

Environment Canada Policy on Predator Management

November 25, 2005

1. Purpose

This document sets out the policy of Environment Canada (EC) on the management of predatory animals which may pose a threat to populations of other wildlife species, the principles, criteria and purposes that guide its involvement in predator management, and the roles that EC may take in predator management initiatives.

EC recognises the importance of considering the interdependence of the environment, human health and the Canadian economy in its decision-making, and focuses most conservation efforts at the species or population level within a landscape or ecosystem perspective. Within this context, this policy addresses the necessity for undertaking direct interventions targeting groups of individuals under certain conditions.

This policy will be reviewed and up-dated as additional information becomes available on the application and effectiveness of predator management as a wildlife management tool.

2. Policy Statement

EC supports the use of predator management, including direct predator control and indirect predator management, to minimise or remove the threats they pose to other wildlife species, under specific conditions that are consistent with the following principles, purposes and criteria. Decisions on the use of direct predator control are undertaken on a case-by-case basis by EC management, following scientific, policy and public review, and discussions with jurisdictional partners, in line with approaches described in this document.

3. Definition

Predator management: Activities undertaken to minimise the impact of predators on other wildlife species, including:

- *Direct predator control*, involving the killing or removal of predators, or undertaking other direct actions to increase their rate of mortality or reduce their productivity, and
- *Indirect predator management*, including actions to limit the access of predators to wildlife species which they have negatively impacted, by scaring or exclusion from nests, residences or other specific areas.

4. Scope

This policy applies to those instances where EC has a jurisdictional interest or legislated obligation for the conservation of at least one of the species concerned, generally migratory birds or species at risk under federal jurisdiction. These species may be either or both of the following:

- the species whose predatory activities are affecting other species (e.g. a gull which may be a predator of other birds or wildlife), or
- the species being impacted by such a predator (e.g. a migratory bird or species-at-risk under EC jurisdiction which suffers predation from a fox or crow which falls under provincial or territorial jurisdiction).

This policy does not apply to the following situations, many of which are addressed through other EC policies (see reference documents below):

- activities undertaken to address risks to human safety presented by migratory birds at airports or other locations,
- actions to address emergency situations or public health concerns, such as the control of disease-bearing animals,
- the protection of agricultural or aquacultural crops from waterfowl or other migratory birds,
- the control of migratory birds considered to be nuisances or pests, or those causing other damage or danger,
- the collection of migratory birds for scientific purposes,
- the application of general exceptions outlined in Section 83 of the *Species at Risk Act (SARA)*.

5. Management Authority

EC has jurisdiction for the management or killing of migratory birds considered to be predators. Disturbance, removal or killing of migratory birds can only be undertaken under the authority of permits issued under the *Migratory Birds Regulations*, following appropriate review and environmental assessment. Sections 19 (scientific permits), 26.1(1) (destruction of eggs) and 26.2 (capture and relocation of migratory birds) of these *Regulations* provide the appropriate authorities for predator management.

Section 73 of the *Species at Risk Act (SARA)* sets out purposes and conditions for permits authorising activities which affect a species at risk under federal authority. It does not specifically allow activities for the management of predators which are listed as species at risk.

Authority to kill, remove or disturb individuals of most other predatory species rests with provincial or territorial wildlife management agencies, wildlife management boards, or municipalities (for feral or domestic animals), and generally requires similar review processes. These organisations lead in decisions on management or killing of predator species within their jurisdiction, generally with input from EC if the species subject to predation is a migratory bird or species at risk under EC jurisdiction.

6. Principles of Predator Management

The management of predators should be conducted in the context of established wildlife and ecosystem management approaches, and should adhere to the following principles:

- predator management decisions should be taken in an open, transparent and consistent manner,
- predator management practices should aim to preserve or regain the stability and diversity of ecosystems, and ensure secure populations of native species,
- predator management practices should not jeopardize the long-term, range-wide survival of a native predator species,
- predator management should be viewed as a partial or interim solution, as long-term management of predator impacts is best achieved by addressing key factors leading to these impacts, and predator management that requires long-term investment of resources should be avoided,
- predator impacts should be resolved at the smallest relevant geographic scale,

