

# AMERICAN SOCIETY OF MAMMALOGISTS

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## Conservation Annual Report 2003

**Committee Members:** B. Bergstrom, B. Blood, E. Boydston, T. Doonan, K. Foresman, T. Gehring, J. Goheen, R. W. Kays, M. Kreuzer, A. Krevitz, K. LoGiudice, C. Long, S. MacDonald, R. Manson, R. McAliley, A. Morzillo, D. Rabon, J. Rachlow, L. Randa, P. Reynolds, R. Rose, M. Schadler, S. R. Sheffield (Chair), S. Vignieri, J. Young, J. Yunger.

### Information Items:

The Conservation Committee was first established by the ASM in 1927. First known as the Conservation of Land Mammals Committee, the name was changed to the Conservation Committee in 2002 to reflect the fact that it dealt with conservation issues that included all mammals. It is one of the oldest and consistently most active committees in the Society. The Committee functions to fulfill ASM's responsibilities to promote conservation and welfare of natural populations of terrestrial and aquatic mammals, and works closely with the Marine Mammals Committee in dealing with marine mammal conservation issues. Service on the Committee provides ASM members interested in conservation with opportunities to work towards supporting mammalian conservation in a variety of ways. Currently, the committee is subdivided into 8 subcommittees, including 2 action subcommittees (Position Letters, Resolutions) and 6 information subcommittees (Conservation Education, Communication/ Coordination, Federal/State Regulations Monitoring, International Conservation Issues, Special Projects, and Mammalian Conservation News. In 2002-2003, the Aldo Leopold Conservation Award subcommittee was moved to Standing Committee status and the Federal/State Regulations Monitoring subcommittee was added. The subcommittee reports are as follows:

1. **Position Letters** (Alex Krevitz, Chair): The position letters subcommittee pursued development of 7 new position letters this year, including letters dealing with an EPA proposal to end its responsibility for Section 7 consultations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) when registering or re-registering pesticides, a proposed rule to amend the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) which would impact biodiversity on 192 million acres of National Forests and Grasslands in the US, a draft EIS for the NW National Petroleum Reserve put out by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the final plan for the conservation and management of the gray wolf in Montana, the USFWS reclassification and proposed delisting of the gray wolf, feral and free-ranging domestic cats, and conservation and recovery efforts for the grizzly bear in the lower 48 contiguous states.

The first letter was written to the EPA in response to a public comment period for their advanced notice for proposed rule change that would amend the EPA's implementation of Section 7 of the ESA, which requires that all federal agencies consult

with the 2 federal Services (US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service) responsible for all endangered and threatened species matters to ensure that any action they undertake is unlikely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered or threatened species. The proposed amendment would assign the EPA, rather than the Services, to determine whether the registration and use of a pesticide is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any listed species or destroy or adversely modify critical habitat. The letter pointed out that this proposed amendment is greatly flawed, would needlessly place endangered and threatened mammals and other organisms at a higher risk of mortality due to pesticide exposure, and would only serve to significantly weaken the ESA. We also called on the EPA to honor their existing Section 7 consultation obligations with the USFWS and NMFS on listed species in their pesticide registration/re-registration activities.

The second letter, a sign-on letter initiated by Defenders of Wildlife and World Wildlife Fund, was written to the USDA - Forest Service regarding a proposed rule change involving the National Forest Management Act (NFMA). Specifically, the change dealt with the species viability provisions of the NFMA that are a key mechanism for ensuring the diversity requirements of the Act. This proposed change could have negatively impacted biodiversity on 192 million acres (National Forests and Grasslands) in the United States. The letter stated that neither of the proposed options for ecological sustainability in the Proposed Rule is consistent with species viability and called on the Forest Service to withdraw the Proposed Rule and implement its existing Rule from 2000. The letter also called on the Forest Service to include in its Rule the following features: encourage more (not less) participation from scientists, retain ecological sustainability as the primary goal, develop scientifically credible approaches to viability, incorporate the 2000 roadless protection rule, require monitoring as part of the adaptive management cycle, and require firm, transparent, and trackable performance-based standards.

