

"WILDLIFE REHABILITATION: EXPANDING THE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK"

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ABSTRACT:

In the United States, wildlife rehabilitation is an activity that is governed primarily by regulations issued by state wildlife agencies. In this article, the authors present a conceptual framework which could be used to help agencies understand that wildlife rehabilitation, while possibly considered "outside the box" of wildlife management, is within the changing scope of wildlife agency responsibilities. Two charts are included that were used by the authors to effectively discuss wildlife rehabilitation with the Colorado Wildlife Commission during review and revision of the wildlife rehabilitation regulations in that state in 1995.

Beyond 'Hook and Bullet Clubs' - Changing Expectations

In the last few decades, the scope of responsibilities and activities of state wildlife agencies have expanded far beyond the traditional role of merely ensuring that adequate wildlife populations exist for the enjoyment of anglers and hunters. State wildlife agencies now find themselves facing a wide range of responsibilities involving wildlife, which more and more involve recognizing the needs and desires of new constituencies outside what have, at times, been described informally as the "Hook and Bullet Clubs".

The sense of urgency demonstrated towards any of these specific issues and responsibilities will vary, depending on state statutes, resource levels, legislative sentiment and a variety of other factors. These other factors can range from longer term changes in national and regional demographic trends (numbers of hunters is on the decline in the U.S. (Decker, 1993); or public opinion towards traditional methods of taking wildlife such as the use of leg-hold traps (Manfredo, et al 1995)) to more immediate local situations and events (disease outbreaks in certain wildlife populations in the state; or the results of the ballot box, in the form of referendums and grass roots initiatives).

Examples of these new responsibilities can range from providing formal input to county commissioners about placing shopping centers in a sensitive wildlife habitat; to oversight of aquaculture; to monitoring sensitive non-game wildlife species (including frogs and beetles); to development of strategies to protect ecosystems and biodiversity. While the scope and depth of state wildlife agencies responsibilities vary significantly, there is little doubt that the public expects the agencies to do far more than ensuring ample fish and game harvests for license buyers.

Wildlife Rehabilitation as a Regulated Activity

Since wildlife is generally considered the property of the state (unless it happens to be privately owned, as in a game park or zoo), wildlife rehabilitation is an activity that properly falls within the responsibilities of a state wildlife agency. Our research in 1994 on state wildlife rehabilitation regulations across the United States showed that most state

wildlife agencies do have some regulations governing wildlife rehabilitation activities (Casey, 1994).

But the research also highlighted the fact that those regulations were often relatively brief, vague or outdated when compared to regulations on other, more traditional hunting, fishing and wildlife management related activities. There are probably a variety of reasons that this is the case.

One reason may be that wildlife rehabilitation, in the eyes of a state wildlife agency, is still a relatively new activity, and has only recently received the visibility and recognition it truly deserves. Another may be that there are those in a state agency who believe that people willing to help an injured animal and return it to the wild should be allowed to do so with minimal government interference. Others may believe in minimal or no government involvement with the activity beyond assuring that no harm is done to populations. Or maybe it is that an agency with limited financial resources believes it does not have time or resources to give attention or priority to an activity that involves so few people or animals.

While there are many other plausible and valid reasons, our experience suggests there may exist an even more fundamental reason why a state wildlife agency could be slow to appreciate or embrace wildlife rehabilitation activities.

Recognizing a Fundamental 'Disconnect'

Wildlife rehabilitation is very different from many of the other activities that fall under the umbrella of traditional wildlife management (Dunlap, 1988). Many of the traditional agency activities are wildlife *population* oriented, such as monitoring wildlife population trends, minimizing the negative impact of commercial development on sensitive wildlife habitat, or working to reduce noxious weed infestations. Rehabilitation, on the other hand, is focused on saving *individual* animals. The differences in this unit of concern make it difficult for staff assigned to traditional conservation or wildlife management to understand or appreciate wildlife rehabilitation. (Though rehabilitators are often in a position to identify emerging issues, such as being amongst the first to notice an outbreak of a disease that could threaten sensitive populations.)

