



NEWS RELEASE

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TWS Spotlights Conflict of Wildlife Conservation and Animal Rights Philosophy in New Position Statement

Bethesda, MD: The Wildlife Society (TWS), representing over 10,000 professional wildlife biologists and managers, has released its final position statement on [Animal Rights Philosophy and Wildlife Conservation](#). The Society's primary position is that the philosophy of animal rights is largely incompatible with science-based conservation and management of wildlife.

"The Wildlife Society recognizes the intrinsic value of wildlife and its importance to humanity," says Michael Hutchins, Executive Director/CEO of TWS. "We also view wildlife and people as interrelated parts of an ecological-cultural-economic whole. But we're concerned that core beliefs underlying the animal rights philosophy contradict the principles of successful wildlife management and conservation in North America and worldwide." Those beliefs (listed below) "promote false choices regarding potential human-wildlife relationships and false expectations for wildlife population management," says Hutchins. "They also undermine decades of knowledge gained through scientific research on wildlife and their habitats."

At its core, the animal rights philosophy hinges on beliefs that: (1) each individual animal should be afforded the same basic rights as humans, (2) every animal should live free from human-induced pain and suffering, (3) animals should not be used for any human purpose, and (4) every individual animal has equal status regardless of commonality or rarity, or whether the species is native, exotic, invasive, or feral.

Strict adherence to these beliefs would preclude many of the science-based management techniques that professional wildlife biologists use, such as aversive conditioning, the capture and marking of animals for research, or lethal control of over-abundant, invasive, or diseased animals. For example, a recent TWS position statement advocates for control of non-native [feral swine](#) to protect and conserve native plants and animals and their habitats and to protect human and domestic animal health, yet this goal would be jeopardized by animal rights philosophy.

Instead of focusing exclusively on the "rights" of individual animals, TWS supports a more holistic philosophy of animal *welfare* and conservation that focuses on the

quality of life and sustainability of entire populations or species of animals and their habitats. This approach allows for the management of animal populations and the use of animals for food or other cultural purposes, as long as any loss of life is justified, sustainable, and achieved through humane methods.

In sum, TWS' policy regarding animal rights philosophy is to:

1. Recognize that the philosophy of animal rights is largely incompatible with science-based conservation and management of wildlife.
2. Educate organizations and individuals about the need for scientific management of wildlife and habitats for the benefit of conservation and other purposes, and inform people about the problems that animal rights philosophy creates for the conservation of wildlife and habitats and for society as a whole.
3. Support an animal welfare philosophy, which holds that animals can be studied and managed through science-based methods and that human use of wildlife—including regulated, sustainable hunting, trapping, and lethal control for the benefit of populations, threatened or endangered species, habitats, and human society—is acceptable, provided that individual animals are treated ethically and humanely.

“There is a profound conflict between many tenets of animal rights philosophy and the animal welfare philosophy required for effective management and conservation,” says TWS President Tom Ryder. “Established principles and techniques of wildlife population management are deemed unacceptable by the animal rights viewpoint, but are absolutely essential for the management and conservation of healthy wildlife populations and ecosystems in a world dominated by human influences.”

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Founded in 1937, The Wildlife Society is a non-profit scientific and educational association of over 10,000 professional wildlife biologists and managers, dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education. Our mission is to represent and serve the professional community of scientists, managers, educators, technicians, planners, and others who work actively to study, manage, and conserve wildlife and its habitats worldwide.