The third letter was written to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in response to their draft EIS for the northwest National Petroleum Reserve-A (NPR-A). The BLM, as managers of these 8.8 million acres of public real estate in the arctic, put forth in this draft EIS a plan to develop this land specifically for oil/gas leasing. The draft EIS itself was voluminous (>1,000 pages) and presented a lopsided development plan that would endanger the unique areas of the NW NPR-A and undermine responsible environmental safeguards. We pointed out that this draft EIS falls significantly short of what we believe to be acceptable for a draft EIS under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Alternatives provided in the draft EIS were not balanced, not realistic, nor did they conform to the requirements for “adequate and appropriate protection for the unique cultural, natural, fish and wildlife, scenic and historical values” of the NPR as laid out in the National Petroleum Reserve Production Act of 1976. The Alternatives given in the draft EIS emphasized the literal assets of the area (National Petroleum Reserve), ignoring most or all of its other valuable natural aspects. Given the serious flaws found in the draft EIS, our recommendation was for the BLM to go back to the drawing board and significantly revise the draft EIS and make it available for public comment once more, this time with a longer comment period (at least 90 days). We also provided many constructive comments on how Alternative C (their “conservation” alternative @ only 47% of the NW NPR-A opened to oil/gas leasing) should be improved. The timing of the

National Academy of Sciences report on cumulative impacts of oil/gas activities on Alaska's North Slope was fortuitous for us as the report was released a few weeks before our letter was written and was cited frequently throughout our letter.

The fourth letter was written to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks regarding their proposed final plan for conservation and management of the gray wolf. This is the same plan (then in draft form) that our committee commented on through a position letter last year. This time, it was clear that the reason for this plan was that the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) was planning to completely delist the gray wolf in the lower 48 contiguous states (except the Mexican wolf). In fact, it appears that the plan existed solely as a means for the states to take over the federal responsibility for the gray wolf in the lower 48 contiguous states (except Mexican wolf). Our major concern is that the recent reclassification of gray wolves by the USFWS (1 Apr 2003) downlisted Montana's gray wolves from endangered to threatened, and on the same day, the USFWS proposed to completely delist Montana (and all other) gray wolves in the lower 48 contiguous states (except Mexican wolf). This rapid push toward delisting on the part of the USFWS is an incredibly premature action on their part and, in their rush to push gray wolf management off onto the states, appears to violate the ESA. In the case of Montana, with so few individuals (estimated at only 183) concentrated in a small fraction of the state's total area (extreme NW and SW Montana only) as well as past history (complete extirpation), continued threats (predator control, prey population diseases, habitat loss, illegal shootings, public misunderstanding, etc.), and the fact that they were downlisted from endangered to threatened only a month ago, complete delisting obviously is not warranted at this time and doing so would be an egregious error on the part of the USFWS. Therefore, we suggested that the only Alternative put forth in the plan that maintains current protective measures for gray wolves under the ESA is Alternative 1. In addition to the problem of premature delisting, we also pointed out several other concerns with Alternative 2 (the Agency's preferred alternative), including no secured funding sources for monitoring and management, no information on long-term population viability and harvest options, and no mention of use of a fully integrated management model for addressing wolf-livestock conflicts.

The fifth letter also deals with gray wolves, and this one to USFWS, Congress, and the General Accounting Office (GAO) addresses the recent (1 April 2003) USFWS reclassification of gray wolves as well as their announced plans to delist gray wolves in the lower 48 contiguous states (except Mexican wolf). The recent reclassification of gray wolves downlisted both the eastern and western distinct population segments (DPSs) from endangered to threatened. This includes all gray wolves in the lower 48 contiguous states except the Mexican wolf. In the same Federal Register, USFWS announces plans to delist the eastern and western DPSs of gray wolves. In Nov 2000, our committee provided a detailed set of comments to USFWS on this proposed reclassification, and we were disappointed to see that our comments were generally disregarded. We feel that this reclassification is seriously flawed and that it should be challenged, and also that the rush to delist the gray wolf is incredibly premature and an egregious error on the part of USFWS.

