



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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Draft Position Statement

In accordance with TWS policy, The Wildlife Society Council seeks member review and comment on the following draft position statement, Animal Rights Philosophy and Wildlife Conservation, prior to revising and finalizing it. **Comments must be received by 1 April 2011** to be considered in a final position statement.

Please send comments to: Laura Bies, Director of Government Affairs, at the address above or via email to laura@wildlife.org.

Animal Rights Philosophy and Wildlife Conservation

The animal rights philosophy holds 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 exploited for any human purposes, and (4) every individual animal has equal status regardless of commonality or rarity, or whether or not the species is native, exotic, invasive, or feral. The animal rights philosophy differs from animal welfare which acknowledges legitimate human use of animals and humane treatment of animals.

The foundational difference between an animal rights philosophy and conservation is the conflict between the animal rights focus on individual animals and a holistic conservation ethic that emphasizes conservation of wildlife populations, species, and ecosystems. The reductionist view of the animal rights emphasis on individual animals also ignores the inter-relatedness of wildlife communities within functioning ecosystems and holds that usurping rights of individual animals to conserve populations, species, or ecosystems is unacceptable.

Tenets of the animal rights philosophy contradict scientifically established principles of wildlife population management and wildlife management techniques, including lethal measures such as regulated hunting and trapping, and non-lethal techniques such as aversive conditioning or capture and marking for research purposes. These techniques are vital to the phenomenal success of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, which has been and will continue to be the principle mechanism for conservation of most wildlife populations and habitat in the United States and Canada. Scientific evidence clearly indicates that regulated hunting and trapping are sustainable, ecologically compatible activities that have never led to the endangerment or extinction of any wildlife species. Lethal control of individual animals of many species is desirable to promote and maintain healthy wildlife populations, habitat, and ecosystems by maintaining wildlife populations at or below the ecological and/or cultural (acceptable to humans) carrying capacity.

Consumptive wildlife use through hunting, fishing, and trapping is part of North America's cultural heritage and provides a wealth of social, economic, and environmental benefits. Hunting and trapping are also the primary means for managing populations of many wildlife species. Since passage of the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937, more than six billion

dollars of funding has been generated for wildlife and habitat restoration, management, and protection via excise taxes on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment. This funding is the single most important financial mechanism for supporting wildlife conservation and management in the U.S. See TWS position statements on Hunting, and Traps, Trapping, and Furbearer Management for more details.

The conflict between animal rights philosophy and wildlife management and conservation is profound. The Public Trust Doctrine, the bedrock of laws protecting wildlife in the U.S., is based on the premise that wild animals are property to be held in trust by the government for the benefit of all citizens. Animal rights advocates oppose this concept of wildlife as property held as a public trust resource and further advocate affording legal rights to all animals. Therefore, under the animal rights legal framework, there would be no existing legal basis for wildlife conservation and management. Furthermore, if animals cannot be controlled lethally or otherwise used by humans, wildlife professionals will not be able to manage overabundant, invasive, exotic, or ecologically detrimental animal populations. Sportsmen and women would not be able to participate in safe, ethical, and sustainable outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, and trapping, and a significant part of North America's cultural heritage would cease to exist.

Animal rights proponents routinely use legislative or ballot initiative processes to attempt to restrict or eliminate sustainable methods of wildlife harvest. They aggressively work to eliminate hunting and trapping and, consequently, the ability of professional wildlife biologists to use proven, ethical, science-based tools to manage wildlife populations and resolve wildlife-human conflicts in the public interest.

The policy of The Wildlife Society regarding animal rights philosophy is to:

1. Reject the animal rights philosophy as a basis for wildlife protection.
2. Recognize that the animal rights philosophy conflicts with science-based conservation and management of wildlife.
3. Educate organizations and individuals about the problems with animal rights philosophy.
4. Support an animal welfare approach, which holds that animals can be studied and managed through science-based methods, including regulated hunting, trapping, and wildlife control for the benefit of populations, species, and human society and used for human purposes as long as they are treated ethically and humanely without undue pain and suffering.
5. Clearly distinguish the inherent philosophical differences between animal welfare and animal rights.
6. Recognize wildlife is held in trust by government to sustain its existence for the benefit of the public.