

Conservation Committee

Committee Members: B. S. Arbogast, E. Beever, B. J. Bergstrom (Chair), A. D. Davidson, A. W. Ferguson, A. T. Ford, B. J. Gaston, A. J. Giordano, R. L. Honeycutt, D. M. Kaufman, A. Krevitz, J. Malaney, R. A. Medellin, R. A. Ojeda, L. A. Randa, M. Schadler, S. R. Sheffield, W. Smith, N. Upham, E. Wilson.

Mission:

The Conservation Committee (CC) was established by the ASM in 1927, a few years after the Society passed a resolution condemning the unscientific and propagandistic extermination campaign against predators at its 4th annual meeting in 1924. First known as the Conservation of Land Mammals Committee, the committee's name was changed to the Conservation Committee in 2002 to reflect the fact that it dealt with conservation issues that included all mammals. In 2002–2003, the Aldo Leopold Conservation Award subcommittee that CC had recently established was moved to full standing committee status. The CC promotes research, education, and science-based solutions to conservation and management of native mammals in North America and globally.

Information Items:

(1) The following members rotated off the Committee in 2015, and we thank them for their service: T. J. Jessen, N. G. Dawson, A. Morzillo, A. Cheeseman, and L. C. Arias. The Committee welcomes new member A. Butler.

(2) Activities of the ASM CC during 2015-2016:

(a) Beginning at our 2015 Annual Meeting in Jacksonville, the CC collaborated with Joe Cook on a position letter regarding the Alexander Archipelago (AA) wolf (*Canis lupus ligoni*) simultaneously calling on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to list the AA wolf under the Endangered Species Act, the U.S. Forest Service to cease construction of roads and old-growth logging in critical areas of Prince of Wales Island (POWI), AK, and the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADFG) to give an emergency order closing a critical habitat area of POWI. These letters were signed by President Lacey and sent in early July.

In August 2015, we followed up with a Society letter to the Federal Subsistence Board asking them to close the federal season on AA wolves, agreeing with a request from the Tongass National Forest Supervisor, in response to an alarming single-year 60% decline in the population.

In October, ASM received a response from ADFG Chief Wildlife Scientist Kim Titus explaining that, while they would not close the season on AA wolves, they were setting a restrictive quota of 9 wolves for the hunting and trapping season. ASM responded in early November, reiterating that a quota of zero was scientifically justified in this case.

Follow-up #1: In mid-December, ADFG closed the wolf season early on POWI after 5 wolves had been reported taken (so that the eventual toll would not exceed 9).

Follow-up #2: In early January 2016, USFWS declined to list the POWI AA wolf, agreeing that the population is "discrete" but concluding it is not "significant"—essentially deciding that its extirpation would be acceptable under the ESA.

(b) In early October 2015, ASM signed on to a multi-organization letter (prepared by Michael Robinson of CBD) requesting releases of endangered Mexican gray wolves (*C. l. baileyi*) in the Gila Wilderness and Gila National Forest in New Mexico, to address inbreeding depression.

Follow-up: On 18 April 2016, USFWS announced they would proceed with new releases of Mexican gray wolves into New Mexico and Arizona, despite New Mexico's denial of a permit to the agency to do so. On 26 April, a settlement was announced between USFWS and several environmental groups that—once the federal court approves it—will require USFWS to finalize a recovery plan for the wolf before the end of 2016.

(c) Also in October, several members of CC, independently, prepared and submitted a scientist comment letter on the proposed delisting of gray wolves by the State of Oregon.

(d) In early December 2015, ASM sent a position letter, drafted by CC, and signed by President Lacey to the government of Mauritius urging them to suspend their planned cull of 18,000 endemic fruit bats *Pteropus niger* (Mauritius flying fox).

(e) CC and President Lacey collaborated with Society for Conservation Biology North American section (SCBNA) on a joint position letter (dated 10 May 2016) opposing the delisting of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) due to its continuing isolation, recent slowing or declining of population growth, and serious threats to four of its major food sources. We reminded USFWS that ASM passed a resolution in 2001 urging re-establishment of a population in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area, which they listed as a program goal, and which they still have not done.

(f) Throughout the year, we have monitored international efforts to save the critically endangered Vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*) from extinction. Current efforts center on a plan for discussion this spring and passage this summer of a motion by IUCN (ASM has been but is not currently a member of IUCN).

(g) We have also monitored and will continue to monitor the dire situation with the red wolf (*C. lupus*), whose recovery the USFWS seems to have abandoned.

(h) NOTE: copies of the position letters mentioned above can be read on the Committee's web page at <http://www.mammalsociety.org/committees/conservation#tab3>.

(i) Finally, the CC established a social media presence in June 2015 with its now growing Twitter account—@AsmConservation—to announce mammal-related conservation news and promote interactions with the public. So far, the account has tweeted out 34 events and has 125 followers.

(3) Other news relating to past CC actions:

(a) On 4 April 2016, the U.S. District Court in Montana agreed with ASM's position letter of July 2014, when it ruled against the Interior Department and its decision—overturning the advice of its own biologists—not to list the wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) as threatened or endangered; the Court was blunt in its closing statement: “No greater level of certainty is needed to see the writing on the wall for this snow-dependent species standing squarely in the path of global climate change. It has taken us twenty years to get to this point. It is the undersigned's view that if there is one thing required of the Service under the ESA, it is to take action at the earliest possible, defensible point in time to protect against the loss of biodiversity within our reach as a nation. For the wolverine, that time is now.” Conservation efforts on behalf of the wolverine by the CC extend back to 1998, when we drafted and ASM submitted a letter to USFWS requesting ESA protection for the wolverine.

(b) On 4 May 2016, USFWS, under a Section 7 consultation required by the Endangered Species Act, approved a copper mine in the Santa Rita Mtns. south of Tucson, AZ, in the range of the endangered jaguar (*Panthera onca*; currently occupied by one male called “El Jefe”), and where an endangered ocelot (*Leopardus pardalis*) had been observed and photographed in 2014. U.S. Forest Service, Army Corps of Engineers, and EPA still have to issue decisions on permits. ASM passed a Members' Resolution in 2007 and wrote a Position Letter in 2008 both urging USFWS to draft a recovery plan for the jaguar, which they later did. This latest decision by USFWS not to issue a “jeopardy” opinion on a major development comes after a recent study published in PNAS revealed that only 2 of 6,829 formal Section 7 reviews conducted by USFWS between 2008 and 2015 resulted in jeopardy opinions.

Action Items: None.

Respectfully submitted,
Brad Bergstrom, Chair
(bergstrm@valdosta.edu)