The sixth letter deals with feral and free-ranging domestic cats and was sent to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in order to give support to their proposed new tough policy on feral and free-ranging cats. This letter was originally

written back in 2001, and updated in 2002, to address a concern about impacts of feral and free-ranging cats on small mammal populations, specifically as it concerns insular and other vulnerable mammalian species such as the 6 endangered subspecies of the beach mouse, *Peromyscus polionotus*, occurring along the coasts of Alabama and Florida. Currently, there are nationwide programs known as TTVAR (Trap, Treat, Vaccinate, Alter, Release) or TNR (Trap, Neuter, Release) that take in orphaned or otherwise feral cats with the sole purpose of releasing them back into the wild in “healthy” condition. Threats that cats pose to small mammals are compounded by current policies of this program, where cats are fed, vaccinated, spayed/neutered, and released back into wild areas where the now healthier cats exert an increased negative impact on small mammals, birds, and a number of other smaller animals. Although policies of this program are well-intended, release of these cats into the wild is taking a serious toll on small mammal and bird populations, particularly in the case of the beach mouse (a listed subspecies in AL and FL). A recent study found that some 15 million cats in Florida spend all or part of their time outside preying on wildlife and that they kill as many as 271 million small mammals and 68 million birds annually. Our letter supports adoption of a tough new policy on feral and free-ranging cats in Florida, including prohibiting the release, feeding, or protection of cats on FWC-managed lands or other public lands that contain significant wildlife habitat, opposing creation or maintenance of TTVAR, TNR, or related programs that manage feral or free-ranging cat populations, and the need for new rules to minimize the impact of feral and free-ranging cats on native wildlife. We have been in contact with The Wildlife Society, the Ornithological Council, and the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles on this particular issue, and all of these organizations have indicated an interest in a joint effort on this issue. We plan on sending this letter out to many other recipients, either solely or jointly, in the near future.

The last letter dealt with the continued lack of action on the part of the current administration to conserve and recover the grizzly bear in the lower 48 contiguous states. Not only has there been a complete lack of action from Secretary Norton over the past 2 years on this matter, but we never received any response back from our 2001 resolution (with cover letter) on grizzly bear conservation/recovery as well as our joint position letter on grizzly bear conservation/recovery (with 7 other scientific societies) from Aug 2001. Further, 2 newly surfacing issues have us deeply concerned; the administration’s plans to delist the grizzly bear in the lower 48 contiguous states and their blatant disregard for the grizzly bear and its habitat by allowing mining leases in the middle of its habitat in the Cabinet Mountains. This small, isolated population of grizzlies is particularly vulnerable to human disturbance, yet mining leases are being awarded in their habitat regardless. This letter to Congress, as well as to Department of the Interior officials and the General Accounting Office (GAO), clearly points out this failure of Norton et al. in this matter and requests that action be immediately taken by the Department of the Interior to conserve and recover the grizzly bear in the lower 48 contiguous states as mandated by the Endangered Species Act. There is major interest in another joint letter from scientific societies on this issue, and we have recently been in contact with The Wildlife Society, Society for Conservation Biology, and others on this.

In the upcoming year, this subcommittee intends to continue to follow up on letters in which no response or other news has ever been received. There are a number of issues potentially meriting position letters, including large carnivorous mammal conservation

and recovery, great ape conservation, the bushmeat trade, the fate of the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) or other nongame funding measures in Congress, and proposed listings/delistings of mammalian species by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. These and other related issues will continue to be monitored by this subcommittee. Recommendations for position paper issues are always welcome from any ASM member.

