

## WORKGROUP STAFF SUMMARY FOR JULY 12, 2016

**1. PUBLIC FORUM****Today's Item****Information** **Decision** 

Receive public comments for items not on the agenda.

**Summary of Previous/Future Actions (N/A)****Background**

The Workgroup generally receives two types of correspondence or comment under public forum: requests for the Workgroup to consider new topics; and informational items. Requests for regulatory change need to be redirected to the full Commission and submitted on the required petition form, FGC 1, titled "Petition to the California Fish and Game Commission for Regulation Change" (Section 662, Title 14, CCR).

The Workgroup may not discuss or take action on any matter raised during this item, except to decide whether to place the matter on a future meeting agenda (pursuant to Sections 11125 and 11125.7(a), Government Code).

**Significant Public Comments**

1. Email from Dale Steele with comments from the Apr Workgroup meeting for consideration by the Workgroup. Comments include recommendations on species to include, definitions, and review coordination.

**Recommendation (N/A)****Exhibits**

1. [Email from Dale Steele, received Apr 27, 2016.](#)

**Workgroup Decision/Recommendation (N/A)**

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [Chappell, Erin@FGC](mailto:Chappell_Erin@FGC)  
**Subject:** Predator Policy Working Group Comments from 4/26/16 Mtg  
**Date:** Wednesday, April 27, 2016 12:27:51 PM  
**Importance:** High

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Hi Erin,

I attended the PPWG meeting yesterday but didn't get a chance to introduce myself and you were busy enough already. I had to leave right after the meeting but wanted to offer some comments to the group which follow. I needed time to pull them together anyway. Please let me that you receive these comments or if you have any questions. I'm local in Sacramento much of the time too. Good luck, I know you have a considerable workload associated with this WRC assignment.

Thanks, Dale

Dale T. Steele  
[REDACTED]

#### **Predator Policy Working Group Comments from 4/26/16 Mtg**

I'm on the original list of those selected to participate in the PPWG and volunteered to join either the writing or reviewing groups as needed. I attended the meeting yesterday and have several comments on scope and process mainly. I would like these comments to be shared with the PPWG as I understand will be the initial process followed until further guidance is received by the WRC.

I opted not to raise my scope questions yesterday based on the group discussion I heard. It seemed like the group had enough to do working together on the agenda and that it would be better to provide my comments now. I offer them now and encourage the PPWG to discuss and document their decision. I also hope these comments will help frame the best way for the PPWG to interact with the review group originally created as part of the process now underway. That role seems to be evolving with further expansion.

The CDFW list shared with the PPWG yesterday was missing a few candidates for consideration. The first one, the non-native red fox, apparently became established in California from fur farms and other sources. Since then it has spread into areas of Southern California, the San Joaquin Valley, and SF Bay Area. Until recent work determined that the red fox found in the lowlands of the Sacramento Valley was native, it was thought that all low land red foxes were non-native.

The non-native red fox is a successful predator taking many native wildlife species including some sensitive and/or listed ones. Take of the species is not actively regulated but there is confusion when the species is brought into wildlife rehab centers resulting in releases back into the wild including some new areas like the sierras.

This species is also a competitor for some native predators including the San Joaquin Kit fox. There are currently efforts to reduce this competition but the non-native red fox has apparently become established in California. As such, it should be carefully

considered within the scope of the PPWG.

It's equally important that the PPWG establish clear definitions for "predator", native vs non-native species, and "management" which was to be used interchangeably with conservation to describe the objectives of the PPWG yesterday to develop "predator policy" or "predator management policy". This should be further clarified by the PPWG.

In the discussion yesterday, the PPWG described both conservation and management goals for predators. This seems appropriate. In the case of the non-native red fox the conservation goal could be for conservation of those native species impacted by it.

While I was with CDFW, I worked on a draft policy for feral cats which was circulated widely within the department and modeled after work by others including The Wildlife Society. There are some existing regulations within CDFW and CDFA that address definitions and responsibilities including "house cats" as Nongame wildlife in some circumstances. In practice, most management of feral cats occurs at the local city and county level. Meanwhile, numbers of feral cats continue to increase and impact native wildlife. Secondary impacts from outdoor feeding and other measures to maintain feral cat "colonies" attract native wildlife include a number of the species on the PPWG draft list.

I encourage the PPWG to include the draft feral cat policy issue and existing regulations on feral cats in the initial work plan objective and elsewhere determine with clear documentation why or why not it is decided to include this issue in the work of the group. There is a void on this issue now at the state level that results in local government actions that impact native species including predators that are the focus of the PPWG.

I've attached a copy of the draft feral cat policy I worked on within CDFW. I suspect it's still the latest version and that there has been no more recent work by CDFW. This should be verified by CDFW staff as well as requesting their thoughts on my comments concerning non-native red fox and feral cats as candidates for the PPWG to consider. Ultimately, the PPWG will need to make a decision on these species and should document this in reporting to the FGC WRC.

Review coordination between the PPWG writers and review groups has changed since originally proposed and become more unwieldy as the review group has grown. I have a couple of thoughts on that as I consider how or if I should continue to work with the PPWG in some capacity. I am happy to do so if it is of value to the PPWG process and responsibilities.

