Final Position Statement

Incorporating Wildlife Needs in Land Management Plans

Land management activities and decisions can have significant effects on wildlife species and populations by influencing the amount, quality, extent, and connectivity of available habitat. Decisions about land management can alter the carrying capacity of a region and influence population dynamics of wildlife species in a variety of ways. Given that society needs natural resources and will continue to use resources from public and private lands, this use should be conducted with the intent of minimizing negative effects on wildlife.

Some environments support highly specialized indigenous flora and fauna that are sensitive to human disturbance. Alteration of riparian zones, wetlands, old-growth forests, grasslands, shrub-grasslands, and other distinct natural systems without careful planning could result in widespread disruption to those natural systems, loss of ecosystem function and potential loss of species. Many of these environments and the wildlife they support have already experienced declines in quality as human development has increased.

Land management activities can enhance habitat conditions for a wide variety of species; however, some activities can have an overall negative effect on that area's biodiversity and species richness. In areas where human activities have disrupted natural processes (e.g., fire suppression, fragmentation), land management can play an essential role in supporting biodiversity by mimicking natural disturbance regimes. In many regions, public agencies are the only landowner with a sufficient land area to provide these type of disturbance activities at a suitable scale. In other regions, private forest landowners, agricultural producers, and other landowners may be able to manage their properties to provide beneficial disturbance as part of their actions.

Integrating wildlife needs (including wildlife health) from a broad group of native species into land management decision-making can increase the positive effects of ecosystem services (such as clean water from healthy watersheds) and maintain biodiversity while mitigating the possible negative effects of human use. However, mitigation procedures to improve habitat conditions typically require time to become successful, possibly even community succession to achieve desired goals. National, provincial, state, and local agencies have the authority and mandate to require reasonable planning and mitigation measures that will minimize or avoid deterioration of public trust wildlife and wildlife habitat. Responsible land management on public lands includes activities that sustain fish and wildlife habitat, protect environmental and ecological values, maintain biodiversity, and provide for recreational use and aesthetic considerations.

Addressing wildlife needs in land management plans can result in a readily integrated set of management objectives coordinated among planning units. Plans at each scale should provide their assigned portion of desired wildlife populations, wildlife habitat, and the conditions and processes upon which they are controlled. Of course, such plans are of limited value unless implemented.

The policy of The Wildlife Society regarding incorporation of wildlife needs in land management plans is to:

1. Support the development and implementation of comprehensive land management plans that address wildlife needs in accordance with relevant laws and regulations and include: a) a broad range of indigenous or naturalized, noninvasive species and important ecological processes within the region; b) specific objectives for the conservation and management of wildlife within the area that considers the relationships among the biological, physical, and socio-economic factors operating within the region; c) expectations for public and private lands; d) sufficient monitoring and research to provide a basis for adaptive management; e) attention to biological resources, the management of which may not be limited to typical landscape planning units (i.e., watersheds or other hydrological units); f) climate change adaptation measures; and g) conservation across temporal scales.

2. Recognize the multiple values of rare and unique environments for wildlife habitat, societal values, and for use in scientific research. Whenever possible, recommend the conservation of these settings in land management plans.

3. Promote the coordination of resource management activities to maximize retention of biodiversity across multiple spatial scales. Encourage cooperation and collaboration by professionals that specialize in forestry, fisheries, wildlife, and other natural resource disciplines.

4. Promote research to understand and mitigate adverse effects on wildlife habitat resulting from alteration, resource extraction, and other forms of management of terrestrial and aquatic systems. Support development of collaborative research, inventory, and monitoring to evaluate the status of terrestrial and aquatic systems across multiple spatial scales, including the development and maintenance of long term databases to track changes over time.

5. Promote education about the ecological and economic values of terrestrial and aquatic environments that retain native biodiversity.

6. Promote the use of Certified Wildlife Biologists® to represent wildlife values and evaluate habitat requirements in land use planning and decision making.

Approved by Council October 2018. Expires October 2023.