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Policy for Avian and Mammalian Predation Management

Adopted August 24, 2000

I. PURPOSE

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (Department) has a responsibility to preserve, protect, perpetuate and manage all wildlife in the state and to provide continued supplies of such wildlife for hunting, fishing and trapping. To fulfill its responsibility, the Department must efficiently and effectively manage populations of predators as well as populations of prey species to meet management objectives. The Department recognizes predator management to be a viable and legitimate wildlife management tool that must be available to wildlife managers when needed. However, the Department also recognizes that predator removal is controversial both publicly and professionally. The purpose of this policy is to provide the Department direction in managing predator populations consistent with meeting management objectives for prey species populations.

This policy does not apply to emergency response situations where the Department must act to protect human health and safety.

II. DEFINITIONS

- A. **"Predation"** means the act of an individual animal killing another live animal.
- B. **"Predator"** means any wild animal species subsisting, wholly or in part, on other living animals captured through its own efforts. Predators are defined in Idaho Code as 'big game animals' (black bear and mountain lion), 'migratory birds' (American crow), 'fur-bearing animals' (badger, bobcat, fisher, marten, mink, otter, raccoon, and red fox), and 'predatory wildlife' (coyote, skunk, and weasel). For the purpose of this policy, "predator" will include primarily those avian and terrestrial species subject to Idaho jurisdiction, but may in some cases include species which are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act or the Endangered Species Act. For predatory species protected under these or other federal statutes, the Department may cooperate with the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and/or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in addressing predation problems caused by such species.

- C. **"Predation management"** means the application of professional wildlife management technology to increase or decrease predator populations. Predator management may include management of habitats to benefit or depress populations, selective harvest of individual animals, or generalized harvest over a geographic area.
- D. **"Predator removal"** means the physical removal of an animal, alive or dead, from an area where its presence is undesirable. Physical removal of live animals for release in habitats already occupied by the same species has been shown to create additional problems as individual animals seek living space (i.e., a home range) within already-occupied suitable habitat; for that reason, predator removal will often but not necessarily require lethal methods.
- E. **"Prey"** means any animal hunted or killed as food by a predator.

III. POLICY

Predator populations, as with all wildlife in Idaho, will be managed to assure their future recreational, ecological, intrinsic, scientific, and educational values, and to limit conflicts with human enterprise and values. Where there is evidence that predation is a significant factor inhibiting the ability of a prey species to attain Department population management objectives and the Department decides to implement predation management actions, the management actions will ordinarily be directed by a predation management plan.

Predator populations will be managed through habitat manipulation and/or predator removal as appropriate. Wildlife managers and administrators implementing predation management options will consider the ecological relationships that will be affected. Management decisions will be consistent with objectives or management plans for predators, animals that constitute or contribute to the predator's prey base, affected habitat, and other biological and social constraints.

Idaho Code provides that predatory wildlife (i.e., coyotes, jack rabbits, skunks, starlings, and weasels) may be taken by any legal means at any time.

On lands managed by the Department, efforts to limit the size of predator populations may include habitat manipulation. The Department may encourage other land management agencies to manipulate habitat under their jurisdiction in a manner to limit the size or effectiveness of predator populations.

The Department, when and where feasible, will rely on sportsmen (licensed hunters and trappers) to take predators classified as game animals and fur-bearing animals, and may alter seasons or harvest rules to meet wildlife management objectives. However, the Department will not support any contests or similar activities involving the taking of predators which may portray hunting in an unethical fashion, devalue the predator, and which may be offensive to the general public. The Department opposes use of bounties as a predator control measure. The Department will not implement a program based, in whole or in part, on utilizing methods involving sterilization or birth control in wild animals.

The Department will cooperate with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Wildlife Services Program to address specific areas and species, particularly on private lands, in a manner consistent with the approved interagency Memorandum of Understanding.

The Director may implement a Predation Management Plan in those circumstances where wildlife management objectives for prey species cannot be accomplished within two years by habitat manipulation, sportsman harvest, or interagency action designed to benefit the prey species, and where there is evidence that action affecting predators may aid in meeting management objectives. Essential components of such a Predation Management Plan are defined below.

