

WINNING STRATEGY WHEN WILDLIFE CONFLICTS OCCUR

- **IDENTIFY AND ASSEMBLE THE RIGHT TEAM**—A seasoned public information manager who knows the media, a management expert with public speaking experience, a respected researcher and field officers trained to work with the media.
- **PREPARATION IS CRITICAL**—Develop a plan with clear communication paths, responsibilities, backups players and responsibility and accountability.
- **HAVE MESSAGES PREPARED**—Develop and test messages that clearly and concisely inform and show the agency is prepared and capable in a crisis.
- **PRACTICE**—Conduct annual training for field officers and biologists, with mock interviews for both print and electronic media.
- **TRAIN THE MEDIA**—Identify and spend time with key reporters, including fieldwork and research projects that builds trust between you and media representatives who regularly cover your agency.
- **WHEN CONFLICT OCCURS, CALL KEY REPORTERS**—Calling reporters you trust and who know your agency personnel and understand wildlife issues allows you to determine who will cover a story and shows your agency is willing and able to work with the public and press.
- **CONTROL OF THE FLOW OF INFORMATION**—When information becomes available, make sure your agency delivers the news to reporters.
- **CRISIS IS NOT THE TIME FOR AMATEUR HOUR OR 15 MINUTES OF FAME**—Avoid multiple spokesman or staff members who view a crisis as their opportunity for personal attention and advancement.
- **USE YOUR EXPERTS**—Polling and focus groups show researchers and biologists have excellent credibility. The chief spokesman can provide the what, when and where, but biologists need to tell the public and press “why”.
- **NEWS RELEASES SHOULD QUOTE THESE BIOLOGISTS** —Use news releases to allow biologists to provide the context, background and expertise that frames an issues and to underscore the agency’s professionalism.
- **COORDINATE WITH OTHER AGENCIES**—If conflict results in human injury, local law enforcement agencies generally have lead responsibility, including releasing names and addresses of victims. Have working relationships with law enforcement field officers and spokespeople in advance.
- **KEEP STATE OFFICIALS IN THE LOOP**—Political leaders often respond poorly when they find out about conflicts through the media. Be sure to inform them yourselves.
- **REGOGNIZE THAT CONFLICT EXPOSES THE AGENCY TO PUBLIC SCRUTINY**—People who seldom if every interact with wildlife agencies can form their opinions of your agency’s effectiveness through the “snapshot” of encounters. Tailor messages for a public that knows little about your agency or wildlife and demonstrate your respect for the public’s right to know.
- **VIEW HUMAN/WILDLIFE CONFLICT AS AN OPPORTUNITY**—When conflict occurs, seize the opportunity to show your agency’s professionalism and

expertise. Use all of your tools to show yourself at your best. Never, never, ever allow your agency to be seen as indecisive, confused or arbitrary.