinds of wildlife that will be present but their abundance as well. In fact, the majority of environmental concerns are directly or indirectly related to land use changes, such as damming rivers, industrial expansion, urban sprawl and recreational subdivisions. While our concerns are real involving these land changes, it is the broader aspects of land use that concern me, and to which I would like to direct my remarks. It is the open-space land in private ownership made up predominately of farm, ranch and forestlands. In California it accounts for close to 50 percent of the land area and over 50 percent of the wildlife habitat. Yet we, as wildlife managers, have had little if any impact on these lands as to their wildlife resources. The landowner is the real wildlife manager, for it is what he does with his land that determines the variety and abundance of wildlife. What concerns me is that with few exceptions, these lands are being managed more intensively as food and fiber

demands increase. The lands are managed generally for a single purpose, with little or no thought for secondary resources such as wildlife and recreation. Consequently, it is becoming more important that we work with landowners and impress upon them the importance of managing their lands on a multiple-use basis, and to consider all of their land resources. If wildlife resources were given due consideration, and management practices applied, these lands could produce as much, if not more, wildlife than they have in the past.

However, before this can be accomplished on a large scale, we have some hurdles to clear. Number one - how can we help landowners if they show no interest? I think you would be surprised at how many would be interested and willing if they knew where to begin, particularly if it could be demonstrated to them that it could be incorporated into their on-going management program.

From my work as a consultant, I have seen an increase in interest over the last few years by landowners to work with their wildlife resources. This increased interest, I think, is for two major reasons. One is purely economics: they want to increase their profits. The other is more on environmental lines: if they don't manage these resources now, it may be only a period of time before the public demands it, possibly even by means of regulation.

The economic incentive, I believe, is the most important one. Believe me, if we could demonstrate to a landowner how to profit from managing his wildlife resources, we would certainly have a major hurdle cleared. Presently, numerous landowners profit from wildlife by selling hunting privileges, (deer clubs being a good example) but few profit by managing wildlife resources. A property owner's wildlife management incentive bill was introduced in the Legislature approximately 5 years ago, however; it lacked the adequate support to pass into law. I will mention more about this bill later on.

The next two hurdles don't involve the land or landowner, but involve our wildlife profession as a whole. For one, we, in our profession, are not oriented or interested very much in managing wildlife and wildlife habitat on private land. This is particularly true on the State level. Both the Soil Conservation Service and the Cooperative Extension Service are involved, but with relatively few individuals. Instead, our profession is primarily oriented towards research, planning and law enforcement. When it gets right down to it, we spend very little time actually managing the land upon which our wildlife is dependent. California's deer program is an excellent example. We are all aware of the time and expense that the Department of Fish and Game has spent on behalf of the deer in the State, including a multitude of research projects, and of course we can't forget the latest deer management plan. While over the years we have learned much about deer, I doubt very much if all this work has had much bearing or impact on the deer population. In contrast, there is a bill that encourages prescribed or controlled burning of millions of acres of dense and mature brushlands of the State. If this bill is introduced as planned, and passes, it could have a tremendous positive impact on the deer. Unfortunately, the Department of Fish and Game has shown little interest.

Another example which indicates we are in a research and planning syndrome involves the private wildlife management bill I mentioned earlier. The bill was designed to encourage landowners to manage their wildlife resources, and actually required them to carry out positive management programs for wildlife. The bill initially received widespread support, even from the Department; however, they withdrew their support when it was discovered that many of their field personnel were not in favor of it. I can add a positive note to this, however, for the Department has indicated that such a bill, or something similar, may well now be in order.

A final example I use is general, but I think it is important. It is our over-critical nature when we see landowners destroy certain wildlife values without our giving any positive suggestions. I am continually surprised at what landowners are willing to do for wildlife, given the ideas and assistance. This is particularly true of recreational subdivisions that have sprung up in the mountains and foothills of California. By all means, we should work with such projects. If they have a detrimental impact on wildlife, mitigation measures should be recommended, and in extreme cases, the project should be discouraged. However, once a project has received approval, we can't just walk away and consider it a total loss. I believe we should be working with the developers to save as much wildlife and habitat as possible, and even enhance it where feasible. I have been encouraged with the few developers I have worked with over the past few years. When they understood the situation, they have provided the necessary monies to carry out active wildlife management programs, and without any push from state or local governments. On one of these projects we employ a full-time wildlife biologist, and have for the past 3 years. Working on such programs is a challenge and a real learning experience. More important, though, is the input we have been able to inject, and how the project relies on us now concerning land use decisions.

The last hurdle we must get over before we can effectively manage wildlife on private land involves our education and training. We are not educated or trained to work on private land where wildlife resources must be managed with other resources. From experience, I can tell you it is a different ball game. It not only involves knowing about and managing other resources; it involves economics. You must be a down-to-earth multiple-use manager. Presently, we lack credibility in this area, and that is why at times we find landowners to be unwilling listeners to our wildlife management programs. To be most effective, we must widen our horizons and become better educated and experienced in other land uses and resources. I think it is time colleges and universities that offer wildlife management add to, or balance, their curriculum with more land use and management subjects, including agriculture and economics. It would be particularly helpful for those students headed towards careers in private land management.

In summary, while our profession has concerned itself with land use and how it affects wildlife resources, I feel that the efforts and expertise in this area leave something to be desired, with little positive action showing on the ground. As pressures continue to increase for the use of these private open space lands, it is a must that wildlife managers become more multiple-use oriented and involved in applying wildlife management practices to the land. We must be more than law enforcers, researchers and planners.