

Conservation Committee

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Mission:

The Conservation Committee was 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. Currently, the committee is subdivided into seven subcommittees: Position Letters, Conservation Education, Coordination with other Organizations, Monitoring State and Federal Legislation in the USA and Canada, Monitoring International Issues, Special Projects, and Resolutions. In 2002-2003, the Aldo Leopold Conservation Award subcommittee was moved to full standing committee status.

Information Items:

(1) Erin Boydston, Janet Rachlow, Penny Reynolds rotated off the committee this year, many thanks for their years of service. We have added four new committee members: Justin Boyles, Kristofer Helgen, Jill Nugent, Allan F. O'Connell, Jr., and Brad Swanson.

(2) The committee listserv run by Brad Bergstrom and Valdosta State University has become the backbone of our communication and action, distributing 216 emails to committee members over the last year.

(3) We submitted three letters this year to address conservation challenges:

(A) Prairie Dog Poisoning. In September 2004 we wrote to the Department of Agriculture urging that restrictions on black-tailed prairie dog control be maintained in and adjacent to the Buffalo Gap National Grassland to protect local populations of Black-footed ferrets. This was in response to an "emergency rule" adopted by the South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks Commission that could lead to the poisoning and shooting of prairie dogs in the area. Result: We received a reply letter on 4 Nov 2004 from the regional forester stating that they do not intend to eradicate prairie dogs, but that poisoning will continue over 3,760 acres of black-footed ferret habitat. Related to this, he expected that a new amendment would further relax limitations on prairie dog poisoning and shooting.

(B) Wolf Delisting. In November 2004 we wrote in opposition of the US Fish and Wildlife Service's proposal to remove the eastern Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of the gray wolf from Endangered Species Act protection across a substantial portion of its historic range in the Eastern USA. Our letter detailed

problems with this plan including the arbitrary geography of this DPS, the uncertain taxonomy of wolves in this region, and the liberal wolf-control policies included in state management plans. Result: On 31 January 2005 a federal district court ruled that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service violated the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) when it reduced protections for gray wolves across most of the lower-48 United States. The court's decision ensures the highest level of federal protection for wolves and requires that the government continue its efforts to recover the species throughout its historic range.

(C) Jumping Mouse Delisting. In April 2005 we wrote to in opposition of the decision by the USFWS to remove *Zapus hudsonius preblei* from the list of Threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. This delisting proposal was based on two unpublished studies lumping the taxa that were peer reviewed through the USFWS, but not a scientific journal. This was a complicated but important issue; to understand it fully our committee members reviewed the delisting petitioners' briefs, two unpublished studies by staff at the Denver Museum of Natural History (Ramey et al. 2004a,b), 14 independent scientific reviews of these, and opinions of additional experts. Our conclusion was that delisting this species at this time is unwarranted and unsubstantiated by the available scientific data because: 1) most of the independent reviews of the Ramey et al. (2004a) study supported continued protection (i.e., retention of listed status); 2) the scientific evidence produced by Ramey et al. (2004a) was incomplete and misinterpreted; 3) the two studies on which USFWS's decision to delist *Zapus hudsonius preblei* are based (Ramey et al. 2004a; 2004b) have not been through sufficient scientific peer review, which can only be done under the supervision of a scientific journal editor. We found the report by Ramey et al. (2004a) to be inconclusive, at best, and methodologically flawed, at worst - this was a case where the scientific expertise of the ASM was really needed. Our letter pointed out a number of technical problems with this unpublished study including: the use of only 355bp of a single mtDNA marker to detect genetic differentiation, the use of strict criterion of reciprocal monophyly, the inappropriate use of software for genetic analyses (used MDIV to age time of divergence), the failure to report F_{st} values but still interpret them as artificially inflated, morphologic analysis using only highly correlated characters and ignoring bacular data and qualitative skull characters, the use of inappropriate statistics for analyses of their morphological data (Discriminate Analysis rather than PCA), and no verification of the species identity of museum specimens used. Results: There has not been time for a reply on this issue.

(4) Education: A brochure on the importance of conserving mammalian carnivores is nearly completed. Maps of historic and present range for all species covered have been completed and need to be integrated into the final text.

(5) Coordination with other Organizations: We have initiated discussions with the IUCN's Global Mammal Assessment (GMA) team to explore how we might work together to improve the conservation of mammals worldwide. One area we have focused

on is to raise the profile of Red Data List species classified as “Data Deficient”. The GMA team is presently revising this list, after which we will explore how our committee might encourage mammalogists to study this poorly known, endangered group of mammals.

Action Items:

(1) Special Projects – Mammalogy Expertise Database: We have been exploring the possibility of creating a database to make ASM expertise more available to professionals from conservation organizations and the press. Information of interest includes academic and professional qualifications, taxonomic, geographic, scientific, and conservation issue expertise. This type of service is now available through Allen Press; the cost is \$0.15/datum collected (probably \$0.75-1.00/member for the above questions). Querying is free but can only be done by registered ASM members. Our original idea is that this would be widely available to both members and non-members, but opening up access would be a much more complicated endeavor.

We would be interested in hearing discussion of this possibility by the board. Is this something that would be useful to ASM members? Would it encourage new members? How much use does the ASM Directory get now and would this database enrichment be worth the cost?

Respectfully submitted,
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