

Mike Yaun, Acting Executive Director
1416 Ninth Street, Room 1320
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 653-4899
(916) 653-5040 Fax
www.fgc.ca.gov

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WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMITTEE PREDATOR POLICY WORKGROUP

**Meeting Summary
April 26, 2016**

**University of California Center Sacramento
1130 K Street, Sacramento**

Following is a summary of the meeting prepared by staff.

1. **Call to order and roll call of workgroup members**

Meeting was called to order by Wildlife Advisor Erin Chappell who introduced Fish and Game Commission (FGC) staff and Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) staff. Self-introductions were made by the Wildlife Resources Committee (WRC)'s Predator Policy Workgroup (Workgroup) members.

Commission Staff

Michael Yaun Acting Executive Director
Erin Chappell Wildlife Advisor

DFW Staff

David Bess Chief, Law Enforcement Division
Eric Loft Chief, Wildlife Branch
Scott Gardner Senior Environmental Scientist

Workgroup Members

Josh Brones Mark Hennelly
Noelle Cremer Dr. Rick Hopkins
Rebecca Dmytryk Tony Linegar
Jennifer Fearing Erica Sanko
Bill Gaines Jean Su

Erin Chappell outlined the meeting procedures and let participants know that the meeting was being audio-recorded for posting to the website with a staff summary.

2. **Develop and approve draft work plan for Wildlife Resources Committee direction**

Erin Chappell provided a work plan template for the Workgroup to use as a starting point to develop the project scope, objectives, tasks, and timeline.

(A) Scope

The discussion about project scope was broken into three components: the purpose of the project; which species will be included; and what levels of governance will be addressed by the project.

Purpose – the Workgroup discussed why the project was needed and what management issue(s) are not adequately addressed under existing policies and regulations.

- (Josh Brones) - Need to come to understanding if regulations as they exist today are still appropriate and are serving purpose for which they were first established.
- (Tony Linegar) Need for appropriate predator policies for addressing depredation and agriculture. Noted this would apply to subset of predators.
- (Mark Hennelly) Identify the conservation needs that need further investigation. Focus on species where conservation needs are not being met. If conservation of a species is being addressed elsewhere, keep it off the list. Focus on science.
- (Jean Su) Focus on furbearers with no limit on take.
- (Rick Hopkins) Need a framework for establishing take limit. Address methods of take where regulations are currently silent. Noted that -full science-driven management does not exist, as science only informs decisions, not dictates them, and thus policy decisions need to also integrate social, political, and economics values as part of the decision making process.
- (Bill Gaines) Need to determine actual take of some species to inform whether a cap on take is necessary. Determine if an issue with overharvest exists and if current harvest is affecting conservation goals for a particular species.
- (Jennifer Fearing) Noted that predator management issues raised previously have been addressed in piece-meal fashion and this project arose from the WRC by the desire to take a more comprehensive approach. This project is an earnest effort for comprehensive reviews. Raised the need to address ethical concerns.
- (Rebecca Dmytryk) Reminded the group about WRC's previous effort to look at structural, scientific, and ethical concerns.

- **SUMMARY:** The main ideas from the discussion included 1) the need to identify whether conservation needs of species are being met; 2) if those needs are not being met, what are appropriate policies and regulations for meeting those conservation goals in a more comprehensive manner; 3) focus on prioritizing needs and/or efforts; and 4) balancing all beneficial uses/needs in a way that accounts for broader policy considerations, social context, and is informed by science.
- **DECISION:** The purpose is to evaluate whether existing predator policies and regulations reflect current understanding of science, wildlife management practices, ecological and environmental effects, economic concerns, social values, and public health and safety concerns.

Species – After the Feb 2016 Workgroup meeting, DFW evaluated a previously compiled list of predators and developed a recommendation to WRC on which species to include in this project. Eric Loft provided an overview of their evaluation and recommendations. The Workgroup reviewed the list of potential predators and discussed whether to use DFW's list of recommended species or to modify it.

- **SUMMARY:** There was general agreement on excluding species where no take is authorized (i.e., threatened or endangered species). There was some discussion around the need to address skunk, opossum, bear, mountain lion, and wolf for some aspects related to take (i.e., depredation and nuisance issues). The Workgroup was generally comfortable with using DFW's list but expressed preference to be more inclusive than exclusive and to include other species as appropriate. There was general agreement to prioritize effort on DFW's list of recommended species.
- **DECISION:** Workgroup will include badger, gray fox, mink, raccoon, bobcat, coyote, short-tailed weasel, and long-tailed weasel as priority focus species. Secondary focus species include black bear, mountain lion, gray wolf, striped skunk, spotted skunk, and opossum.

Level of Governance – At its Feb 2016 meeting, the Workgroup discussed including objectives related to state-level governance, Commission policy, regulations, and State statutes. Staff included these in the template work plan and added one related to local governance for discussion by the Workgroup.

- **SUMMARY:** There was general agreement on the state-level governance. Mark Hennelly raised a question about inclusion of local government given the opinion of the Attorney General's Office that local governments are generally prohibited from legislating upon fish and game matters. However, local governments can provide recommendations and input on State regulations. After further consideration under agenda item 2(B) (see below), the Workgroup decided to keep the scope focused on State-level governance.

