

Responsive Management helps manage humans



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Aldo Leopold, long considered the father of wildlife management in the United States, once said, “The problem of game management is not how we should handle the deer ... the real problem is one of human management.”

Leopold was right. Managing wildlife is straightforward: provide the right combination of food, cover and water and it flourishes. But what do we do with all the complex people-related issues connected to wildlife management?

Wildlife professionals deal with three aspects of wildlife management: wildlife populations, wildlife habitat and people. Managers rely on a solid foundation of fact and research when it comes to managing wildlife populations and habitat. But when it comes to people, the human side of the equation is often managed based on input from only a few people, particularly through hearsay or assumptions — decidedly unscientific means that should never be used to manage wildlife.

The human element of wildlife management is becoming more important as it becomes clear that understanding the public often means the difference between success and failure. Public attitudes on wildlife management efforts are diverse, and successful strategies are developed not only through biological and ecological research, but also through human dimensions research to better understand and work with constituents and strike a balance between differences in public opinion. Public opinion should not dictate

wildlife management or wildlife policy, but sound decision-making can only be made when it includes a thorough understanding of the human element.

Our firm, Responsive Management, has helped agencies strike this balance for three decades by providing social science research used to inform wildlife managers. Responsive Management started in the mid-1980s as a pilot project developed to provide fish and wildlife organizations with tools and knowledge to better understand and work with their constituents. The conservation education committee of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies initiated the project.

In 1990, WAFWA’s original pilot project evolved into a private corporation, the survey research firm, Responsive Management.

Responsive Management has since worked with the NWTF and numerous other nonprofit wildlife conservation organizations and fish and wildlife agencies to better understand the public’s knowledge of, concerns and values regarding, and attitudes toward wildlife and its natural habitat in order to manage wildlife resources more effectively.

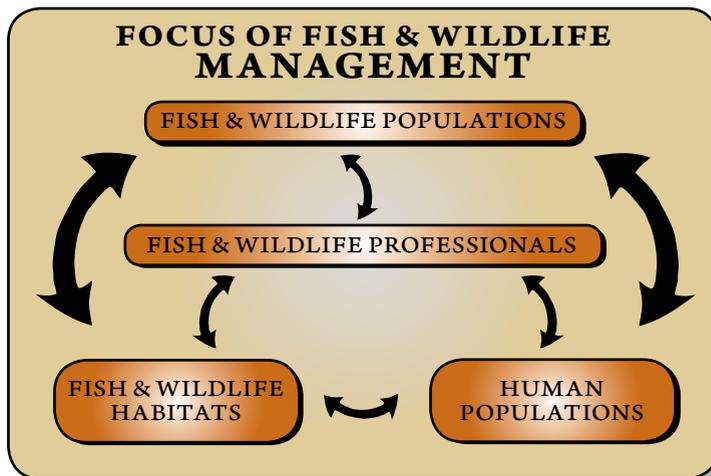
The results of the NWTF and Responsive Management study featured on page 30 of this issue provide a good example of incorporating the human dimension into agency programs. The study took a scientific approach in understanding what is and isn’t working when it comes to the myriad programs with a goal to increase Americans’ enjoyment of the outdoors through hunting, fishing and shooting.

Responsive Management has partnered with

the NWTF on several major human dimensions research projects, including a comprehensive assessment of the Women in the Outdoors program. This study examined many aspects of American women and their outdoor activities, including their interests, attitudes, motivations and participation in hunting, fishing and boating; license buying behavior; and the perceived and actual barriers affecting their participation in outdoor recreation. In addition, the study examined the outcomes and levels of satisfaction with the Women in the Outdoors program.

Responsive Management also partnered with the NWTF to determine the behavioral, attitudinal and demographic characteristics of spring turkey hunters, as well as to assess the impacts of spring turkey hunting on state economies and the U.S. economy.

The NWTF, in cooperation with Re-



sponsive Management, is paving the way for a better understanding of human dimensions, with the ultimate goal of conserving more wildlife and wildlife habitat, not only for our enjoyment today but, more importantly, for our children and grandchildren to enjoy. — Mark Damian Duda and Amanda C. Ritchie