As a general rule, many of the traditional activities regulated by the state wildlife agencies can be broadly categorized as pertaining to wildlife used for either "Consumptive" or "Non-Consumptive" purposes. Regulations can be further categorized as to more specific recreational, commercial, scientific research or educational purposes or uses (Wagener, 1995). *Yet wildlife rehabilitation does not fit neatly into these traditional categories.*

Rehabilitation clearly is not a hobby and few of the tasks are fun (removing parasites from a wound, euthanizing animals, cleaning cages, etc.). Rehabilitation costs money rather than makes it. Rehabilitation involves technical problem-solving and scientific procedures but is not scientific research. Rehabilitators are often involved in educating the public about wildlife, but wildlife rehabilitation is not solely an educational effort.

It became obvious that to get the Colorado Wildlife Commission to understand and approve new wildlife rehabilitation regulations, we needed a way to demonstrate that wildlife rehabilitation is a legitimate wildlife related activity, but admittedly one that falls "outside the box" of traditional wildlife management. Additionally, research has indicated that some of the public even expect a wildlife agency to be more directly involved with the saving of individual animals, beyond just indirect involvement through the licensing of wildlife rehabilitators (Siemer, 1994).

Establishing a Common Frame of Reference

We developed the following chart shown in Figure 1 to help generate discussion with Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) Staff and the Colorado Wildlife Commission during the revision of our state wildlife rehabilitation regulations (1994-95). Discussion of this chart followed a more thorough discussion of the definition of wildlife

EXAMPLES OF WILDLIFE RELATED ACTIVITIES Involving Wildlife Agencies and the Public			
	Recreation	Commercial	Scientific & Education
“Consumptive”	Hunting Fishing Trapping Falconry Dog Training & Field Trials	Trapping Aerial Shooting Commercial Fishing Commercial Lakes Private Lakes Commercial Wildlife Parks Raptor Propagation Elk Ranching	Scientific Collection Education Collection (study skins, mounts)
“Non-consumptive”	Wildlife Watching Nature Photography Falconry	Exhibition for Education Private Parks (game birds, etc.) Aquaculture: hatchery	Educate the public on wildlife, habitat, etc. Teacher education Wildlife Programs for schools Project Wild

FIGURE 1

rehabilitation; basic components (facilities, zoonoses, euthanasia, release, etc.); costs; myths about rehabilitators; agency benefits of working with rehabilitators; and how rehabilitation fit into their newly developed Long Range Plan (containing new areas such as increased public stewardship of wildlife, involving more women in wildlife activities, etc.). (More specifics on this process are described in the "Wildlife Rehabilitators and a State Wildlife Agency: Strengthening a Relationship" *Journal of Wildlife Rehabilitation*, Summer, 1995.)

Wildlife rehabilitation did not fit very well into the traditional categories that the CDOW staff and Wildlife Commission were accustomed to using. The "Consumptive" and "Non-consumptive" groupings that were frequently used as broad categories just did not work in this case. The discussion even prompted the Staff and the Commission to acknowledge certain 'gray' areas, including that some "non-consumptive" activities could in fact do harm (e.g., disturbing birds during breeding) and "consumptive" did not always result in wildlife being consumed (in the case where wildlife was not taken during a hunting or fishing trip). Later in the discussion, rehabilitation was generally considered to be non-consumptive; and although some euthanized animals were used as food for other rehabilitating animals, it was a very different type of "consumption".

There was healthy discussion by some of the Commissioners that while rehabilitation was not commercial, scientific research or educational, they initially felt it must have an aspect of recreation to keep people motivated. To this view, rehabilitators presented an analogy by comparing rehabilitation to volunteer fire fighters, who volunteer to do often unpleasant, high risk tasks to save lives. Both activities take dedication, special knowledge and skills, a willingness to take risk, and commitment to life. As such, volunteer fire fighting is not considered recreation, nor, felt the rehabilitators, is wildlife rehabilitation.