Anyone can attend the PPWG and WRC meetings and provide input or comments at these meetings. In addition to these meetings, it seems likely that coordination between meetings in writing or teleconferences will be needed. The workload for the tasks discussed so far seems quite large and the proposed schedule may be a challenge. It is likely that further discussion including comments like mine could increase that workload. If the PPWG needs help, it would serve to somehow identify members of the review group to provide assistance. I'm thinking initially of research and compilation tasks that were discussed yesterday. In any case, those that were not at the table in yesterday's meeting will need to maintain close contact and involvement if they are to serve in any capacity beyond review of draft or final

products before the formal public process that will follow.

I know that Bagley-Keene places limitations on meetings and other forms of communication and collaboration but I recommend the PPWG and WRC explore those options as a way to increase the effectiveness of the group and the task it's been given. Another option might be for FGC to assign additional staff or volunteers to work with the PPWG.

Those are my initial thoughts from yesterday's meeting. I thought the group did a great job yesterday and is off to a good start. I've given myself a task to identify predator policy and regulation materials from others to send in before the next meeting. I plan to attend the next PPWG meeting which you tentatively scheduled for July 12th.

The draft feral cat policy I referenced above follows:

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The Department considers the impact of feral cats on wildlife to be significant and an issue that must be better managed to protect California's' unique wildlife biodiversity.

Section 4151 of the Fish and Game Code:

**House Cats Found Within Limits of Refuge**

Any house cat (*Felis domesticus*) found within the limits of any fish and game refuge is a nongame mammal, unless it is in the residence of its owner or upon the grounds of the owner adjacent to such residence.

Section 4153 of the Fish and Game Code:

**Control of Harmful Nongame Mammals**

The department may enter into cooperative agreements with any agency of the state or the United States for the purpose of controlling harmful nongame mammals. The department may take any mammal which, in its opinion, is unduly preying upon any bird, mammal, or fish.

For the purposes of this policy regarding domestic cats, Sections 4151 and 4153 should be considered applicable to all Department lands that are managed for wildlife populations. The Department should also encourage and support similar application to other public lands and all other lands managed for wildlife populations.

**DRAFT** Policy for the Department of Fish and Game regarding feral and free-ranging domestic cats:

Recognize that cats as pets have a long association with humans, and that responsible cat owners are to be encouraged to continue caring for the animals under their control.

Strongly support and encourage the humane elimination of feral cat colonies on lands with native wildlife populations.

Support the passage and enforcement of local and state ordinances prohibiting public feeding of feral cats, especially on public lands, and release of unwanted pet or feral cats into the wild.

Support educational programs and materials that call for all pet cats to be kept indoors, in outdoor enclosures, or on a leash.

Support program to educate and encourage pet owners to neuter or spay their cats,

and encourage all pet adoption programs to require potential owners to spay or neuter their pet.

Support the development and dissemination of sound, helpful information on what individual cat owners can do to minimize predation by free-ranging cats.

Work with the conservation and animal welfare communities to educate the public about the negative impact of free-ranging and feral cats on native wildlife, including birds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and endangered species.

Encourage researchers to develop better information on the impacts of feral and free-ranging cats on native wildlife populations.

Not support the legalization of maintaining "managed" (trap/neuter/release) free-ranging cat colonies. Call for adequate CEQA evaluations when TNR programs are proposed.

### **Feral Cats and Wildlife** Revised DRAFT 8/17/2009

(New language now included on the [Department webpage](#) for this subject.

The impacts of feral or free-ranging human companion or domestic animals poses a challenge for contemporary wildlife management. The domestic cat is the best known of these animals for its impacts to wildlife. Feral cats are an exotic species in the United States. With numbers in the millions, these animals are recognized as one of the most widespread and serious threats to the health and integrity of native wildlife populations and natural ecosystems. Feral cats present special challenges for wildlife managers because their negative impacts are poorly understood by the public. Feral cats and other exotic species have become accepted as part of the environment and considered "natural" by many people. Advocacy groups promote their continued presence and few policies and laws deal directly with their control.

The domestic cat (*Felis domesticus* or *F. catus*) originates from an ancestral wild species, the European and African wild cat (*Felis silvestris*) and is now recognized as a separate species. The estimated number of pet cats in the United States has grown from 30 million in 1970 to over 70 million, however reliable estimates of the total cat population are impossible to determine. It is estimated that approximately 30 percent of all households have cats, and in rural areas; the estimate is around 60 percent.

The cumulative impact of domestic cats on wildlife is impossible to quantify, however the growing body of literature strongly indicates that domestic cats are a significant factor in the mortality of native small mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. Because feral cats often receive food from humans, they can reach population levels that create areas of abnormally high predation on wildlife. Even well fed cats have been documented to prey on wildlife regularly. When the prey is a threatened or endangered species, the result could lead to extirpation or extinction. Effects of predation by domestic and feral cats are most significant in island settings (actual or isolated habitats), where prey populations are already low or stressed by other factors. These include natural areas where cat colonies are maintained. Competition with native predators, disease implications for wildlife populations, and pet owners' attitudes about wildlife and wildlife management are also important factors.

Even if conservative estimates of prey taken are considered, the numbers of animals killed is immense. Feeding cats does not stop them from killing or injuring wildlife and they frequently do not eat what they kill. The possibility for disease transmission among feral cats, wildlife, humans, and other pets should be a serious concern where feral cats are abundant. Cats were introduced into California and North

America by humans who are now responsible for the control and removal of cats that prey on wildlife.

The Department considers the impact of feral cats on wildlife to be significant and a non-native species that must be better managed to protect California's' unique wildlife biodiversity.

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