

Conservation Committee

Committee Members: L. C. Arias, B. S. Arbogast, B. J. Bergstrom (Chair), A. D. Davidson, N. Dawson, A. W. Ferguson, A. T. Ford, B. J. Gaston, A. J. Giordano, T. J. Jessen, R. A. Medellin, A. Morzillo, R. A. Ojeda, L. A. Randa, S. R. Sheffield.

Mission:

The Conservation Committee (CC) was established by the ASM in 1927, a few years after the Society passed a resolution condemning the unscientific and propagandistic extermination campaign against predators at its 4th annual meeting in 1924. First known as the Conservation of Land Mammals Committee, the committee's name was changed to the Conservation Committee in 2002 to reflect the fact that it dealt with conservation issues that included all mammals. In 2002–2003, the Aldo Leopold Conservation Award subcommittee that CC had recently established was moved to full standing committee status. The CC promotes research, education, and science-based solutions to conservation and management of native mammals in North America and globally.

Information Items:

(1) The CC welcomed new members Lily Arias, Brian Gaston, and Adam Ford in 2011-2012; Roxy Larsen rotated off the committee, and we thank her for her service.

(2) Activities of the ASM CC during 2011-2012:

(a) In early March 2012, the committee drafted an ASM Presidential position letter, which was signed by President Mares, and submitted through the Federal Register during the Public Comment period on a proposed rule by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to change the interpretation of “a significant portion of its range,” a phrase in the Endangered Species Act (ESA) that is part of the definition of both endangered and threatened species. We opposed the changed interpretation, which would consider only the current range of the species, and not its historic range, in determining when a species should be listed. We felt the revised interpretation could preclude listing a species, in some cases, until it reached the critical point of being at risk of global extinction. The letter can be read here:

http://www.mammalsociety.org/uploads/committee_files/USFWS%20Policy%20ASM.pdf

(b) In late March 2012, the committee drafted an ASM Presidential position letter, which was signed by President Mares, and submitted through the Federal Register during a Public Comment period in which USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS) requested input from stakeholders on suggestions for re-prioritization of its programs and budget. We urged APHIS to institute reforms to its Wildlife Services (WS) agency, in which WS would take a more science-based approach to wildlife conflict management; monitor impacts of its lethal control campaigns on affected populations; account for the ecosystem values (e.g., trophic cascades, nutrient effects) of such keystone species as prairie dogs and gray wolves before targeting them for lethal control;

and to discontinue lethal control when not demonstrably efficacious and necessary and wherever mortality of non-targeted species is significant, especially those that are state or federally listed. We urged more funding for non-lethal control methods and research and less for lethal control, except in the cases of invasive exotic species. The letter can be read here:

http://www.mammalsociety.org/uploads/committee_files/ASM-Federal%20wildlife%20control%20letter_0.pdf

An extensive, three-part investigative series on WS was published in the Sacramento Bee several weeks after ASM's letter was submitted; several members of ASM were quoted in that article, and ASM's long-standing involvement in this issue was noted. As of this writing, the committee is continuing to send ASM's letter to additional recipients and to consult with other societies, conservation NGOs, and members of the press.

(c) Although the committee briefly discussed the call for comments on the 15-year Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), the short lead time precluded preparation of an official Society response. Instead, in November 2011 several committee members, as individuals, co-signed a letter to USFWS supporting "Alternative E" as the best hope of preserving polar bear and other species of Arctic mammals; this involves designating three Wilderness Study Areas and including the Canning River in the National Wild and Scenic River System, but also adding NWSRS status for the Jago River to Alternative E, given the latter's value to musk ox and risk of potential oil and gas development.

(d) The CC continues to follow the fragile recovery of the Mexican gray wolf. The USFWS released only one captive-bred wolf into the wild in the past several years, despite the fact that only six breeding pairs now exist in Arizona and New Mexico and the small population is at risk of inbreeding. CC plans to work with The Wildlife Society this summer to draft a joint letter or resolution urging continuation of captive releases to restore genetic health to this critically endangered subspecies.

(3) Follow-up on Previous Issues:

The Northern Rocky Mountain gray wolf was delisted by Congress, effective May 2011; in the year since the first legislative delisting of an endangered species in the 37-year history of the ESA, more than 400 wolves have been killed in the state of Idaho, alone. In February 2012, WS agents shot 14 wolves from aircraft in the Lolo National Forest, and Idaho officials have left the hunting and trapping season open in the Lolo zone through June (into the denning season). This, plus a liberalization of bear and mountain lion hunting regulations in the area, is being done to boost elk populations, a goal that we questioned in our letter to WS. Also, 166 wolves were killed by hunters in Montana, which has closed its season. Meanwhile, USFWS announced on 30 April 2012 that it approves of Wyoming's wolf management plan, which allows wolves to be killed year-round, without license, and by any means necessary, throughout 86% of the state.

Action Items: None.

Respectfully submitted,

Brad Bergstrom, Chair
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