THE BIOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT OF WILD RUMINANTS

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

IMPROPER RANGE USE

by

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I do not like to be negative, choosing rather to emphasize the positive, the solutions that work rather than those that don't. Yet there is a body of literature that describes problems that have arisen as a result of certain management decisions, and the causes of those problems can sometimes be identified.

Regulations governing the management of wild ruminants are often in the hands of legislators. This is not, in itself bad. Legislators, however, are seldom knowledgable about ecological relationships, and under the democratic system of government they are expected to represent their constituency as much as possible. It is hard for the majority of legislators--and indeed for the majority of people--to understand that limited resources cannot be stretched indefinitely, and that the laws of society must be subordinate to the laws of nature.

On the whole, legislators are no better qualified to propose effective wildlife programs than, for example, the teamsters' union is capable of predicting next year's wheat crop. Game management simply is not their province. Ecological decisions must be in the hands of specialists, and the public and lawmakers must both understand that the laws of nature are paramount. This places an extraordinary responsibility on the ecologist.

Laws should not be enacted to solve problems, but rather to prevent them. Regulations should--and can--be changed before problems develop. No one, of course, can predict or prevent the effects of an occasional unfortunate act of nature on wildlife populations, but over the long haul we can prevent such from being disastrous, and minimize immediate effects.

Differences of opinion on management programs cannot be settled by sentiment or by "demands." Decisions must be based on ecological relationships if we are to retain a viable ecosystem. That is essential if we are to preserve natural life, including human life. Human compromises must not violate biological laws. Wildlife management cannot be an expression of the will of the majority if that will results in the destruction of natural resources faster than they can be replaced. This is a matter of self-preservation.

The realization of the importance of ecological relationships is so recent that we have, in the mistaken belief that resources are inexhaustible and that economic growth is limitless, allowed the conflict between ecology and economics to get completely out of hand. In our desire to improve conditions, we have allowed economics to over-shadow ecology. A high standard of living, an abundance of luxuries . . . are of little consequence if natural laws are not recognized and respected.

In spite of the recent interest in the environment, there is little real understanding of the underlying principles of animal-environment relationships, and of population dynamics. Some environmentalists consider preservation of the environment as having something to do with improving its

appearance, which may take the form of anything from picking up beer bottles and waste paper to creating city playgrounds. Others think is is leaving everything "natural," forgetting where food for city-dwellers and suburbanites--the major part of the United States population--comes from. Preservation of the environment is something vastly more essential--it is living within the basic physical and chemical "laws" and keeping populations within the carrying capacity of the world.

The concepts presented in the first twenty-two CHAPTERS of this SEVEN-PART SERIES are not unique to wild ruminants. They may be applied to any species, including humans. There is a vast accumulation of all sorts of data on natural phenomena--weather, space, soils, forests, nutritional needs, populations-- much of it collected by the U. S. Census Bureau ever since the beginning of this country that can be used in decision making. We can simulate situations and come up with reasonable approximations of expected results. The data, the technology, the analytical procedures . . . are far more advanced than the human's willingness to apply what is known, whether to wild ruminant problems, or human ones. I have personally sat in a room filled with specialists (experts!) on the environment, each one of us representing a special area of environmental concern, discussing minimum standards for air quality and minimum tolerances of life to chemicals in the environment. Yet the smoke emanating from some of those participants filled the room, making it most uncomfortable for those of us present who consider air pollution to be not only uncomfortable, but hazardous to health and life. How can experts arrive at decisions affecting the health and well-being of plants and animals if they are oblivious to their own health and well-being?

Traveling through airports, I am often confronted by sign-carrying "environmentalists" concerned about nuclear energy use. How many of them would be willing to support complete abolition of alcoholic beverages? Yet alcohol is associated with about 40,000 to 50,000 deaths in automobile accidents <u>each year</u>, not to mention the broken homes, broken lives, and misery that is experienced by families and friends of those involved in alcohol abuse. Need I mention the drug abuse problem throughout the world?

With so many examples of improper "range use" by humans, I wonder why anyone should be concerned about a few deer dying, or an overused elk range, or the permitting of hunting, or the abolition of hunting . . .

Humans are the funniest people, excessively sophisticated and yet almost pitifully ignorant.

REFERENCES, CHAPTER 23

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TYPE PUBL CITY PGES ANIM KEY WORDS---------- AUTHORS/EDITORS-- YEAR

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

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Proceedings of the Annual Conference of Western Association of State Game & Fish Commissioners (Annual conference beginning 1921)