

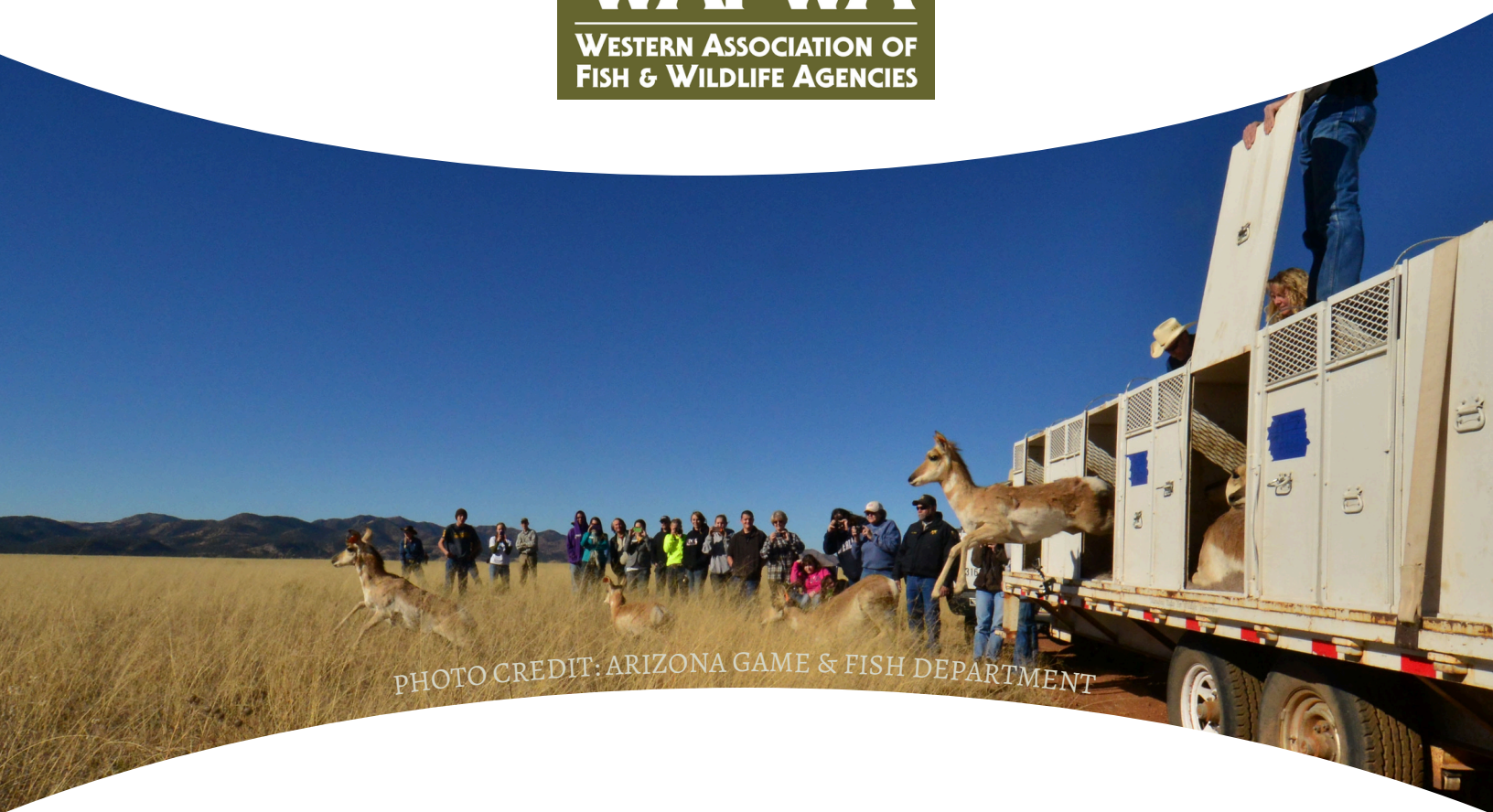


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RECOMMENDATIONS

for Wildlife Translocations Planning and
Implementation

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AGENCIES

A PRODUCT OF THE WAFWA WILDLIFE HEALTH COMMITTEE
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Recommendations for Wildlife Translocations Planning and Implementation
Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Wildlife Health Committee
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Background

Translocation is the deliberate movement of wildlife from one area to another outside of their home range and/or established area of occupancy. This technique has been used successfully by wildlife management agencies to reestablish extirpated populations, augment declining populations, introduce desirable nonnative species (usually associated with increasing hunting or fishing opportunities), restore ecological services and address human/wildlife conflict issues. Translocation has also created some ecological disasters through the introduction of invasive species, nonnative species, and pathogens and parasites that have led to habitat degradation, extirpation of local flora and fauna populations, ecosystem disruption, and disease outbreaks (Saunders et al. 2010, Beltrán-Beck et al. 2012, Jolly et al. 2015, Wauters et al. 2023). Historically, identification of the reasons for the success or failure of translocations and any associated ecosystem changes has been hampered by a lack of follow up on the fate of translocated animals, poor study design, and inadequate funding. As agencies managing wildlife in the public trust and following the tenets of the North American Model for science-based management, we should strive to learn from past experiences and carefully consider the risks and benefits via adequate consideration and planning before moving wildlife. Further, agencies may not be the only decision makers with regard to determining if a translocation should proceed. Where appropriate, the initial planning stages of a translocation project should include consultation with affected First Nations/Tribes and other impacted stakeholders. Agencies can obtain initial guidance on collaboration for conservation strategies by reviewing Hessami et al. (2021). The guidance presented here is not meant to be prescriptive but a set of recommendations to maximize the success of translocations and reduce negative outcomes. This document is primarily meant to focus on translocations of multiple individuals to address a conservation need and not single animals or small groups released into an area from wildlife rehabilitation or as the result of conflict management, although many of points below are applicable to those situations as well.

