

## Conservation Committee

**Committee Members:** B. S. Arbogast, B. J. Bergstrom (Chair), A. D. Davidson, N. Dawson, A. W. Ferguson, A. J. Giordano, T. J. Jessen, R. J. Larsen, R. A. Medellin, A. Morzillo, R. A. Ojeda, L. A. Randa, S. R. Sheffield.

### **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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 CC welcomed new members Ana Davidson, Anthony Giordano, Timothy Jessen, Roberto Medellin, and Ricardo Ojeda in 2010-2011. The following members rotated off the committee in the past year, and we thank them for their service: Michael Barbour, Kris Helgen, Daryl Howell, Andy Joachim, Charles Long, Stephanie MacDonald, Suzie Prange, Bob Rose, Margaret Schadler, Wes Sechrest and Julie Young; Terry Doonan and Sacha Vignieri continued to serve on the committee until mid-year.

#### **(2) Activities of the ASM CC during 2010-2011:**

**(a)** As of this writing, committee members are researching and drafting a position letter urging a more science-based approach to wildlife conflict management by USDA's Wildlife Services. This is a continuation of ASM's long history of action on behalf of threatened and over-exploited mammals, particularly predators. This is a follow-up to an ASM Resolution in 1999 addressing the same agency.

**(b)** Committee members also are researching the question of whether to recommend that ASM take a position in favor of listing the African Lion (*Panthera leo*) as endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA). On 1 March 2011, several NGOs petitioned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to list lions, citing importation of trophy animals as a contributing factor to the decline of their global population.

**(c)** In March 2011, USFWS proposed to renew incidental take permits for Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*) during oil and gas exploration and production in Alaskan waters. Following a 2007 ASM Presidential position letter urging ESA protection of Polar Bear and also cautioning against take by oil and gas activities, the species was listed as threatened in 2008. CC and ASM's Marine Mammal Committee discussed preparing a response to this proposal, but did not pursue it further, as a short deadline would have

precluded an official Society response.

(d) CC continues to monitor developments in the recovery of the Northern Rocky Mountain (NRM) Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*), the Mexican Wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*), and the Jaguar (*Panthera onca*), all of which CC and ASM has actively supported, and any of which may warrant action in the near future.

### **(3) Follow-up on Previous Issues:**

In 2008, CC drafted a position letter opposing the delisting of the NRM Gray Wolf in Idaho and Montana, which President Sue McLaren sent to the Bush Administration in November 2008, and also to the Obama transition team. Wolves were delisted in those 2 states effective May 2009, and 255 animals were killed by hunters during the 2009-2010 season (270 additional wolves were killed by state and federal wildlife agents conducting control actions during the same period). In August 2010, U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy restored ESA protection to NRM gray wolves, overturning the the two-state delisting rule (excluding Wyoming) as “arbitrary and capricious.” Despite no legal hunting during the 2010-2011 season, 226 wolves were killed by USDA Wildlife Services control actions. Earlier this year, a proposed settlement agreement between the USFWS and 10 conservation NGOs, intended to forestall congressional efforts to legislatively delist the NRM gray wolf, was rejected by Judge Molloy on 9 April. But later that month, a rider to the federal budget bill passed by Congress and signed by the President removed wolves from the endangered species list not only in Montana and Idaho, but also in Washington and Oregon, where dispersers have established small populations, and in Utah, which has no resident wolves. This is the first time in the 37-year history of the ESA that a species has been delisted by legislation.

On 26 October 2010, the U.S. Geological Survey released a study that concluded that the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A) contained only 1/10 as much oil as a 2002 study indicated. A 2003 ASM Presidential position letter criticized the draft EIS for oil and gas leasing as inadequate and a serious threat to several of the most valuable mammalian wildlife habitats within the 9.5 million ha reserve, the same year that a National Research Council report concluded irreversible damage would be done to NPR-A ecosystems. In 2004, U.S. Department of Interior opened all but 17% of the area to oil and gas leasing, but those leases were blocked in 2006 by the U.S. District Court in Anchorage.

In December 2010, USFWS announced that Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) warranted ESA protection, due to threats from climate change, but listing was precluded in favor of higher priority species. An ASM Presidential position letter urging ESA protection of Wolverine was sent in 2000. Federal District Judge John Roll was killed in the 8 January 2011 shooting rampage in Tucson, AZ; this was the judge who ordered USFWS in 2009 to prepare a recovery plan and designate critical habitat for the endangered Jaguar, as an ASM Resolution and follow-up presidential letter requested they do. Roll rejected the government's argument that the Jaguar was primarily a "foreign" species.

On 12 April 2011, the Interagency Bison Management Plan group announced Bison (*Bison bison*) from Yellowstone National Park would be allowed to range through the 30,000-ha

Gardiner Basin, MT, in winter; after more than a decade of efforts, a cattle-free corridor for seasonal migration to lower elevation habitat was finally secured, which should reduce the need for the nearly annual winter culling of the herd as they left the park. A 1997 ASM Resolution had urged this result.

**Action Items:** None.

**Respectfully submitted,**  
Brad Bergstrom, Chair  
([bergstrm@valdosta.edu](mailto:bergstrm@valdosta.edu))