



# Challenges Surrounding the Management of Orphaned/ Injured Wildlife



**Fish and Game Commission Meeting**

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# Take Home Messages

- Animal rehabilitation is a compassionate response.
- effort is substantial and appreciated
- Dept Fish & Wildlife mission =
- maintain native wildlife for
  - their intrinsic, ecological and beneficial values;
  - at the population level

# Take Home Messages, cont'd

- Regulations recognize inherent differences
- Differences include:
  - Basic biology
  - Specialized needs of some species
    - Safety
    - Welfare

# Wildlife Rehabilitator Efforts

- Birds and small mammals received by California Rehabilitators
  - 2004 through 2012
  - 66,000 and 83,000 per year

# Where is the Challenge?

- Can be emotional
  - No one likes to see an animal suffer
- Regulations require more control by DFW for certain species
  - elk, deer, bear, bighorn Sheep, mountain lion, antelope and feral pigs
- These regulations are well-founded, but not always well understood
- Little effect at the population level



# Biology and Survival Rates

- High animal densities = high reproduction, yet low survival of young
- 30-70% wild bear cubs die w/in first year
- Similar survival rates for young deer and other large mammals
- In some wild carnivore populations, the leading cause of death is infanticide
- Low recruitment naturally keeps populations in check

# Options for Apparently Abandoned Animals

- Leave alone in the wild to fend for themselves (the natural condition)
- Place into temporary 'rehabilitation' facility and release into natal habitat
  - limited capacity to do this appropriately
  - effective for certain ages and species
- Place into permanent captivity
- Euthanize

# Public Safety and Habituation Concerns

- Some wild animals carry diseases transmittable to humans
- An animal improperly rehabilitated = habituated
- Habituation can = a life sentence in a zoo
- If a habituated animal is released
  - could cause safety, property and potentially liability concerns later
  - likely to have poor survival in the wild

# Facilities

- Only one bear rehabilitation facility in California
- DFW has limited capacity to perform short-term rehabilitation
- Limited number of zoos and other permitted facilities able to take large animals limits options

# DFW Responses to the Challenge

- Encouraging public to “Keep Me Wild”
- Education about the balance between management of individuals and populations
- DFW has species experts and wildlife veterinarians to evaluate situations
- DFW ensures that facilities and response personnel are trained and meet regulatory criteria

# Wildlife Rehabilitation Regulations

Title 14, Section 679:

- 100 permits with 2,000-3,000 volunteers
- Small mammals and birds are allowed
- Big game and specially-protected species may not be possessed
  - elk, deer, bear, bighorn sheep, mountain lion, antelope and feral pigs

# **Some issues DFW has had with good intentioned Wildlife Rehabilitators dealing with deer, lions and bears...**

- Attempting to keep juvenile lions after illegal capture and not released to DFW staff
- Improper evaluations of animal health
- Improper determination of abandonment

# Wildlife Rehabilitators issues

## Cont.

- Use of immobilization drugs on wildlife without authorization
- Initiating rescue efforts for big game in violation of permit
- Failure to immediately notify DFW
- Initiating next steps without DFW approval

# Conclusion

- Each situation is unique
- DFW has great experience and expertise regarding large mammals
- Encouraging the public to bring in or “save” young large animals fundamentally conflicts with the nature of wildlife

Questions



Thank You



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