



## Position Statement Responsible Human Use of Wildlife and Their Habitats

Wildlife and human populations are interrelated components of a larger ecological-cultural-economic complex. Humans are part of the environment and we ultimately and legitimately derive our livelihood and many of our cultural values from that environment. All humans and human societies use wildlife directly or indirectly because wildlife generates tangible goods and ecological services, and contributes to the health, economic, and spiritual well-being of individuals and society. Most, if not all human societies recognize and accept consumptive and non-consumptive use of wildlife resources, including as an indicator of environmental quality. However, human use of natural resources, including wildlife, must be carried out in a responsible and sustainable manner so that wildlife populations can persist and ecological processes can continue to function and sustain a diverse, healthy environment. This, in turn, will contribute to the well-being of both humans and wildlife.

Social acceptance of wildlife use reflects the cultural value system of society, human benefits derived from use, and liabilities associated with using or not using wildlife in a particular manner. The decision of an individual to participate, or not, in a wildlife-related activity should not prevent others from exercising their own freedom of choice for activities that are humane<sup>1</sup>, ethical<sup>2</sup>, and legal. Participation in, or support of, wildlife-related activities that are based on the sustainable use doctrine<sup>3</sup> are encouraged, but such participation is a matter of personal choice. TWS endorses humane treatment of wildlife. This does not preclude management of wildlife for food or other cultural uses, as long as the loss of life is justified, sustainable, and achieved through humane methods.

Human activities can alter the quality and availability of wildlife habitat, cause over-exploitation or disturbance of some wildlife populations and species, and change the functioning of ecosystems. Knowledge-based management of wildlife and habitats is vital to ecological functioning, sustaining genetic diversity, and perpetuation of wildlife and their habitats. Resource management professionals and others should act to conserve wildlife and their habitats. Lethal control or removal of some populations or species, both native and non-native, may be necessary to maintain the integrity of native wildlife or their habitats. Society has a responsibility to use and manage wildlife populations and their habitats in a way that creates opportunities for them to adapt to changing environments.

Prudent conservation practices and regulations are essential for sustaining wildlife and their habitats. Identifying and implementing the best conservation practices may require responsible use of wildlife as part of research and management. In research, use of animals could be either lethal or involve nonlethal techniques such as capture and marking or aversive conditioning.

<sup>1</sup>Gillespie, A. 2003. Humane killing: a recognition of universal common sense in international law. *Journal of International Wildlife Law and Policy* 6:1-29.

<sup>2</sup>Smith, C. A., J. A. Tantillo, B. Hale, D. J. Decker, A. B. Forstchen, E. F. Pomeranz, T. B. Lauber et al. 2024. A practical framework for ethics assessment in wildlife management decision-making. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 88:e22502.

<sup>3</sup> The practice of using natural resources at a rate and in a way that does not harm the environment or society, and that also preserves biodiversity and supports social and economic development.

Such research or management allows for continued, responsible, and humane consumptive and non-consumptive use of some wildlife species by humans when consistent with conservation objectives.

Benefits to wildlife and humans can be achieved through the application of knowledge-based management techniques used in an ecological and social context that promotes thriving wildlife. The policy of The Wildlife Society regarding responsible human use of wildlife is to:

1. Affirm that responsible human use of wildlife is consistent with ecological principles and is an appropriate human activity;
2. Recognize that the current and future state of wildlife and diverse ecosystems depends on human stewardship. Such stewardship must consider the growing human population (and growing spatial requirements), limited availability of wildlife habitats to sustain many native populations, and the need to maintain and manage wildlife for sustained human use and enjoyment in economically, socially, and environmentally acceptable ways for present and future generations;
3. Support the conservation of wildlife in ways that biologically sustain populations, species, and their habitats in consideration of natural levels of abundance, distribution, and connectivity;
4. Encourage human wildlife-related activities that enhance the overall value of wildlife and supporting habitats, thus improving opportunities to protect and perpetuate wildlife, understand their habitat needs, and enhance their economic, cultural, and social importance;
5. Recognize that each individual person can choose if they want to be directly involved in ethical and legal wildlife-related activities;
6. Promote practices, laws and regulations that facilitate an ethical standard in the use of wildlife;
7. Advocate for laws, management policies, programs, and practices that enhance the values and benefits of wildlife and their habitats while minimizing conflicts associated with wildlife populations or species;
8. Support wildlife professionals and knowledge-based management that provide the foundation for the conservation of wildlife and their habitats;
9. Encourage educational efforts about wildlife use that emphasize the interdependence of humans and wildlife, the obligations to manage human uses of wildlife and impacts on habitats, and the requirement that conservation be based on the best available knowledge.