



# THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

5410 Grosvenor Lane • Bethesda, MD 20814-2197

Tel: (301) 897-9770 • Fax: (301) 530-2471

E-mail: [tws@wildlife.org](mailto:tws@wildlife.org)

## Final Position Statement

### Economic Growth

Economic growth is an increase in the production and consumption of goods and services, occurring as a consequence of an increase in the multiplied product of population and per capita consumption. Technology has the potential to diminish or exacerbate the effects of economic growth, depending on whether the net result is increased or decreased per capita natural resource consumption.

Economic growth has been a primary, perennial goal of U.S. government and society. Some schools of thought believe that there is no limit to economic growth, particularly given that technological progress allows us to use resources more efficiently. However, other schools believe that, based on established principles of ecology and physics, there is a limit to economic growth. Moreover, though technological progress can reduce ecological impacts of economic growth, it also can contribute to ecological problems. Therefore, faith in technology to present the solution to the dilemma of global economic growth versus ecological sustainability is not adequate to support unlimited economic growth.

Of central concern to The Wildlife Society and the wildlife profession, is that economic growth affects ecological systems that are essential to wildlife conservation. The mechanisms of economic growth may impact the physical environment through many portals, such as pollution (contamination of natural resources), overexploitation of natural resources, degradation and loss of wildlife habitat, and climate change. Unsustainable consumption levels result in degradation and overexploitation of resources, which are evident in the decline of some fisheries, the growing number of threatened and endangered species, loss of natural habitats and inadvertent introduction of exotics. In addition, development projects that affect wildlife and habitat can destabilize local economies that depend on those resources for sustainable consumptive and non-consumptive wildlife-related recreation such as regulated hunting, wildlife-watching, and ecotourism.

Decline in environmental quality and loss of biological diversity are not easily assessed in conventional economic models, where these consequences would be regarded as externalities (i.e., not accounted for in the balance sheet). Current economic policies usually do not take into account the value of natural resources in contributing to biological processes such as flood control by wetlands, climate regulation by forests and open space through oxygen production and carbon dioxide consumption, and pollination by insects, birds, and mammals. Thus, economic health is not measured accurately by gross domestic product alone. Instead, because of the inevitable reliance on natural resources to achieve economic growth, the strength of the economy must incorporate the condition and sustainability of natural resources. This is not happening, and many concerned about wildlife conservation believe greater attention needs to be given to the erosive impact of economic growth on wildlife.

The policy of The Wildlife Society with respect to economic growth is to:

1. Encourage science and education that improve society's understanding of the direct and indirect impacts of economic growth on wildlife and other natural resources.
2. Encourage science-based articulation of the interactions between economic growth and the ecological services that underpin the human economy (e.g., pollination, flood control, decomposition, climate regulation), and encourage sustainable uses of natural resources.
3. Recognize: (a) the inadequacy of technological progress that does not incorporate the ecological effects of economic growth, (b) the necessity for encouraging technology that supports wildlife conservation through greater efficiencies (e.g. substituting the use of non-renewable resources with renewable resources).
4. Inform and educate natural resource professionals, public officials, and the general public about the interactions between economic growth and wildlife conservation, and the role of policy makers and consumers in curbing undesirable effects.
5. Educate policy makers and the public about the value and importance of wildlife and habitat and their benefits to local, regional, national, and global economies, cultures, and quality of life.
6. Encourage and support collaborative processes to engage stakeholders in the incorporation of wildlife conservation in land use planning and resolution of incompatibilities between economic growth and wildlife conservation.
7. Encourage and support sound public policy at state, national, and international levels that avoids or minimizes negative consequences of economic growth on wildlife and other natural resources.
8. Work with policy makers to encourage businesses to internalize negative impacts on water, air, biological resources, and quality of human life so that price of goods and services fully reflects private and social costs.
9. Recognize economic growth is a function of population growth and per capita consumption. Thus, management of economic growth involves both of these factors.
10. Encourage development of models that factor wildlife and habitat into their assessment of the impact of proposed growth projects and economic policy decisions.

Approved by Council September 2009. Expires September 2014.