

A LEGISLATOR'S PERSPECTIVE ON WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

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Thank you for the invitation to address The Wildlife Society at your annual meeting. Today's topic - Perspectives on Wildlife Management - is particularly important as we begin a new legislative session and a second term for the Deukmejian administration.

California is unique in its diversity of wildlife resources. The responsibility of managing those resources for all Californians is a demanding task. The state continues to grow in population and the pressures that come with such growth must be addressed by the Legislature through the enactment of statutes which balance the needs of a growing state and the needs of our wildlife resources.

The Legislature as policymaker and the Department of Fish and Game as administrator of that policy, must continue to strive for that balance. The Legislature has passed legislation to protect many species. Laws regarding antelope, bighorn sheep, tule elk and the mountain lion, to name just a few, have enabled these species to survive and their number to increase.

For example, the tule elk population was near extinction in the late 1800's due to hunting pressures created by the gold rush population explosion. The elk was afforded protection from private landowners and wildlife enthusiasts until the Legislature enacted a statute in 1971 which required the Department of Fish and Game to restrict hunting of elk until their numbers reach 2,000, and to restore the tule elk to its historic range through translocation. As the number of elk have increased to about 1,800, so have the problems associated with moving the elk (depredation of farmlands, agricultural corps and the elk refusing to stay in the new area). The responsibility for moving the elk and the costs associated with the program have been borne by the Department. In fiscal year 1985-86, the department spent \$426,677 on moving elk to new locations. The Department of Finance approved \$70,000 to cover the costs of translocation. The difference of \$356,677 had to be taken from the Fish and Game Preservation Fund. This funding shortfall presents the department with a serious problem. I believe we will have to identify other funding for continued translocation of elk. Possible sources of funding are the Environmental License Plate Fund and the General Fund.

Another success story is the mountain lion. Legislative protection of the mountain lion was enacted in 1971 by placing a moratorium on hunting. The moratorium was effective through January 1, 1986 unless legislation extended it. The issue before the legislature in 1985, then, was one of continued protection versus the enactment of authorization for hunting of the mountain

lion. The mountain lion population had risen through the years of the moratorium. Reports of depredation on livestock and predation of deer were reported in increasing numbers. A mountain lion attacked a small child in Casper's Park in the Los Angeles area which resulted in a lawsuit filed against the state for \$30 million in damages. The proponents of continuing the moratorium felt that the Fish and Game Code contained adequate provisions to address the depredation problems and hunting of the mountain lion should not be used as a method for controlling depredation or as a management tool. Opponents of the moratorium felt that hunting of the mountain lion was a legitimate management tool and the opportunity to take mountain lions under a management program should be allowed. The Legislature, as the policymaker, fashioned SB 76 (Presley) which extended the moratorium until 1990, and authorized the department to prepare area management plans (which could authorize a hunt for depredating lion) as a compromise between those opposed to hunting and those that advocated hunting. Governor Deukmejian vetoed SB 76 which effectively returned management of the mountain lion to the Department of Fish and Game. The question of protection versus hunting becomes an increasingly volatile issue as the success of these protection programs results in increased wildlife populations.

The bighorn sheep was another species whose numbers had been severely reduced in the mid-1800's due to introduction of domestic sheep diseases, and competition between people, domestic livestock and sheep over the limited water supplies. The Legislature afforded the bighorn sheep protection in 1872. As of June 1986, the Department of Fish and Game estimated bighorn populations at 4,000 animals. The private sector has become very involved in bighorn management and very successful in funding projects. Fifty water guzzlers have been installed in water deficient areas. The availability of water has proven to be an effective method of increasing bighorn in desert habitats. Since 1984, the department has received \$200,000 from the Environmental License Plate Fund to fund work on bighorn. Again, as the numbers increased, the request to allow limited hunting came before the Legislature for resolution. Last year, AB 3117 (Mountjoy), Chapter 745, Statutes of 1986, was enacted. AB 117 allows for limited hunting in specified areas of the state for the desert bighorn after approval by the Fish and Game Commission. The funds generated from the sale of license tags will be used to further increase the numbers and range of bighorn in California.

An area of critical concern for Californians is the status of the deer herds. The populations have declined from historic numbers. The challenge for the Legislature and the department is to identify the causes of the declines and take effective steps to halt it. To aid the department in that goal, AB 2735 (Frank Hill), Chapter 1411, Statutes of 1974 increased the deer tag fee from \$4.25 to \$10.00 over a two-year period which increased the current annual income by \$1.6 million. These funds are specifically earmarked for activities identified in deer management plans. Continued acquisition of critical deer habitat by state entities, closer cooperation with counties to protect key areas from development, and continued education of the public on the problems associated with maintaining viable deer herds for now and in the future are also needed.

Another critical area the Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee reviews is the need for protection of rare and endangered species and their habitat. The continued growth of the state jeopardizes rare and endangered species habitat. To aid the Department of Fish and Game in its responsibility to protect these species, I authored AB 3309 in 1984. AB 3309 authorizes the Department of Fish

and Game to enter into early consultation with state agencies to determine if a proposed project would have adverse impacts on any rare or endangered species or their habitat. The Department of Fish and Game assures me that the program is working well.

The challenge before the Legislature is to establish a policy which ensures continued protection of rare and endangered species while recognizing the needs of the people of the state for adequate housing, and new and expanding industry. What trade-offs will be made and how will the allocation be made? Those are the issues facing the Legislature as it begins a new session.

As Chairman of the Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee, I look forward to the challenge. The Wildlife Society can influence the decision-making process in Sacramento by contacting their local legislators, writing directly to the Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee and by testifying on important wildlife issues. I look forward to working with the Society and the Department of Fish and Game in the coming session on matters of mutual interest.