



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation

Final Position Statement

Responsible Human Use of Wildlife

Because humans are part of a functioning environment, we ultimately and legitimately derive our livelihood, and many of our cultural values, from the resource base. Human societies have recognized and accepted the use of wildlife resources for food, clothing, shelter, hunting, fishing, trapping, viewing, recreation, and as an indicator of environmental quality. All humans and human societies use wildlife directly and/or indirectly, because wildlife generates tangible goods and income and contributes to the economic and spiritual well-being of society. However, human use of natural resources, including wildlife, must be carried out in a responsible manner so that ecological processes can continue to function and sustain a diverse, healthy environment. This, in turn, will result in the continued well-being of both humans and wildlife.

Human activities are a major factor in ecosystem disruption worldwide. Human population growth and technological development result in dramatic reductions and alterations in quality and availability of wildlife habitat, over-use of some wildlife species, greater human dependence on domesticated animals, and changes in the functioning of most ecosystems.

Abuse of the land and water resources exacerbates the decline of natural resources and deterioration of the ecosystem's abilities to support wildlife and human populations. Maintenance, restoration, and enhancement of wildlife populations and habitat characteristics through scientific management and regulations are vital to ecological functioning, genetic diversity, and perpetuation of wildlife populations, species, and habitats.

Conservation-minded citizens and resource management professionals can successfully slow or reverse the decline of wildlife species and destruction of habitats. Prudent management practices and regulations, supported by a conservation-minded public, are essential for restoration of wildlife species, populations, and habitat productivity. This allows for continued responsible consumptive and non-consumptive use of some wildlife species by humans.

Certain activities, such as hunting, fishing, trapping, wildlife rehabilitation, wildlife feeding, wildlife viewing, and other appreciative or recreational uses of wildlife, can have both positive and negative effects on natural resources. However, adhering to the sustainable use doctrine of conservation should allow these activities, and others, to be done on a minimal-impact basis.

Social acceptance of wildlife use reflects the cultural value system of society, human benefits derived from use, and liabilities associated with using or not using the resource in a particular manner. However, the decision of an individual to participate or not participate in a wildlife-related activity should not prevent others from exercising their own freedom of choice within the realm of constitutional and statutory legality. Participation in or support of wildlife-related

activities that are based on the sustainable use doctrine should be encouraged, but are a matter of personal choice.

Humans can take responsibility for use of wildlife by regulating human activities that influence wildlife and habitats. Benefits to wildlife and humans can be maximized through the support and application of scientifically based management techniques developed in an ecological and social context that promotes sustained survival and welfare of wildlife populations. When people choose to be involved directly in responsible wildlife management, the overall value of wildlife is enhanced. This enhanced resource value increases:

- economic importance,
- cultural importance,
- understanding of roles and needs of the resources,
- long-term ability to support and perpetuate the resources,
- ability to protect ecological processes that sustain the resources, and
- ability to control negative aspects of the resource, such as crop depredation or diseases.

The policy of The Wildlife Society with respect to responsible human use of wildlife is that:

1. Such use is consistent with ecological principles and is an appropriate human activity.
2. Management of wildlife in ways that sustain and enhance wildlife populations, species, and habitats for human benefits is appropriate.
3. Each individual can choose if he or she should be directly involved in any legal wildlife-related activity, and this choice is consistent with social principles.
4. Management of wildlife in ways that sustain and enhance the integrity and long-term survival of a population or species or the viability or integrity of the ecosystem(s) supporting that population or species is appropriate.
5. Human wildlife-related activities should enhance the overall value of wildlife resources. These enhanced values improve potential opportunities to protect and perpetuate wildlife, understand its habitat needs, and improve its economic, cultural, and social importance.
6. The future of wildlife and diverse ecosystems depends on human stewardship. Such stewardship must consider the growing human population, decreasing availability of pristine wildlife habitats, and the need to maintain and manage wildlife populations for sustained human use and enjoyment in economically, socially, and environmentally acceptable ways for present and future generations.
7. We support and promote the position that humans are responsible for promulgating and enforcing laws and developing management programs essential to sustaining the long-term welfare of wildlife, as well as developing good stewardship understandings and values, leading to a good ethical standard of use. Wildlife laws, management policies, and programs should enhance the values and benefits of wildlife resources, while minimizing liabilities associated with wildlife populations, species, and habitats.
8. Options for wildlife management activities and habitat alterations are developed by trained wildlife professionals and must be implemented and coordinated through resource management agencies that are legislatively mandated and empowered to do so.

9. Educational efforts about wildlife use should emphasize the interdependence of humans and wildlife, the obligations to manage uses of wildlife and impacts on habitats under the public trust doctrine of law, and the requirement that management programs be based on the best available science and accumulated experiences.