

## Summary of the Meeting of the Wildlife Disease Association Brainstorming Session

President P. Barrows convened the meeting the morning of 9 August 2003 at the annual conference of the Wildlife Disease Association (WDA) in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. Nineteen participants were present at the start of the meeting. Attendees included current WDA officers and council members, several past-presidents, and regular and student members of the Association. W. Karesh facilitated the meeting.

The assembled group began by reviewing goals that were set at the 1989 WDA Organizational Review and Planning Session in Corvallis, Oregon. At that meeting, 25 items were condensed into six goals:

- increase income to stabilize financial solvency
- become more proactive in public policy
- increase public awareness of WDA
- increase international presence of WDA
- increase scope of WDA
- work toward hiring an Executive Manager

The group concurred that progress has been made on most of these goals. Financial solvency was a major priority in 1989, but that issue has now been largely resolved through investments and dues increases. For a time, WDA was more proactive in public policy, but we have been less active recently and certainly, there are many current and relevant wildlife health related issues we could be involved in. Funding for wildlife disease research has increased primarily because of emerging disease with human and domestic animal health implications. We have increased our international scope by holding a meeting in South Africa and establishing a functioning African section; work is ongoing to reestablish/reenergize a Latin American section. Council has approved the hiring of an Executive Manager and interviews for this position are in progress.

Discussions then turned to brainstorming WDA into the future. The goal of the brainstorming session was to clarify elements of primary importance to WDA in the near term future including both ongoing programs and new ideas. Ideas were put onto paper and organized roughly into four areas that require attention by WDA: internal structure and operations; outreach and publicity; membership; and information transfer.

During the afternoon session, breakout groups were formed with each addressing one focal area. Each breakout group identified concerns and ideas then developed a list of action items for consideration by Council. Each breakout group provided a report to the reconvened assemblage.

- 1. Internal Structure and Operation.** With the hiring of an Executive Manager, the duties of elected officers, council, editors and committees may change. We need to re-examine and perhaps refocus committee and officer functions to reflect this change both internally and how we relate to and are perceived by those

outside WDA. We also need to work to increase the consistency of the relationship between our geographic sections and the WDA parent body. It was the consensus of the group that we should review our mission statement and in doing so, it was decided that it was still very relevant today and should be left alone. We also discussed the need for creative funding initiatives for the future, and the need to consider how we position WDA as a nonprofit Association, managed in a business-like manner, while maintaining quality service to our members.

Action items proposed:

- Formally review council, sections, and committee functions
- Maintain Executive Manager ad hoc committee to help define Executive Manager's functions and to review processes
- Consider council term increase
- Update bylaws and ensure a mechanism is in place to accomplish this as needed

- 2. Outreach/Publicity.** It was the consensus of this group that we need to do more to increase WDA outreach, visibility, influence, and impact on relevant issues. WDA membership should be viewed as a valued "credential" to its members. We should also focus our energies on attracting new members involved in topical issues, such as emerging diseases and bioterrorism, increase our influence with regulatory agencies, and also increase public awareness of our expertise on wildlife health issues.

Action items proposed:

- Increase membership, especially of students and members outside North America through website and other promotional tools
  - Expand and promote inexpensive association member option
  - Use our website to provide direction to experts, links to job sites, direction to significant sources of information, heavy advertising of meeting, reciprocal web links with other organizations, and links to other material of interest
  - Develop an electronic brochure as an alternative to the expensive and quickly outdated hard copy brochure
  - Cooperate with faculty to promote WDA and involve WDA members in presentations (may wish to develop a standard WDA PowerPoint presentation or introductory information on wildlife health)
- Build on and maintain recent success in international outreach
  - Encourage and assist formation of new Sections
- Broaden the relevance and scope of our published papers and presentations to bring in readers from conservation biology, wildlife management, and other related professions using approaches such as symposia, invited papers, and special editions of the Journal dedicated to selected topics

- Organize visit to hosting agency, university, etc. as part of our annual conference
- Explore expanded use of WDA logo
- Connect with non-traditional issues and partners (e.g., emerging infectious diseases, bioterrorism) via symposia and other venues
- Provide a t-shirt (rather than a conference bag) with each conference registration. A student design contest could accompany this plan

**3. Membership.** Outreach to students and our international colleagues should be the focus for increasing membership in and scope of WDA. Interaction between established WDA members and students at the annual conference could be fostered through a mentorship program and social activities. Established members can promote WDA during academic interactions with wildlife and veterinary students and by supporting student chapters of zoological medicine and wildlife clubs. The Student Activities committee could also be more active at this level. The WDA website provides an excellent venue for reaching students and should be fully utilized. International outreach is occurring and we need to promote these successes, including formation of the African Section and WDA formal support of the international meeting of The Wildlife Society in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Action items proposed:

- Formalize a recommendation for mentorship that can be incorporated into annual conference planning
- Establish a “Wildlife Disease Bowl” to be held on the first evening of conference registration
- Identify funding support for student attendance at the annual conference
- Enhance student services available on the WDA website, e.g., by creating a jobsite, providing specialists lists, and providing in-depth information on selected individuals via a focus article
- Encourage the Student Activities Committee to facilitate formation of student chapters of WDA and provide benefits to these student chapters.
- Exhibit the WDA display whenever possible and offer ‘memberships on sale’ to encourage new memberships.
- Promote international outreach successes.

**4. Information Transfer.** It was the consensus of this group that the Journal be put online in one form or another and that we improve our information transfer. Because this topic will be a major discussion at the editorial board meeting, we did not discuss further.

These reports were put forward to and accepted by Council. It is important to note that in accepting the report Council is accepting a set of recommendations to consider and expand upon. Acceptance of the report does not bind Council to accept all of the proposed strategies.

Respectfully submitted,  
Tonie E. Roche  
Past-President  
and  
Margaret A. Wild  
Secretary