**2. Resolutions** (Charles Long, Chair): The resolutions subcommittee received 1 suggestion from within the Committee for resolutions this year. This year's resolution deals with a red fox introduction in Tasmania. Over the past couple of years, there has been a suspected planned and deliberate effort by 1 or more persons to introduce red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) onto the island of Tasmania. This introduction involved the release of at least 19 individual red foxes in at least 3 different locations, including the Tasman peninsula in southeastern Tasmania and the northwestern coast of Tasmania near Somerset, and it is estimated that there may be as many as 30-40 red foxes currently running wild in Tasmania. Until this introduction event, Tasmania had been fox-free and was an island refuge for marsupials, ground-nesting birds, and other vertebrates that have become threatened, endangered, or extinct on mainland Australia. Mainland Australia has been battling destructive impacts of the exotic red fox for over 100 years, and many mammalian species have become extinct (eastern quoll, Tasmanian bettong, Tasmanian pademelon), endangered (eastern barred bandicoot), and threatened (long-nosed potoroo, southern brown bandicoot, New Holland mouse) on mainland Australia due to the presence of the exotic red fox. It appears that the red fox population in Tasmania is still relatively small and could be contained with a modest effort right now, but with such a high reproductive output and no predators, their numbers may be out of control in a matter of a few years. Therefore, the resolution calls on both the state (Tasmania) and federal (Commonwealth of Australia) governments to immediately step up and aggressively deal with containing the spread of red foxes in Tasmania, with the ultimate goal being the removal of all red foxes from Tasmania. We also call on the state and federal governments to address the immediate need to review and update their laws related to the introduction of exotic species to be more in line with the serious nature of acts of biological terrorism such as this one.

There were no resolutions brought forward to the membership at last year's meeting in Lake Charles, LA, so there was nothing to send out and no follow-up was necessary. However, to date, we are troubled by the lack of responses to our 3 resolutions from 2001, and intend on following up on these with inquiries and possibly position letters.

**3. Conservation Education:** The focus of the subcommittee this year was completion of a new educational brochure dealing with the importance of large mammalian carnivores. This new educational brochure dealing with large mammalian carnivores, entitled "Why large carnivorous land mammals are important", was initiated in early 2001 to coincide with our Symposium on the same topic held in Missoula, MT in 2001. The Committee feels that large mammalian carnivores in particular are being greatly impacted by humans and that we should do a better job of educating the public on this important issue. Topics covered in the brochure include identifying the large carnivorous land mammals of North America, brief (1 pp.) accounts of each species (including body

size, distribution, range size (both present and historic), conservation status, habitat needs, significant life history traits), problems faced, ecological role and importance, economic value, consequences of large mammalian carnivore-human conflicts and removal of large mammalian carnivores from nature, coexistence of large mammalian carnivores and humans, and where to obtain further information on large mammalian carnivores and their conservation. This large job was divided up amongst committee members, and a draft manuscript was completed in May 2001. The manuscript was reviewed by several Conservation Committee members in 2002 and further refined. In 2002-2003, we set out to complete the last 2 aspects of the brochure, the photos and the range maps. We contacted the Mammal Images Library with a request for some good quality large mammalian carnivore images, and they were very accommodating. We were assisted in our efforts for electronic versions of current range maps by committee member Roland Kays. With regard to information on historic range maps, we made a request to the Mammal-L and Carnivore-L listservers and came up with some good leads for this information. This included some valuable specimen records being received as well as some valuable citations and even a couple of historic range maps put together by Wes Sechrest of the Univ. of Virginia. Currently, we are working on superimposing the present range with the historic range on a single map for each of the 11 species covered in the brochure. Our goal is to have the manuscript peer-reviewed and get the brochure printed before the end of the year. This brochure will also be available on the ASM website.

As a reminder, copies of our last brochure "Why species become threatened or endangered: a mammalogist's perspective", published in January 1997, are available from the ASM Secretary-Treasurer. This brochure is also available on the Conservation Committee webpage of the ASM website.

**4. Communication/Coordination:** The aim of this subcommittee is 3-fold: 1) to communicate the Committee's mission and activities to the ASM membership and to the public through the ASM website, 2) to communicate and coordinate with other professional scientific societies and interested NGOs that share our interests in conservation issues, with the intention of keeping them informed as to our conservation-related activities and possibly interacting with them on conservation matters, and 3) to communicate and coordinate with other ASM Committees and the ASM Board in an effort to better accomplish our goals. Our major goals again this year were to: 1) place Conservation Committee information on the ASM website, 2) communicate and interact with as many other scientific societies that share conservation interests as possible, and 3) work closely with other ASM Committees and the ASM Board to accomplish our Committee goals.

