



The Honorable Mark Dayton
Governor of Minnesota
Office of the Governor & Lt Governor
116 Veterans Service Building
20 W 12th Street
St. Paul, MN 55155

May 26, 2015

Governor Dayton:

The Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society is concerned about the implications of Executive Order 15-10 to the management of Minnesota's public trust wildlife resources. Wildlife research, including capture and marking of wild animals, is a fundamental component of science-based wildlife management. Science-based information is essential to making credible, fact-driven decisions for wildlife populations managed in public trust by Minnesota's Department of Natural Resources.

The Wildlife Society (TWS) is an international organization founded in 1937 and is comprised of wildlife biologists, managers, scientists, and other natural resource professionals. TWS' mission is to inspire, empower, and enable wildlife professionals to sustain wildlife populations and habitats through science-based management and conservation. The Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society, founded in 1944, was the first state chapter in the organization and is comprised of about 250 professionals dedicated to conserving Minnesota's wildlife heritage by supporting and developing the wildlife profession within our state.

We strongly urge you to incorporate the need for wildlife research and the recognition of professional standards into your decision making. Executive Order 15-10 directed a cessation of capture and collaring of moose in Minnesota by DNR employees and future issuance of permits for capture and collaring of moose elsewhere in Minnesota. We readily acknowledge the prerogative of the Governor, as head of the Executive branch, to take such action. We do, however, respectfully disagree that such an order was necessary before a more comprehensive review of the research practices employed by the adult and calf projects could have been completed by qualified professionals.

Biological and ecological processes are highly complex and it is often impossible to understand aspects of a wildlife species or population without directly handling individual animals for research purposes. Wildlife biologists hold themselves to a high standard to ensure that the research practices they employ will not adversely harm the species they have dedicated their careers and lives to conserve. Members of TWS are also held to a Code of Ethics, which includes specific reference to the care and use of live animals in research. Unfortunately, despite the best efforts, individual animals do occasionally die in the pursuit of information to understand, manage, and conserve wildlife populations and species on behalf of the public. It is unrealistic to expect that no individuals will die in this pursuit.

Moose are indeed an iconic species in Minnesota but their population is in serious trouble. Early studies suggest that warmer temperatures from climate change are stressing moose, but the exact causes of the decline in both the northwestern corner of the state and in northeastern Minnesota remain largely unexplained. Technological advances in GPS and satellite collars in the last 10 years give biologists a heretofore unprecedented ability to understand how and why moose populations grow or decline. Likewise, technological advances in detecting bacteria, viruses, and other pathogens and parasites in live and dead moose are also helping to shed new light on the mysterious causes of Minnesota's moose decline.

There is indeed some risk to individual moose calves and adults whenever researchers capture and handle them. There is also a larger, unknown risk to Minnesota's moose population that remains to be discovered and appropriately addressed, if possible, to ensure the future of moose in the state.

We encourage you to commission an external review by a qualified third-party group of wildlife biologists and wildlife veterinarians from outside Minnesota to ensure that best management practices are used by DNR personnel in their moose research. We are hopeful a thorough review will shed light on strategies that will permit all appropriate moose research, which may include capture and collaring, to resume in the future so Minnesota researchers can continue learning how to keep moose populations in Minnesota robust and sustainable.

Part of the mission of the Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society is to provide technical expertise and scientific information relevant to wildlife biology and wildlife conservation in Minnesota. We have direct connections to an extensive network of wildlife professionals throughout the Midwest, the United States, and around the globe. This network possesses knowledge and expertise that can fill critical information needs about wildlife and wildlife conservation. We encourage you and the departments in your cabinet to call on our technical expertise in the future if the need arises (contact: President-Elect Stephen Winter, PhD, Certified Wildlife Biologist®; email: stephen.winter@okstate.edu, phone: 402-310-5460).

Sincerely,

Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society

CC: Tom Landwehr, Commissioner Department of Natural Resources
CC: Nancy Gibson, LCCMR Co-Chair
CC: Sen. David Tomassoni, LCCMR Co-Chair
CC: Rep. Jean Wagenius, LCCMR Co-Chair