

New York State Office of Parks Recreation
and Historic Preservation

**POLICY ON FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT
IN STATE PARKS AND HISTORIC SITES**

The New York State Parks System harbors an extraordinary diversity of wildlife that make a unique contribution to the biodiversity and recreational resources of New York State. This document sets forth agency policy regarding the management of fish and wildlife in state parks and historic sites including: wildlife management goals; fishing, hunting, and trapping; wildlife feeding; collection and release of wildlife; and protection of endangered, threatened, and at-risk species.

Introduction

The mission of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) is to provide safe and enjoyable recreational and interpretive opportunities for all New York State residents and visitors and to be responsible stewards of our valuable natural, historic, and cultural resources.

The State Park System's 350,000 acres of lands and waters harbor significant wildlife habitats and populations of wildlife species that are important and valuable natural resources. Whether actively seeking wildlife or just observing it incidental to other activities, park visitors' experiences can be enhanced by wildlife. Wildlife is an important component of our state's biodiversity and plays a vital role in the function of healthy ecosystems.

The protection of wildlife is a vital part of OPRHP's mission. § 3.02 of the Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation Law (PRHPL) directs OPRHP to "operate and maintain the state park, recreation and historic site system to conserve, protect and enhance the natural, ecological, historic, cultural and recreational resources contained therein and to provide for the public enjoyment of and access to these resources in a manner which will protect them for future generations." Other PRHPL sections direct OPRHP to identify and conserve important wildlife species within state parks and historic sites.

For the purposes of this policy, "wildlife" means all animal species including mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish, and all invertebrates including insects, molluscs, and crustaceans. encompassing both native and non-native (introduced) species. The term does not include domesticated animals such as dogs and cats.

Goals

The following ecological and operational goals shall guide wildlife management within New York State Parks:

- Conserve and enhance native wildlife species and plant and animal biodiversity.
- Provide for recreational and educational/interpretational wildlife experiences.
- Protect the health and safety of park staff, visitors, and wildlife from harm, diseases, and other risks associated with wildlife.
- Protect facilities and grounds from wildlife-related damage.
- Increase our understanding of wildlife resources to better manage them.

Wildlife Management Policy

Approximately 85% of the 350,000 acre State Park System is natural habitat. As a general rule OPRHP follows a “passive management” approach, allowing natural processes to maintain wildlife populations in ecological balance. However, there are times when an active management approach is necessary.

OPRHP will actively manage wildlife on lands under its jurisdiction to: protect the health and safety of park staff and patrons; protect and enhance endangered, threatened, and other at-risk species; conserve and enhance biodiversity, maintain wildlife populations in ecological balance with their habitats; provide public recreational opportunities; and prevent damage to park buildings or infrastructure. Evaluation of the need for management actions is initiated at the park management level (e.g. by the park or historic site manager and park operations staff). Management is undertaken in consultation with regional office staff and the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB), and when appropriate with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), New York State Department of Health, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In situations where a specific wildlife species presents a health and safety or operational concern, OPRHP utilizes an integrated management approach using non-lethal techniques to the extent practical. Techniques can include habitat modification, exclusion, repellants, harassment, public education, and relocation. Should these techniques be impractical or fail to accomplish the management objectives, OPRHP will consider the use of lethal methods to manage wildlife.

Wildlife management within state parks will incorporate the principles of Ecosystem Based Management:

- Place based focus (e.g. site-specific strategies).
- Scientific foundation for decision making.
- Measurable objectives to direct and evaluate performance.
- Adaptive management to respond to new knowledge.
- Recognition of interconnections within and among species and ecosystems.
- Involvement of stakeholders.

All wildlife management activities must comply with applicable agency guidelines and state and federal laws, regulations, and constitutional provisions, including the State Environmental Quality Review Act.

Fishing, Hunting, and Trapping

Fishing

OPRHP recognizes fishing as an important recreational activity. Generally speaking, fishing is allowed throughout the State Park System, which provides diverse fresh and saltwater fishing opportunities during all seasons of the year. Park visitors must observe all applicable state fishing regulations (as promulgated by DEC) as well as any park-specific rules adopted by OPRHP. The agency utilizes fish stocking at a number of state parks to enhance public fishing opportunities or restore native fish populations. In other instances, OPRHP focuses on habitat improvements and take restrictions to support naturally-reproducing fish stocks. The agency undertakes a variety of activities, such as fishing derbies and collaboration with DEC and other partners, to promote fishing opportunities in state parks.