The translocation should address management needs:

- The goals of the translocation should be clearly identified with criteria for success, how they will be met and the endpoint for active management;
- Restoration of a species to historical range or previously occupied areas;
 - An assessment of current habitat conditions should be conducted;
 - The factors that led to extirpation should be identified and mitigated, wherever possible;
- Augmenting or establishing a nonnative species for hunting or fishing purposes should involve thorough consideration, including impacts to habitat, competition with other wildlife, and disease risks;
- Augmentation of a population for conservation purposes;

- Assisted migration or establishment of refugia in previously unoccupied habitat with careful consideration and analysis;
- Restoration of habitat and ecosystem health;
- Resolution of wildlife conflicts (e.g., depredation, domestic livestock production, public safety), while not directly related to species or habitat conservation, can involve translocation of individual animals to reduce conflict. Translocation for this purpose warrants additional considerations.

A feasibility analysis should be carried out:

- Agencies should have a standard review process (e.g., policies, procedures etc.) or use established guidelines (see references and resources) for developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the success of translocations;
- Methods other than translocation should also be considered (e.g., habitat restoration, removal of direct competitors or predators, removal of invasive species, support of natural recolonization);
- A habitat assessment should be conducted to determine if the current resources will meet the biotic and abiotic needs of the species such that it can be expected that translocated animals will stay in or near the area of restoration;
- An assessment of the biology and behavior of the species should be conducted to predict and prepare for likely responses to capture, handling, transportation, and release focusing on animal welfare, and risk of mortality and injury;
- The assessment should include consequences for the translocated group such as the need to adapt to a new environment, or presence of established predators;
- Resources needed for holding, either temporarily or for an extended quarantine, should be identified and established if required;
- Impacts to the founder or source population should be identified and considered (e.g., the ability of the source population to sustain removals; disruption population dynamics, or social structure caused by removals);
- Regulatory requirements, including the need for permits, should be identified and incorporated into the timeline and framework.

A risk analysis should be carried out:

- Assess the risk for pathogen transmission as a result of the translocation including identification of pathogens and parasites of concern, pre-translocation health assessments in the source and recipient ecosystems, and identification of health threats posed by domestic species, and other anthropogenic factors near the release site (Sainsbury and Vaughan-Higgins 2012);
- Identification and evaluation of potential release site conflicts created by translocated wildlife (e.g., agriculture depredation);
- Determine the potential for intra- and inter-species hybridization;
- Assess the risk for ecosystem changes as a result of the translocation; this is especially necessary for keystone species and ecosystem engineers;

- Identify physical hazards (e.g., wildland fire, drought, flooding, fences, highways) that may impact the success of the translocation in the near and long term;
- Perform a risk:benefit analysis including assessing the risks associated with inaction (i.e., if translocation is not performed);
- Identify methods for mitigating risks;
- Include stakeholders in the risk assessment, clearly communicating the level of acceptable risk as it relates to the identified risk factors.

An implementation plan should be developed:

- Agencies should have a standard process for developing and implementing plans;
- Identify the numbers, sexes, and ages of animals to be moved; determine if natural history suggests family groups, specific age classes or particular sex ratios should be moved;
- Determine appropriate season for translocation based on life history;
 - Avoid disrupting breeding and courtship activities;
 - Animals in third trimester of pregnancy should not be moved;
 - Avoid capturing animals with dependent young;
 - Attempt to time translocations to when environmental resources are at a peak and animals are typically in good condition;
- Avoid translocations during periods of extreme weather conditions such as drought or harsh winters; consider significant differences between conditions at the source and destination locations;
- Events that trigger an action (e.g. if animals move outside of a specific predetermined area) and nature of the action (e.g., hazing, re-capture, euthanasia) should be described in the implementation plan; further, resources to carry out these actions should be available for the long term.

A communication plan should be drafted:

- Develop a communication plan and include stakeholders and local communities to clarify the project's goals, methods, and ongoing expectations;
- Communication with public stakeholders and landowners, including First Nations/Tribes, should begin early in the project development process and at minimum occur again during the feasibility assessment and risk assessment phases;
- When moving animals across jurisdictional lines (e.g., state, provincial, territorial, or international), advanced timeline and communication may be needed with additional agencies, including announcements in the Federal Register and establishing requirements for health testing, inspection, and certification as required.

Project success should be evaluated and reported:

- Post-translocation monitoring efforts should be conducted in the release area, as well as the source area (if funding permits);
- Population, community, and habitat conditions should be monitored;
- Unexpected indicators of a negative outcome should be included;

- Post-translocation reporting should describe the effectiveness of the translocation in meeting the stated objectives.

Recommended resources for planning and assessing translocation events

[IUCN Guidelines for reintroductions and other conservation translocations 2013](#)

[IUCN Guidelines for Wildlife Disease Risk Analysis 2014](#)

[IUCN Guidelines for amphibian reintroductions and other conservation translocations 2021](#)

[IUCN Global conservation translocation perspectives 2021](#)

[IUCN Guideline on responsible translocation of displaced organisms 2025](#)

[WAFWA Considerations of disease risks in translocation of deer by wildlife management agencies](#)

[WAFWA Translocation of Mule Deer](#)

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