

Control of Exotic, Feral and Nuisance Terrestrial and Aquatic Animals on Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Lands

POLICY NUMBER: OP-08-01

TYPE OF POLICY: OPERATIONS

DATE: DECEMBER 3, 2008

A. DEFINITIONS

As used in this policy, the following terms shall have the following meaning:

Exotic Species –

Animals not native, or alien to, Texas and which were not present historically; any non-native wild animal. Examples are axis, fallow, and sika deer, nutria, aoudad sheep, mouflon sheep, blackbuck antelope, and other non-native species and fishes alien to Texas such as snakehead, piranha, common carp, grass carp, armored catfish, guppy and tilapia.

Feral Species –

Animals, that are normally domesticated, that have escaped, are living in a wild state, and are no longer owned or cared for by anyone.

Nuisance, Habituated or Managed Wildlife –

Native, or naturalized, species that, because of unusually high populations, disease, habituation, or threats to wildlife restoration efforts, habitat or public safety, must be removed or relocated. Native wildlife species may be controlled/hunted to maintain populations below undesirable levels. Examples may include, but are not limited to, cowbirds, rock dove, javelina, beaver, raccoon, American alligator, skunk, opossum, white-tailed deer, fox, coyote, and mountain lion.

B. BACKGROUND

- 1. Negative Impact of Exotic and Feral Animals.** Exotic and feral animals and their effects on native plant and animal communities (both aquatic and terrestrial) have been studied extensively in Texas and elsewhere. The overriding concern for these species is their negative and often significant impact on native fish and wildlife and associated habitats. Additionally, when left unchecked, native wildlife populations can pose human safety risk and have deleterious effects on habitat.
- 2. Feral Animals.** TPWD facilities often become dumping grounds for unwanted cats, dogs and other household pets. In the case of agency property near urban areas, these abandoned or unwanted animals take up residence on park or wildlife management area lands and frequently reproduce, resulting in significant adverse effects on native wildlife. Due to land uses, fencing and/or management activities adjacent to agency lands, many parks or wildlife management areas (WMAs) contain undesirable populations of exotic and/or feral animals.
- 3. Types of Destruction by Exotic and Feral Animals.** Feral cats and dogs can devastate populations of ground-nesting birds, reptiles, amphibians, and many small rodents. Feral dogs are indiscriminate killers of wildlife and may pose a serious threat to visitor safety. Feral hogs cause extensive soil, turf and trail

disturbance by their rooting activities. When with young, feral hog sows may also pose a threat to visitors. Their negative effects on wildlife species have been abundantly documented. Feral goats adversely affect plant communities and compete directly with native deer. Aoudad sheep and feral burros foul water sources, compete for food and water resources and may spread disease to native wildlife.

4. **Removal of Nuisance Animals.** Nuisance animals should be removed or relocated as soon as environmental or population problems become evident or when visitor safety is threatened and shall be consistent with management objectives for a TPWD land unit.
5. **Population Goal.** In keeping with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission Policy to conserve and manage agency natural resources for the highest and best purpose, all species of exotic and feral animals on TPWD lands will be eliminated to the extent possible.

C. RESPONSIBILITY AND PURPOSE

It shall be the responsibility of the respective Division Directors to ensure that this policy is carried out on TPWD lands where exotic feral, and nuisance or habituated animals have been identified, based on the division's mission and the management objectives and goals for the land. Division Directors may delegate responsibility for implementation, coordination and reporting as each division deems appropriate. Implementation of the plan is intended to eliminate, reduce, or relocate specifically identified exotic fish or wildlife, feral animals, or nuisance or habituated native wildlife species. This policy focuses on non-native species but may be used when native wildlife species occur at population levels incompatible with population and habitat health, as well as public safety. The primary objective is conservation of cultural resources, native fish and wildlife populations and their habitats on TPWD lands, and to ensure staff and public safety in plan implementation.

D. IMPLEMENTATION – METHOD OF REMOVAL

1. **Responsibility.** Implementation as well as concurrent liabilities for controlling exotic, feral, and nuisance animals on TPWD lands is the responsibility of the Division Director.
2. **Removal Methods.** Removal methods will vary depending on the circumstances at a particular TPWD site (e.g., presence of fences, personnel, terrain) and on the species to be managed. Therefore, no single method for removal or management is prescribed. Selection from the following methods based on practicability and utility is recommended:
 - a. **Trapping.** Trapping and removal or relocation will be in coordination with the site manager and other offices (Region and/or Division), as prescribed by the Division Director, by:
 - i. By a TPWD employee;
 - ii. Through the assistance of local animal control officers when appropriate and within their jurisdiction, and U.S. Department of Agriculture-Animal and Plant Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS) Wildlife Services, or other agencies or entities as appropriate.
 - b. **Trapping by Contractor.** Trapping and/or removal by private individuals or companies will be in accordance with a contract or agreement with TPWD.

- c. **Lethal Control.** Appropriate and continual removal may be by qualified, certified staff by most practical and humane means, including, but not limited to the lethal use of approved firearms. Authorization for the use of firearms must be obtained from the appropriate Division Director. Control measures shall be consistent with management goals for that area. (Note: Animals that have food value should be donated where practicable to local prisons or jails, needy individuals or non-profit public or private organizations such as orphanages, and homes for the elderly.)
- . Employees authorized to implement exotic, feral, or nuisance wildlife control by use of a firearm must be certified as competent (with the firearm to be used) in accordance with the standards established for the appropriate division.
- i. On sites where staff is available, it is recommended (but not required) that two employees should be utilized in this process, one to verify that the shot is safe and one to fire.
 - ii. Immediate humane dispatch of an ill or injured animal will be performed in such a way as to ensure the safety of site visitors. When and if possible, animals should be moved to an area of safety, out of public view. If there is a possibility of rabies or an animal has bitten someone, the head of the animal will be delivered to the proper authority for examination.

Public Hunting. In some instances, TPWD may be able to provide additional hunting opportunity by including the use of public hunting in a plan to control some species of exotic feral, nuisance, habituated or managed wildlife. Public hunting will be as provided in the Texas Parks and Wildlife Code and associated proclamations of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission.

Netting or Chemicals. When conditions warrant, aquatic species may be removed by netting or chemical means.