

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Megan Durham 202/343-5634

## AMERICAN ATTITUDES ABOUT WILDLIFE REPORTED IN NEW STUDY

What do Americans really think about saving endangered species, hunting, and other issues that affect wildlife? The first report on a comprehensive study of American attitudes toward wildlife has revealed some interesting answers--including some that might surprise you.

The report analyzes initial findings of a 3-year study by Dr. Stephen Kellert of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. Kellert conducted the study under a research grant from the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

According to Service Director Lynn A Greenwalt, "The results of this study are significant because, without a doubt, people's opinions and behavior can influence the success or failure of conservation programs as much as any wildlife management technique. Wildlife managers hear often from some constituent groups, but there are large segments of the public about whom we know little. Dr. Kellert's study gives us a great deal of information that will help us work with the public in conserving our nation's wildlife."

Greenwalt cautioned that the report will require careful study and analysis as more of the information becomes available. "Wildlife management can never be a popularity contest," he said. "Nonetheless, the results will provide helpful insights, suggesting broad policy guidelines and directions and providing further understanding of the public's need for greater awareness and education."

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The study is based largely on an extensive questionnaire administered nationally in interviews with 3,107 people during the fall of 1978. The questionnaire dealt with specific issues, such as the tuna/porpoise controversy, as well as with general issues such as attitudes toward hunting. The survey population was selected through random sampling techniques that provided a representative sample of the American public. Supplementary samples were also taken in the Rocky Mountain States and Alaska to make sure that information about these important regions was based on an adequate number of interviews. Surveys of this type and sample size have a theoretical margin of error of less than 3 percentage points in either direction 95 percent of the time.

Kellert's first report concerns American attitudes, behavior, and knowledge about endangered species; animal damage control; habitat preservation; consumptive uses of wildlife, such as hunting and trapping; wildlife management; use of backcountry and parks; and miscellaneous issues. Responses were analyzed according to the respondent's age, occupation, place of residence, and other factors. On many questions, the respondent's level of knowledge was considered in analyzing results.

Among the study's findings:

--Of eight selected wildlife issues, the public knew the most about "killing baby seals for fur" (45 percent knowledgeable) and "effects of pesticides such as DDT on birds" (42 percent knowledgeable). The least recognized issue was "use of steel shot versus lead shot by waterfowl hunters" (14 percent knowledgeable). Only 34 percent indicated that they had some knowledge about the Endangered Species Act, and only 17 percent were knowledgeable about the much publicized snail darter/Tellico Dam controversy.

--On a variety of questions, a majority favored protecting wildlife even at the expense of jobs, housing, and development projects. Fifty-five percent opposed the principle of building an industrial plant on a marsh needed by a rare bird species even if the plant would help solve an unemployment problem. Fifty-seven percent disapproved of building houses on marshes used by ducks and other nonendangered wildlife. Seventy-six percent thought cutting trees for lumber and paper should be done in ways that help wildlife even if it resulted in higher lumber prices.

--The public's support for endangered species protection when it would increase costs for an energy project depended on the animal involved and the nature of the project. Americans overwhelmingly supported protecting the bald eagle, eastern mountain lion, American crocodile, and an endangered butterfly. They opposed protecting an endangered plant, snake, or spider if it increased costs for an energy project. On a snail darter type question, most people opposed blocking a hypothetical water project designed for essential uses such as drinking water, hydroelectric power, or irrigation to protect an unknown fish species. But nearly 60 percent opposed construction of a dam for "nonessential" purposes such as making a recreational lake if it would endanger a fish.

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In general, support for protecting endangered species depended on such factors as the animal's attractiveness, close biological relationship to humans, reason for endangerment, economic value, and importance in American history and folklore.

--In a surprising finding, 77 percent said they thought it would be all right to kill whales for a useful product if the species hunted was not endangered. But on another intelligent sea mammal, the porpoise, 69 percent said they would rather pay a higher price for tuna fish than see the tuna industry continue killing porpoises in their nets. The researchers said the apparently contradictory responses may be related to the tradition of whaling in the United States.

--On the controversial issue of animal damage control, the public was not altogether opposed to controlling coyotes that prey on livestock, but strongly preferred nonlethal control methods or hunting only individual coyotes known to have killed livestock. Most were strongly opposed to poisoning, and were also opposed to shooting and trapping as many coyotes as possible.

--Attitudes toward hunting depended on the purpose of the hunt. The public overwhelmingly supported traditional native American subsistence hunting and also supported hunting exclusively for meat, regardless of who hunted. Sixty-four percent approved of hunting for recreation if the meat was used, but about 60 percent opposed hunting just for sport or recreation. Over 80 percent opposed hunting exclusively for a trophy.

--Although some observers have linked anti-hunting sentiment with an anti-wildlife management attitude, results of the study did not support this. Sixty percent of members of humane organizations and 61 percent of those opposed to sport hunting supported government management programs to "control" populations of deer and ducks.

--When asked about possible sources of funding for wildlife management programs, the public indicated stronger support for taxes on "consumptive" activities, such as buying fur, than on "nonconsumptive" uses such as bird-watching. Eighty-two percent favored a sales tax on fur clothing from wild animals; 75 percent favored entrance fees to wildlife refuges and other public wildlife areas; and 71 percent favored a sales tax on off-road vehicles. Fifty-seven percent favored increasing the amount of general tax revenues for wildlife management; the same number favored sales taxes on backpacking and camping equipment; and 54 percent favored taxes on birdwatching supplies and equipment.

--Most Americans wanted to preserve wildlife values on public lands. Two thirds--including 77 percent of Alaskans--were opposed to hypothetical oil development in Yellowstone National Park if it would harm the park's wildlife. Fifty-six percent thought national forest land should be set aside to protect grizzly bears even if it resulted in some loss of jobs and building materials.

--Attitudes toward many issues varied considerably according to the respondent's age, sex, educational level, place of residence, and other factors. For example, support for protecting endangered species was strongest among the highly educated, people under 35, residents of areas with more than 1 million population, people with higher incomes, professionals, and residents of the Pacific Coast and Alaska. Older persons, those with less than an 8th grade education, farmers, rural residents, and Southerners were more likely to oppose protecting endangered species. On the animal damage control issue, residents of the South--not the Rocky Mountain States, where predator damage is higher--expressed greatest support for shooting or trapping as many coyotes as possible. Residents of Pacific Coast States indicated the most protectionist sentiment.

--Of all regions, Alaskans were the most knowledgeable about and supportive of wildlife. Their support was based on understanding of wildlife and ecology, rather than on emotional or sentimental notions about animals. As a group, Alaskans ranked third in level of knowledge, following only Ph.D.'s and those with other graduate education. They also expressed greater willingness to forego personal benefits such as recreation and jobs in order to preserve wildlife habitat and endangered species.

This report is the first of four being prepared for the Fish and Wildlife Service by Dr. Kellert. Future reports will deal with characteristics of wildlife users, analysis of socioeconomic differences in attitudes, trends in wildlife attitudes and uses over the last 75 years, and how children's attitudes toward wildlife are formed. The entire 3-year study cost \$450,000.

Single copies of the report are available from the Publications Unit, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240 (202/343-2982).

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