

Framing problems to understand stakeholders, reduce conflict, and find solutions

OFTEN, FRAMING THE PROBLEM IS THE PROBLEM. Leong et al. (2007) proposes a conceptual model that helps resource managers determine whether their “frame”—filter or lens through which people interpret and process information—on a particular issue jibes with other stakeholders. The particular issue presented in the article is management of white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) at Fire Island National Seashore (New York) and Valley Forge National Historical Park (Pennsylvania), but managers could apply the model to other species in other contexts. The model illustrates the variety of ways a group of stakeholders can define a complex issue. For instance, if the overarching issue is deer abundance and a citizen frames the issues to be about reducing the incidence of people feeding deer (as a solution to deer abundance), but a resource manager frames the issue to be about immunocontraception and sets up bait stations to attract deer for inoculations, then the citizen may see the management solution as exacerbating the problem, not solving it.

Additionally, the authors point out that the considerations of stakeholders are generally broader than the problem frames typically considered by NPS managers. Knowing what these citizens’ frames are will help managers gauge responses. For example, results of this study showed that stakeholders concerned about specific impacts (e.g., deer-vehicle collisions, spread of disease or parasites, or loss of ornamental landscaping) often desired faster results from a management action than stakeholders who were concerned about broad ecological effects (e.g., habitat alteration or changes in deer population dynamics).

The model also illustrates the relationships among different frames and their levels: anthropogenic activities (level I) result in broad ecological effects (level II), causing events or interactions between deer and people or resources (level III), some of which lead to habituation of deer to anthropogenic activities (level IV), amplifying perceptions of specific impacts (level V) (fig. 1). For example, if citizens have identified changes in deer behavior (a level IV frame) as the problem, but managers have identified vegetation damage (a level II frame) as the problem, then “they may apply different metrics of success to the same management action, resulting in incompatible opinions about whether or not a management action ‘works,’ thereby posing the risk of decreasing agency credibility, eroding relationships, and ultimately increasing conflict.”

Being at different levels in the system, however, does not necessarily equate to failure. If stakeholders and managers recognize differences, they may be able to find solutions. The authors con-

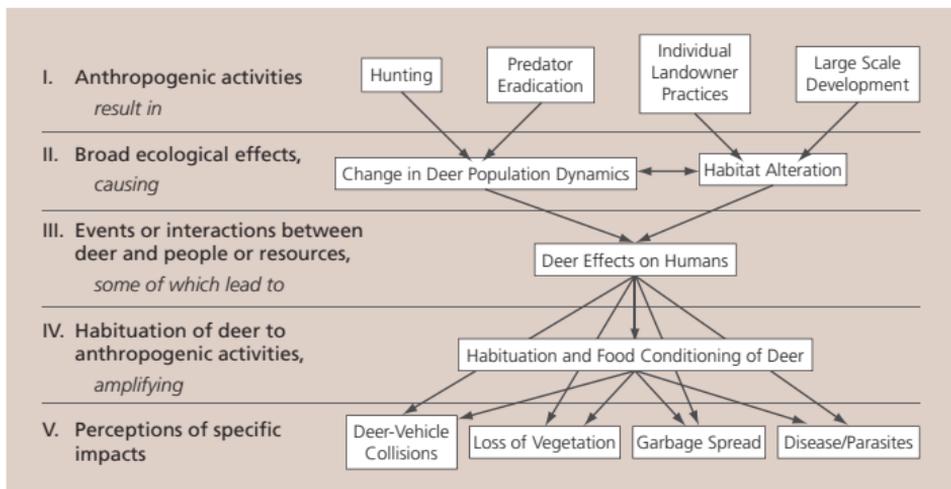


Figure 1. Elements of messy deer problems in and around northeastern U.S. NPS units, as collectively described by local community residents. DERIVED FROM LEONG ET AL. 2007, P. 69

tend that “a more robust view of the problem may be achieved by synthesizing multiple problem frames.” Furthermore, restricting attention to an established management frame “misses opportunities to identify creative solutions outside agency jurisdiction.”

Leong et al. (2007) provides a conceptual model for identifying frames of stakeholders (citizens and managers), which the authors admit is a starting point. Although future research and managers must take this model and develop a tool that facilitates constructive dialogue among stakeholders, Leong et al. (2007) provide a frame for taking this step.

Reference

Leong, K. M., D. J. Decker, J. Forester, P. D. Curtis, and M. A. Wild. 2007. Expanding problem frames to understand human-wildlife conflicts in urban-proximate parks. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 25(4):62–78.

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