This policy does not affect existing predator management policies and procedures used to administer livestock depredation issues.

IV. PROCEDURES

Managers recognize the role of predators in an ecological and conservation context. Impacts of the removal of individual predators on the structure of the predator population, as well as the prey population, will be considered. The actions by the Department must be based on the best available scientific information, and will be evaluated in terms of risk management to all affected wildlife species and habitats.

Valid concerns for human health and safety exist. Predator management will consider the need to avoid risk of human injury, loss of life, or potential for disease transmission.

Predator management may occur but is not limited to the following circumstances:

1. In localized areas where prey populations are fragmented or isolated, or where introductions or transplants of potentially vulnerable wildlife species (e.g., bighorn sheep, wild turkeys, sharp-tailed grouse, and others) has occurred or is imminent. Control may be intensive and of sufficient duration to allow transplanted animals and their progeny to become established and to become self-sustaining, or selective with removal efforts directed at specific offending animals.
2. In specific areas where managers are unable to meet management goals and objectives for prey populations due to predation. For example, in areas where survival or recruitment of game animal populations is chronically low and management plan objectives have not been or cannot be met and where there is evidence that predation is a significant factor, predator control may be initiated.
3. On wildlife management areas, especially those which are managed primarily to provide for production of specific species (e.g., waterfowl), provision of critical winter range, and those acquired and managed to provide specific mitigation for wildlife losses elsewhere.

Predation Management Plans will consider options other than just predator removal. Various kinds of habitat manipulation can sometimes negate or minimize the effect of predators, including constructing nesting islands, providing cover plantings, or removal of roosts used by avian predators. Preventative actions are important in reducing conflicts with predators; therefore, the Department will seek ways to reduce the vulnerability of prey species to

predation, and will cooperate with federal and state agencies, counties, and others to promote activities on public and private lands that will limit predator impacts. Such activities may include working with landowners and land managers to reduce winter concentrations of prey species (especially where artificially concentrated by food resources), and working with recreation managers to direct or reduce human activities that may increase the vulnerability of prey species to predators.

V. **PREDATION MANAGEMENT PLANS**

Predation management plans will be prepared using the following outline:

1. ***Definition of the problem.*** This definition must include a rationale for the proposed action. Such a rationale may include:
 - A. a proposed management action (such as the introduction of a small number of animals into suitable but unoccupied habitat) that may be adversely affected by the presence and predictable actions of predators,
 - B. a finding that approved wildlife management objectives are not being met due in large part to the actions of predators, or
 - C. evidence that wildlife recruitment or populations has been or will be adversely impacted by the presence of predators.
2. ***Risk Assessment.*** A discussion of the ramifications of the program, including potential effects on:
 - A. predator populations (i.e., will removal of avian roosting trees near a waterfowl production area affect non-targeted species, such as bald eagles? Will removal of specific individual animals result in vacant home ranges that will be especially attractive to transient predators of the same species?)
 - B. prey or benefiting species,
 - C. sportsmen and wildlife-associated recreational opportunity,
 - D. landowners in or near the impacted area, and
 - E. groups that will strongly favor or oppose the proposed action.
3. ***Program.*** A discussion of the specific proposed treatment, including:
 - A. clearly-defined boundaries,
 - B. the species of predator(s) affected,
 - C. the prey or other species to benefit from any proposed action,
 - D. the method or techniques identified to address identified concerns, including habitat manipulation where appropriate and the method(s) of predator removal (if removal is a component of the program),
 - E. the objective and measure of success used to determine whether that objective has been achieved,
 - F. date of initiation of actions,
 - G. measurable objectives and monitoring plans to assess program effectiveness, and
 - H. budget.

All predator management plans will be reviewed by the chief of the Bureau of Wildlife and regional supervisor. Predator management plans must be approved by the director. Predator management plans will be reviewed and evaluated annually.

VI. REVISION DATE

This policy shall be reviewed on or before June 30, 2005.









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