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Publication Date
2003-08-24
PARTNERING TO REDUCE DEER-VEHICLE COLLISIONS: IMPROVING MANAGEMENT OF THE “DEERSHED”

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Abstract

(a) The problem statement – Nationwide, Deer Vehicle Crashes (DVCs) are killing and injuring more and more people. Each year in the U.S. alone, more than 1.5 million DVCs occur, affecting human safety and resulting in unnecessary social, environmental and economic losses. In addition, insurance companies, drivers and state and federal governments spend upwards of $3 billion each year for the ever-growing number of deer-vehicle collisions.

(b) Project objective – Sand County Foundation has constructed a growing partnership to unite interests for an ecological approach to reducing deer-vehicle crashes by: (1) managing the ‘deershed’ rather than engineered corridors, (2) public/private collaboration to implement the most economical and lasting solutions, (3) empowering and providing incentives to landowners willing to contribute to public safety by managing deer populations with human safety, deer herd quality and habitat integrity in mind, (4) monitoring, mapping and adapting management to evolving landscape and transportation trends, (5) providing sound information and support research and education on deer-vehicle crash reduction, (6) leading action to reduce deer-vehicle crashes.

(c) Funding source and total budget – private and public entities have contributed to different components of the initial, essential and partnered work. For instance, the Clearinghouse for Deer-Vehicle Collision reduction is a collaboration of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, College of Engineering and State of Wisconsin Department of Transportation with funding derived from state and federal sources. Initiating contributions are approximately $240,000. The initial working group conference to launch this multi-state collaboration included funds from the State of Wisconsin Department of Transportation and the private Bradley Fund for the Environment of Sand County Foundation and had a cost of less than $100,000. Full-fledged operation of this collaboration in five participating states with a sound database and peer-reviewed research activity is projected to cost several million dollars each year. Solutions coming from sound data, better application of meaningful practices and improved ‘deershed’ involvement will be highly cost-effective and will produce considerable co-benefits including reduced crop damage, improvement to native vegetation and less damage to nesting woodland, forest and shrubland bird habitat.

(d) Methodology – Assemble a network of stakeholders who will share information, develop solutions and make investments that reduce deer-vehicle crashes. This network will grow in stages, implementing pilot DVC reduction projects in select areas, then adapting and scaling up to regional demonstrations.

(e) Summary of findings and their applications – The work to create a sound database for the Upper Mississippi basin states of the U.S. Midwest is well along at the Clearinghouse. The first Working Group Conference of 2000 was well attended by stakeholders from across the Great Lakes’ states and is a springboard to a more advanced session planned for late 2003 or early 2004. Insurance company and transportation leaders are incorporating initial recommendations from scientists associated with the Sand County Foundation and the Clearinghouse into their budget considerations and planning.

(f) Implications for future research/policy development – We expect this national network that will link biologists/engineers, state agencies, federal agencies, highway user groups and insurers to achieve better understanding of causes of deer-vehicle crashes, management solutions at the scale of the “deershed” through which highway networks are dispersed and the will to affect change for safer highways.

(g) URL for Web site for further information – http://www.sandcounty.net

Biographical Sketch: Dr. Haglund earned a Ph.D in ecology from the University of Georgia where he studied with Eugene Odum and Frank Golley. His research interests have been in ecosystem level effects of weather modification, fire management and wildlife populations. Dr. Haglund was ecological consultant to the Wisconsin Legislative Council on non-profit water pollution, was a member of the Executive Committee of the Wisconsin Public Utility Institute, and was a private sector conservation advisor to the Cabinet of Premier Nick Greiner, New South Wales Australia. Current service activities of his include Rotary Club of Madison, Wisconsin, and church school education. His book Wild Wisconsin is published by North Word Press and his church school curriculum Religion Without Walls, is in press.