- predator management decisions should be based on the best available scientific information, and should reflect relevant social and traditional considerations,
- predator management decisions should reflect the precautionary approach, such that when there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of scientific certainty should not be used to postpone a decision,
- a graduated approach should be used to minimise the impacts of problem predators, and killing or use of other direct predator control techniques should only be undertaken if all indirect predator management options have been attempted or considered, and shown to be ineffective or impractical,
- the following approaches should be applied or considered in sequential fashion:
 1. *Indirect predator management*: environmental modifications to make areas unattractive or unproductive for predators,
 2. *Indirect predator management*: non-lethal scaring, exclusion or dispersal techniques,
 3. *Direct predator control*: actions to reduce the predator's productivity (such as the oiling of gull eggs),
 4. *Direct predator control*: lethal control approaches, including killing or removal of predators, or increasing their mortality rate,
- when direct lethal predator control is required, the most humane, practical means should be used, killing the smallest number in the smallest area necessary to meet objectives, and
- specific programs involving direct predator control should seek the understanding, and to the extent possible, the acceptance of the Canadian public.

7. Purposes of Predator Management

EC does not support the use of direct predator control when intended primarily to improve the survival or reproductive success of a population of a common species, when that population is within the normal range of abundance, except as a precautionary approach to prevent severe population declines.

EC supports the use of predator management for the following conservation purposes, where the principles and criteria are met:

- to reduce or prevent predator-related mortality of a population of a species, when there is strong scientific evidence or clear consensus that the population level is being or is likely to be severely suppressed below the range of natural variability by predation, and that predator management will reverse this effect, particularly when the effects of predation have been exacerbated by human activity, or
- to ensure the long-term viability of populations of naturally-occurring species and ecosystems, by managing populations of an alien or invasive predator species (those which are not normal components of an area's native biodiversity, which have or are likely to have negative ecological impacts, and whose presence is usually a result of human activity).

8. Criteria for EC Support of Predator Management

Predator management activities undertaken or supported by EC for conservation-related purposes should:

- reflect a scientific assessment of available information that assesses the causes of the impact on the species subject to predation, and concludes that predator management will contribute to addressing these impacts,
- adhere to a science-based plan agreed to by EC and other management agencies with jurisdictional responsibility for the wildlife species involved, that:
 - defines the problem and the reasons for it,
 - assesses the options to address the situation and seeks indirect or non-lethal predator management solutions where possible,
 - sets out the methods to resolve the problem, including techniques, time frame and geographic area, and
 - specifies objectives and an evaluation process to assess progress towards these objectives,
- be designed to have minimum additional impacts on the species involved, or other components of the ecosystem,
- meet the principles, objectives and criteria of this policy, and in the case of direct predator control, reflect consultation to advise partners and the public of the program and reasons for it and to respond to concerns, and
- be undertaken in accordance with appropriate permits and authorities issued by jurisdictional agencies, in line with jurisdictional review processes.

9. Roles of Environment Canada in Predator Management

When it is the proponent of direct predator control initiatives, EC will:

- develop and approve a science-based management plan with other jurisdictional agencies, as set out above, together with a communications plan,
- review the management plan in the public forum, and respond to interventions from concerned citizens and organisations,
- oversee or undertake direct predator control activities in line with the management plan,
- monitor the effectiveness of these activities on the numbers and impacts of predators, and on the status of the species being affected by the predators, and revise the management plan as necessary.

In all cases, EC will:

- review requests for permits to manage or kill predators under EC jurisdiction, and issue permits for activities which meet the above principles, purposes and criteria, as well as relevant permit and environmental assessment requirements, and
- advise other agencies or organisations on the management of predators within its expertise or jurisdiction, in line with this policy.

10. Reference Documents

Environment Canada. 2000. *Canadian Wildlife Service Strategic Plan 2000: The Path Forward For Environment Canada's Wildlife Conservation Program*. Environment Canada, Ottawa, 23 pp.

Environment Canada. 2000. *Canadian Wildlife Service Policy for the Issuance of Scare Permits for the Aquaculture Industry*. Canadian Wildlife Service Ms report, 3pp.

Environment Canada. 2003. *Canadian Wildlife Service Interim Working Policy for the Management of Migratory Birds Causing Damage or Danger*. Canadian Wildlife Service Ms report, 4pp.

Wildlife Ministers' Council of Canada. 1990. *A Wildlife Policy for Canada*. Canadian Wildlife Service, Ottawa.