



Standing Position

The Use of Science in Policy and Management Decisions

It is important for purposes of this position statement to distinguish between two different meanings of science: (1) a structured activity or process designed to generate reliable knowledge, and (2) reliable knowledge resulting from such a structured process. Generally, this statement refers to the second definition, the knowledge resulting from a structured inquiry. In this context, science is a cornerstone for establishing wildlife policies and making management decisions.

The role of science in policy and decision-making is to inform the decision process, rather than to prescribe a particular outcome. Policy and decision-makers may make determinations that do not always provide maximum benefits or minimize impacts to wildlife and their habitats. Such determinations are appropriate if the best available science and likely consequences from a range of management options have been openly acknowledged and considered. However, there are several ways that science can be abused by decision-makers in setting policies and making management decisions to the detriment of wildlife and their habitats. These include:

- Censoring researchers or managers or changing results or well-reasoned conclusions of research or management documents;
- Ignoring science that contradicts a desired outcome, or purposely withholding funding from research not likely to support a desired outcome;
- Reporting as a universal finding the results of science that apply only to a subset of situations; and
- Promoting alternative “hypotheses” that have no empirical or theoretical support in order to raise doubts about sound scientific information.

TWS encourages, recognizes, and publicly advocates the appropriate use of wildlife, ecological, and conservation science in policy determination and decision-making processes and is committed to identifying and supporting actions to correct inappropriate uses or abuses of science.

The policy of The Wildlife Society regarding the use of science in policy and management decisions is to:

1. Demonstrate and promote the highest standards in the use of science in setting wildlife policies and decisions.
2. Adhere to the highest standards in the use of science in developing position statements and in providing input to legislative affairs and management decisions.
3. Acknowledge the uncertainty inherent in science, while noting that such uncertainty is not a reason to ignore or censure scientific findings.

4. Publicly acknowledge those responsible for using science in an exemplary manner in setting policies or making complex and/or controversial resource management decisions.
5. Actively promote educational efforts on the appropriate use of science in all aspects of policy and decision-making.
6. Provide support and advice to its members on the appropriate use of science in particular situations that TWS members may encounter.
7. Provide review and advice to other agencies, organizations, companies and others on their guidelines and practices regarding uses of science in policy and management determinations.
8. Work with other scientific societies and other partners to actively and cooperatively identify instances where science has been abused in setting policies or making management decisions and take actions to publicize and correct such abuses.
9. Encourage other scientific societies to assist their members by providing support and advice on the appropriate use of science.
10. Support establishment of laws and guidelines that ensure the appropriate use of science by policy and decision-makers.
11. Acknowledge that professional science-based management requires the appointment and hiring of professionally competent individuals capable of dealing with the complexities of modern management and science into wildlife agencies at all levels.
12. Encourage agencies, organizations, companies, and others to not constrain employees from publishing papers or writing articles that provide information or perspectives on public policy issues; it is appropriate for employers to require disclaimers in such writings that they do not necessarily reflect the views of the agency, organization, or company.