One Way to Handle a Split Appointment

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Abstract: Wildlife and fisheries extension specialists typically hold split appointments. Identification of significant natural resource problems or opportunities and integration of research and teaching methods with extension programming can produce results that simultaneously satisfy extension program expectations as well as meet desired evidence for university-level scholarship. The wildlife-agriculture applied research and extension program, with emphasis on restoration of northern bobwhite quail populations on intensely farmed lands, illustrates the benefits of an integrated approach.

Key Words: agriculture, impacts, integration of extension, northern bobwhite, research and teaching objectives, scholarship, wildlife and fisheries extension programming

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Introduction

Once uncommon, split appointments are now the norm among extension specialists. I offer my comments to help newer specialists succeed while balancing their programs across two or more of the land grant functions. Although the program focused on in this paper was developed while I was a wildlife extension specialist with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, lessons learned during my prior 13-year experience as a specialist with Virginia Cooperative Extension prepared me to establish a new program focus in North Carolina. Perhaps the most important things I brought with me were a deep respect for integration of both the teaching and research missions of the Land Grant University with the extension mission, and that scholarly work in extension is evaluated by university faculty and administrators on the bases of program impacts, external resources generated, and documentation of those impacts in professional proceedings and journal papers.

Program Identification and Development

Throughout the southeastern United States, the northern bobwhite quail and at least 18 other birds associated with early successional habitat have declined precipitously since approximately 1960. While the current Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative addresses the decline in a comprehensive manner, in 1990 there was a dearth of scientific information to guide farmers and state wildlife management agencies in North Carolina and Virginia.

In 1990, I became the Extension Wildlife Specialist and Zoology Department Extension Leader at North Carolina State University. I was encouraged to develop a program to enhance wildlife benefits on farmlands, as well as deal with wildlife damage management, teach undergraduate courses in natural resource conservation and communications, establish an applied research program, and lead the Zoology Department extension program for fisheries, wildlife and aquaculture. My official appointment was 60% Extension and 40% Academic, but in reality I was responsible for extension, teaching, applied research, and administration. Zoology Department resources to support extension programs in wildlife had diminished both in amount and purchasing power, despite funds that accompanied the new aquaculture emphasis in 1988. To succeed, I would need a sharply focused program to simultaneously address wildlife issues on private lands, satisfy undergraduate and graduate teaching expectations, and report results in both peer-reviewed extension publications and journal papers. Acquiring external resources of at least $50,000 per year was necessary. Also essential would be an extensive network of mutually supporting alliances among university faculty and extension colleagues, state and federal agency professionals, leaders in the agricultural community, and conservation organization leaders.

Shortly after joining NC State, I met with the Chief of the Wildlife Management Division of the NC Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) to explore program options. NCWRC biologists were

concerned that agricultural pesticides and lack of ground cover on farmlands were important reasons for the quail decline, but scientific information was lacking. Because of the credibility of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service with the agricultural community, the NCWRC funded a review of scientific information on pesticides and the publication of a series of peer-reviewed extension factsheets. The agency also supported development of an applied research project to test the wildlife benefits of filter strips of native vegetation at edges of tilled fields, particularly along drainage ditches. Nationally, concerns that intensive agriculture might not be environmentally and socially sustainable led to the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, which provided the opportunity for university faculty to compete for grant money. Jim Miller, then National Program Leader for Wildlife and Fishery Extension Programs with USDA, helped me make contacts with EPA. Doctoral student Bill Palmer, Agronomy Extension Specialist John Anderson, and I wrote a proposal that won the 'gold ring'. We proposed to test the idea that landowners who adopted the practice of edging their tilled fields with filter strips would improve water quality and attain wildlife benefits, especially for the bobwhite quail, without reducing farm profitability. Later, a second SARE proposal was funded. We also received funding through the 319 Program of the Clean Water Act. Because our initial research results were sufficiently encouraging, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries joined with NCWRC to provide substantial funding as well. In addition, Quail Unlimited in North Carolina and Virginia helped. Between 1991 and 2002, the extension and applied research program received over $1 million in funds.

Program Results

Nine peer-reviewed extension publications that provided a crop-by-crop evaluation of pesticide risks to wildlife were completed. Ten professional journal papers were published, the most recent and final one in the Winter 2005 edition of the *Wildlife Society Bulletin*. Two graduate students completed their doctorates, and eight completed their Master of Science degrees. Over 40 young wildlifers worked as field technicians, doing vegetation sampling, hatching, raising and imprinting bobwhite quail chicks, trapping and indexing abundance of bobwhite nest predators, and censusing song bird populations. Today former graduate students and technicians are working as wildlife scientists and managers in several states. Information generated by the research program was presented at numerous field days, professional conferences, and in various ways to illustrate lectures in courses. A video, *Quail at the Edge – Can We Bring Them Back?* was produced, disseminated throughout the southeastern states, and won regional and national awards. Program results supported establishment of Conservation Reserve Program CP-33. Field borders of natural, early successional vegetation are now used to increase quail populations on farmlands in the southeastern U.S. Numerous awards were received by members of the program's professional and conservation leader network, called the Farm Wildlife Recovery Team.

In 1990, I came to NC State as an associate professor without tenure. I left a tenured position at the same rank at Virginia Tech. At NC State, my objectives to teach undergraduate courses, establish an extension-applied research program, and lead the departmental extension program in wildlife, fisheries, and aquaculture were reached. I was promoted to full professor with tenure within three years and was rewarded financially as well. My career goal of improving wildlife and natural resource conservation nationally through education was attained.

Conclusions

An extension specialist with a split appointment can strategically design a program to simultaneously satisfy reasonable expectations for scholarship at a major university. Meaningful research can be funded and conducted under an extension position, simultaneously enhancing professional academic status and practical resource management. Second, colleagues in allied academic departments and natural resource agencies can become important team members when the credit, financial resources, and personnel are allocated carefully to accomplish program objectives. Third, the extension specialist position is excellent for developing and maintaining open and useful communications with a diverse team of professional and citizen

leaders. Fourth, generating grant proposals, keeping all the loose ends tied down, communicating with all the partners, and making sure we had resources to accomplish our objectives and meeting numerous deadlines for reports amounted to hard work. Finally, the CSREES National Program Leader for Fisheries and Wildlife was an essential source of information and contacts that led to major funding that made the program possible and successful.

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