Finally, it was agreed that wildlife rehabilitation seemed to be somewhat "outside the box" of traditional wildlife management functions (Figure 2) -- and that it was likely that other wildlife related activities would also be "expanding the box" in the future. These charts and discussions, following the basic information about rehabilitation, seemed to help provide a better understanding and perspective of where wildlife rehabilitation fits.

EXAMPLES OF WILDLIFE RELATED ACTIVITIES Involving Wildlife Agencies and the Public That "Expand the Box"				
	Recreation	Commercial	Scientific & Education	<i>Expanding the Box</i>
"Consumptive"	Hunting Fishing Trapping Falconry Dog Training & Field Trials	Trapping Aerial Shooting Commercial Fishing Commercial Lakes Private Lakes Commercial Wildlife Parks Raptor Propagation Elk Ranching	Scientific Collection Education Collection (study skins, mounts)	
"Non-consumptive"	Wildlife Watching Nature Photography Falconry	Exhibition for Education Private Parks (game birds, etc.) Aquaculture: hatchery	Educate the public on wildlife, habitat, etc. Teacher education Wildlife Programs for schools Project Wild	Wildlife Rehabilitation Advise on Human/ Wildlife Problems Importation of Exotic / Non-native Species

FIGURE 2

Achieving Common Ground

The discussions and work by the rehabilitators, CDOW Staff, and Colorado Wildlife Commission helped raise the overall understanding of wildlife rehabilitation and its benefits to wildlife and people. The Colorado Wildlife Commission approved most of the wildlife rehabilitation regulations recommended jointly by the CDOW staff and rehabilitator stakeholder group. It included a very specific statement to "...recognize wildlife rehabilitation as a legitimate wildlife related activity and permit qualified individuals to provide for the humane care of distressed wildlife..." for eventual return to the wild (CDOW regulations, 1995).

In addition, *Colorado Outdoors*, a CDOW publication, recently highlighted wildlife rehabilitation in their May-June 1996 issue. This collection of three articles very effectively describes wildlife rehabilitation and the many benefits rehabilitators provide to wildlife and people, profiled some rehabilitators and the species they rehabilitated, and described how a person decides whether wildlife needs to be rescued. It showed that the CDOW clearly views wildlife rehabilitation to be within their scope and puts "...more emphasis on public responsiveness and recognizes changing public values." (Kelly, 1996).

Conclusion

As wildlife rehabilitation grows, state wildlife agencies and wildlife commissions will be required to become more familiar with the many aspects of wildlife rehabilitation, including public expectations around the services provided by wildlife rehabilitators and how it fits into overall wildlife management. Each state wildlife agency will have different functions included in their scope of responsibilities. We suggest that conceptual framework can be helpful in better explaining that wildlife rehabilitation, while perhaps a non-traditional activity for them to consider, is indeed a legitimate wildlife related activity.

From time to time, wildlife rehabilitators may find themselves helping their wildlife agencies deal with and understand another issue outside their traditional comfort zone. We offer these two charts as one way to expand discussion and create a picture with that rehabilitation did not fit neatly into the traditional box, but it is within the changing scope of wildlife management.

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Shirley and Allan Casey, co-founders of WildAgain Wildlife Rehabilitation, Inc. in Evergreen, Colorado, have been wildlife rehabilitators since 1986. They have conducted national research on wildlife rehabilitation regulations, and presented and published on this and related topics to support rehabilitators and wildlife agencies. Their most recent analysis and description of trends in wildlife rehabilitation regulations were published in *Wildlife Rehabilitation*, the NWRA Conference Proceedings from 2005 and is also available at http://www.wildagain.org/regulations/state_wildlife_rehabilitation_re.htm. The Caseys also have conducted research, published, and presented around North America on a wide range of wildlife topics.

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