In fall 2002, the Chair submitted current information on the Conservation Committee, including roster of members with contact information, committee/subcommittee missions and assignments, and copies of the 2001-2002 annual committee report to Sue McLaren for inclusion on the ASM website. We invite visitors to the Conservation Committee webpage to contact the committee regarding any mammalian conservation-related issues (whether to request or to provide information).

This Committee has had contact with several scientific societies dealing with conservation issues over the past year, including the Australian Mammal Society, The

Wildlife Society, Society for Conservation Biology, Raptor Research Foundation, Southwestern Association of Naturalists, Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles, the Ornithological Council (a group of 11 Ornithological Societies), and the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS). We currently are working with The Wildlife Society, Society for Conservation Biology, Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles, and the Ornithological Council on joint position letters. In March 2003, Steve Sheffield (along with Tom McIntyre from Legislation and Regulations Committee) attended the AIBS annual meeting and Council meeting and were able to discuss at some length with AIBS officers as well as other AIBS Council members how ASM deals with conservation issues through resolutions and position letters and our strategies for getting them to the appropriate recipients and maximizing our efforts. Our efforts were well-received by AIBS officers and other AIBS Council members, and at the request of their President, we are now working with the AIBS in posting links to our action items on their website to better communicate our conservation activities to AIBS and the other 86 AIBS member societies (roughly 250,000 biologists).

The Committee has had much interaction with a couple of environmentally-related NGOs over the past year, particularly Defenders of Wildlife, National Wildlife Federation (NWF), and World Wildlife Fund (WWF). We have been in frequent communication with these organizations regarding mammalian conservation issues of mutual interest, of which there are many. The position letter dealing with the proposed changes to the National Forest Management Act was initiated by Defenders and WWF. Defenders has been very interested in education, oil/gas development in the Arctic NWR, control of mammalian predators, and large carnivore conservation issues, and have requested information, feedback, or copies of ASM actions (position letters, resolutions) this past year. Further, they have offered generous assistance (technical and financial) with our large mammalian carnivore brochure, which is an issue that may require discussion and approval by the Board.

Over the past year, this Committee has interacted with a number of ASM Committees, including Informatics, International Relations, Legislation and Regulations, Marine Mammals, Membership, Program, Public Education, Public Relations, and Resolutions Committees. We are represented on the new Public Relations Committee, and we will be making a stronger effort to promote important mammalian conservation issues, conservation-related activities at the annual meeting, and our Committee's activities in the press. Over the past few years, we have designated Committee members as official liaisons with virtually all of the Committees mentioned above, thereby creating closer coordination and cooperation with these committees. We have also continued to work closely with the ASM President on sending resolutions and position letters.

**5. Federal/State Regulations Monitoring:** This subcommittee was created in 2003 for the express purpose of becoming more efficient at monitoring proposed federal and state regulation notices (including both new and amended regulations) that open up public comment periods. The need for this subcommittee became apparent in early 2003 when a number of important comment periods opened up, and we felt that we did not have as much lead time on some of these issues as they deserved. This subcommittee was designed to work closely with the Legislation and Regulations Committee and our own Position Letters and Resolutions subcommittees. Tom McIntyre of the Legislation and

Regulations Committee was consulted on formation of this subcommittee and he felt that it was a particularly good idea considering the need for us to find out about important public comment periods as soon as possible as well as the huge load of legislation and regulations emanating from Washington DC and from the states right now. The bottom line for finding out about the important public comment periods is that, if an action is deemed necessary, we need to maximize the time we have to prepare the letter, circulate it through the Committee for comments, and get it to the ASM President in time to meet the comment deadline. I am hopeful that this subcommittee will indeed assist us in doing just this.