- **DECISION:** The project scope will address Commission policy, California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 14, and relevant State statutes, including Fish and Game Code, Food and Agriculture Code, and Penal Code.

(B) Objectives

The Workgroup reviewed and discussed objectives identified at the Feb 2016 Workgroup meeting along with a proposed objective related to local government.

- Objective 1 – review existing predator policies and regulations
 - **DECISION:** Workgroup included this objective in the work plan
- Objective 2 – develop proposed Commission predator management policy
 - **DECISION:** Workgroup included this objective in the work plan
- Objective 3 – develop CCR Title 14 regulatory proposals
 - **DECISION:** Workgroup included this objective in the work plan
- Objective 4 – prepare summary of proposed statutory changes
 - **DECISION:** Workgroup included this objective in the work plan
- Objective 5 – identify predator management issues for redress by local government, consistent with State law
 - **SUMMARY:** The Workgroup revisited the discussion under agenda item 2(A) related to the relationship between State and local governance. Questions were raised about what would be addressed by this objective as well as concerns about whether it fits under the charge for this group and whether it needed to be a stand-alone objective. There was some discussion about the need to consider predator management issues occurring and being addressed at the local level. To address that aspect, the Workgroup discussed including it as an element under another objective.
 - **DECISION:** Workgroup removed this objective but included review of local government policies and regulations under Objective 1, Task 2.
- Objective 6 – identify best management practices
 - **SUMMARY:** Some concerns were raised about the Workgroup's capacity to address this objective and whether it was under the group's charge to include as a stand-alone objective. It was noted that there are many organizations that have identified best management practices and that information is readily available through other sources. It was also noted that best management practices are possible alternatives to proposed regulations and capturing them as part of those conversations could be beneficial.
 - **DECISION:** Workgroup removed this objective but included management practices under Objective 1, Task 2.

(C) Tasks

The Workgroup reviewed the template work plan which identified potential tasks under each objective. Based on the Workgroup's discussion, the following revisions were made to the tasks under each objective:

- Objective 1 – review existing predator policies and regulations
 - Task 2 was revised to include elements from Objectives 5 and 6 related to local government and management practices
- Objective 2 – develop proposed Commission predator management policy
 - Task 2 was revised to improve clarity regarding review and discussion
- Objective 3 – develop CCR Title 14 regulatory proposals
 - Two additional tasks were added (Tasks 3 and 4) to include vetting of existing regulations proposed for revision and vetting of possible new regulatory proposals
- Objective 4 – prepare summary of proposed statutory changes
 - Task 4 was revised to improve clarity regarding review and discussion
- Note: Objectives 5 and 6 and their associated tasks were removed from the work plan template (see agenda item 2 (B))

(D) Timeline

The Workgroup reviewed the timeline provided in the template work plan. No concerns were raised. Items related to Objectives 5 and 6 will be removed in final version of the work plan.

Erin Chappell will revise the work plan to reflect the changes made by the Workgroup. The revised work plan will be presented and discussed at the May 18th WRC meeting for possible recommendation to the Commission for approval.

3. Review existing predator policies and regulations

Due to time limitations the Workgroup decided to move this agenda to the next Workgroup meeting.

4. Discuss coordination between writing group and reviewers

An initial discussion on the roles and responsibilities of both the Writing Group and reviewers was held at the Feb 2016 Workgroup meeting. As part of that discussion, the topic of coordination between the two was raised. A final decision was not reached but the Workgroup agreed to follow up at the next meeting to determine a coordination process. Erin Chappell led the discussion to gather input from the Workgroup members on the timing of reviews, the length of time for those reviews, options for how comments would be submitted, and

establishing a process for how the Workgroup will consider and address comments.

- **SUMMARY:** There was general agreement from the Workgroup that reviews should occur once there is a draft that the Workgroup is comfortable with but prior to sending it to the WRC for discussion. The group input was that seven to ten days should be sufficient for reviews. There are currently 31 reviewers so the Workgroup discussed options for how to handle a potential large volume of comments. Options included having the reviewers consolidate comments, either by self-organizing or having a single point person, individual comments, or having three point people on the Workgroup to consolidate individual comments submitted to them. As part of that discussion another option emerged with support from the group. The preferred option is to have the Workgroup facilitator, Erin Chappell, compile, organize, and summarize the comments. The staff summaries would be intended to facilitate discussion within the Workgroup, although all comments submitted will be provided with the summary for clarity and reference purposes. There was general agreement from the Workgroup that any substantive issues raised during the review that are not incorporated would be noted in the report.
- **DECISION:** Given the large number of reviewers and the associated challenges with coordination, the Workgroup recommends that the WRC not allow any more reviewers to be added.

Since only a small portion of the reviewers were in attendance, Erin Chappell will set up a conference call with the reviewers to gather their input on coordination with the Workgroup. She will report back to Workgroup with the outcomes of that call.

5. **Discuss workgroup structure**

Due to time limitations the Workgroup decided to move this agenda to the next Workgroup meeting.

6. **Public forum for items not on the agenda**

No public comments were received.

The next Workgroup meeting will be held in Sacramento on July 12, 2016 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Specific location to be determined by FGC staff.

7. **Adjourn**

Erin Chappell adjourned the meeting at 3:38 p.m.