

Wildlife poll finds little change

Stephanie Veldman (Iowa State Daily), Issue date: 10/23/00

The attitudes of farmers about wildlife access to their crops has changed very little over the last 10 years, according to the 2000 Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll.

Paul Lasley, ISU Extension rural sociologist, conducted the poll by surveying about 3,000 Iowa farmers. The poll found eight out of every 10 Iowa farmers said it is important for wildlife to have access to their farmland, and about two-thirds said the animals have as much right to the land as the farmers.

When similar questions were asked during the last survey 10 years ago, a higher percentage of the farmers said the presence of wildlife on farms was important. In 1990, 69 percent of the survey agreed that wildlife has as much right to the land as farmers, compared to 67 percent this year.

"Looking at the percentage of farmers who also hunt, fish, bird watch and take photographs, there is only a 10 percent difference between bird watching and hunting," said Lasley about the poll that is conducted every 10 years. "It really has to do with the non-economic issues of enjoyment but doesn't add any value to the land."

Lasley said even though most farmers agree that wildlife has a right to access their farmland, they believe the government should pay them to save habitat for wildlife.

He also said there were a few areas of the poll that showed a major change this year.

"One question on if the illegal killing of wildlife should result in stiff penalties showed about a 12 percent decline from the 1990 survey," Lasley said. "This may simply be because producers see the overpopulation and the problems that result from the heavy crowding of wildlife."

Kelly Stoll, senior in exercise and sports science, was raised on a farm in east central Iowa. She said her family has never really had much of a problem with deer overcrowding because of deer season. "The land is their natural habitat, whether it is farmland or forest, and if we keep them out of the farmland, where will they go?" Stoll said. "They have as much right to the land as we do."

Stoll said damage to crops by wildlife is minimal. The only real problem they have encountered is raccoons eating the sweet corn.

"The sweetcorn is the only thing we protect with a low electrical fence to keep the 'coons out," she said. "They don't bother the field corn."

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