**6. International Conservation Issues:** The role of this subcommittee is to monitor mammalian conservation issues on the international scene and to recommend possible action(s) to be taken. Over the past year, this subcommittee has been active in monitoring international mammalian conservation issues. In addition, the subcommittee has compiled a list of websites involved with international conservation issues (now available on the Conservation Committee homepage). Of particular interest to the subcommittee this past year is the issue of bushmeat. This particular issue has gained international attention as it has become a severe problem to many species of mammals in Africa. At the Society for Conservation Biology meeting in Canterbury, England in summer 2002, there was a special seminar on this topic which was attended by committee member Rex McAliley. At the meeting, he made contact with Heather Eves, an official of the Bushmeat Crisis Task Force, and they discussed ways that ASM could potentially assist them in their mission. We are currently looking into different ways in which we can work with them on this issue without formally joining their Task Force (\$5,000 for formal membership). The bushmeat trade has taken a severe toll on many different mammalian species in Africa, particularly great apes (gorillas and chimpanzees), and the underlying human social problems (overpopulation, war, poverty, etc.) continue to exert incredible pressures on mammalian populations on this continent.

**7. Special Projects:** The Special Projects subcommittee did not have a specific project that it was concentrating on this past year; however, the subcommittee continues to discuss the idea of initiating a new project to work on a methodology to derive priority scores for conservation prioritization for all mammalian species in North America (similar to what is already in place for birds).

**8. Mammalian Conservation News:** The role of this subcommittee is to actively monitor conservation news that impacts mammalian species and report on its findings to the ASM membership. In 1999, this subcommittee compiled a working list of conservation news sources in order to assist us in this endeavor. These sources include printed materials (e.g., journals, magazines, newsletters, etc.) as well as the internet (e.g., web pages, listservers, etc.). This year, we continued our efforts to build on previously collected sources of information on mammalian conservation. Several news sources were eliminated as being out-of-date or unreliable, while a number of others were added in efforts to keep the membership informed of conservation-related issues involving mammals in a timely fashion. The internet has rapidly become one of the most effective research tools in this endeavor, and many new websites were added to our list. Our



master list of sources is available from our subcommittee to any interested ASM members. News items were compiled during the past year, and the plan was to have these available on the Conservation Committee's webpage on the ASM website. However, to this point, we have not posted these to the ASM website due to continued problems with easy access to the website. We hope to be working with the Informatics Committee to try to get these news items posted in the near future. We wish to post these items to the Conservation Committee webpage instead of including them all in the annual report for several reasons, including saving on paper (a much more manageable annual report size), and the ability for us to stay current by posting news items to the webpage as we find them. We envision posting items by topic as a brief summary followed by a hot link to the source of the news item. We encourage any and all ASM members to share mammalian conservation news items with us that they think may be of interest to the ASM membership at large.

\*\*\* EPILOGUE \*\*\*

The Conservation Committee hopes that the ASM membership and other interested parties enjoy reading this report. ASM members that wish to serve on the Conservation Committee should communicate their interest to both the ASM President and the Chair of the Committee. All ASM members are encouraged to become actively involved in the Committee's activities and business by notifying the Committee of pertinent and timely conservation issues. Undoubtedly, there are members out there who are either working on conservation-related studies or who are otherwise familiar with certain conservation issues that our Committee is not aware of. Well, we want to hear from you!!! Conservation Committee members are ready and very willing to assist other ASM members in the preparation of resolutions or position letters representing the Society's official position on specific conservation issues. ASM members directly involved in mammalian conservation matters or having ideas for possible resolutions or position letters on conservation issues should contact the Committee (see Conservation Committee website for contact information). As mentioned above, we are beginning to maintain updated mammalian conservation news information on our Conservation Committee webpage as we receive it, so please remember to check the Conservation webpage for these news items. It is important for members to keep informed and as up-to-date as possible on conservation issues that impact mammalian species.

Finally, as always, I would like to sincerely thank all of the Conservation Committee members for their valuable assistance during the course of the past year. Special thanks goes to all of my Subcommittee Chairs for handling the extra responsibility and workload so well and responding to my many pleas for assistance usually needed in a hurry. Finally, I thank Reg Hoyt and Lillie Rendt who rotated off the committee in the summer of 2002, for their several years of enthusiastic and valuable service to the committee.

**Action Items:** None

Respectfully Submitted,  
Steven R. Sheffield, Chair  
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