Hunting

OPRHP recognizes hunting as an important outdoor recreational activity, as well as a resource management technique for wildlife population control. Hunting is permitted in more than 70 state parks where hunting opportunities can be provided without creating public safety or park operational concerns. OPRHP consults with the DEC in the establishment of special hunting seasons within the state parks system. All hunting activities must comply with applicable laws and DEC and OPRHP regulations.

When new parklands are acquired, OPRHP's general practice is to continue traditional hunting opportunities that existed prior to state ownership.

Under OPRHP's regulations, hunting is prohibited in state parks and state historic sites where the facility's size, location, conflicting public uses, or public safety or operational concerns preclude hunting.

Trapping

OPRHP prohibits trapping for recreational or commercial purposes in state parks and historic sites.

OPRHP agency may undertake or authorize trapping in specific instances when the population of a wildlife species has increased to the extent that it constitutes a hazard to the public, presents a threat of disease transmission, causes damage to OPRHP buildings or infrastructure, is negatively impacting an at-risk species or significant ecosystem, or results in unacceptable damage to vegetation. OPRHP will consult with DEC to design appropriate trapping programs to meet specific ecological or operational goals of state parks and historic sites.

Wildlife Feeding

The feeding of wildlife has been linked to harmful impacts to both people and wildlife. These impacts include:

- Human disease risk – Feeding wildlife brings people and wildlife into closer contact increasing the risk of disease (e.g. rabies) transmittal between wildlife and people.
- Habituation and food conditioning – Feeding results in wildlife losing their natural fear of people (habituation) and leads to their associating people with food (conditioning).
- Nuisance complaints – Overpopulation, habituation, and food conditioning lead to an increase in nuisance wildlife situations and make the management of nuisance wildlife situations more difficult.
- Wildlife mortality – For example, wildlife feeding near roadways results in increased vehicle collisions.
- Malnutrition – Human sources of food typically do not provide all the nutrients healthy wildlife require. For example, the feeding of waterfowl has been linked to “angel wing” a deformity in the growth of the wings of goslings and ducklings that prevents them from flying.
- Overcrowding and disease – Feeding results in a greater density of animals than the habitat can support and increases the spread of disease among wildlife or to people.

OPRHP prohibits the feeding of wildlife by the public at all state parks and historic sites. In parks and sites where wildlife feeding is a recurring problem, OPRHP may post signage or incorporate a “Keep Wildlife Wild” theme into environmental education and interpretive programs to inform park visitors on the hazards of feeding wildlife.

The agency may feed wildlife in certain limited situations, including the use of bird feeders as part of an environmental education and interpretation program, the use of baits to deliver vaccines to wildlife for health and safety reasons, and wildlife feeding that takes place as part of an OPRHP approved research project.

The Collection and/or Release of Wildlife in State Parks

OPRHP prohibits the collection or release of wildlife or domesticated animals by the public on any lands or waters under its jurisdiction.

The agency may approve the collection or release of wildlife by authorized individuals under certain limited circumstances, provided that such activities must comply with state law and DEC licensing regulations, including:

1. The collection of wildlife that is part of an OPRHP approved research project.
2. The temporary collection of reptiles, amphibians, insects, and similar species for educational purposes.
3. Fish stocking to enhance public fishing opportunities (note: all fish stocking must be authorized by OPRHP; the unauthorized release of baitfish or gamefish by private individuals or anglers is prohibited).
4. The release of gamebirds in certain parks where this practice has historically occurred to enhance public hunting opportunities.
5. The release of wildlife as part of a DEC and OPRHP approved reintroduction program.

6. The release of rehabilitated wildlife by a licensed wildlife rehabilitator will be allowed on a case by case basis in consultation with EMB.

Endangered, Threatened, and Other At-Risk Species

New York's State Parks System provides critical habitat for many endangered, threatened, and at-risk species of wildlife. OPHRP is committed to conserving and enhancing at-risk wildlife species and their habitats. The agency works in partnership with DEC, the New York Natural Heritage Program, the New York State Museum, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, academic institutions, and other partners to identify, survey, and study at-risk species and ecological communities. OPRHP works closely with DEC to comply with applicable law and DEC regulations concerning listed species. The agency, in cooperation with public and private partners, deploys a variety of management actions to conserve and enhance at-risk species. These efforts are grounded in the Ecosystem Based Management principles set forth in this policy.

Any questions regarding this policy should be directed to the Deputy Commissioner for Natural Resources or the Environmental Management Bureau.

This policy is effective immediately and replaces all previous OPRHP policies regarding wildlife management, fishing, hunting, and trapping within state parks and historic sites under the agency's jurisdiction.

Dated: September 27, 2010



Carol Ash
Commissioner