

National Park Service
Briefing Statement

Prepared for: Associate Director, Natural Resource Stewardship and
Science or Deputy Director?
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TITLE: Proposed vaccination of wildlife in units of the National Park System with an oral rabies vaccine (ORV).

ISSUE: United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service-Wildlife Services (APHIS-WS) has requested that some units of the National Park Service (NPS) participate in wide-scale oral rabies vaccination (ORV) programs for raccoons, gray fox, and coyote.

BACKGROUND:

- o Rabies is a fatal viral disease of warm-blooded animals, including humans. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and NPS Public Health Program, rabies poses a public health threat in the United States.
- o The proposed action involves rabies outbreaks in raccoon in the eastern United States and gray fox and coyote in Texas.
- o Origin of the rabies virus causing these outbreaks is not known in all cases, but experts believe that these outbreaks would not have occurred without post-Columbian human intervention.
- o A safe and effective oral rabies vaccine is available for use in raccoons, fox, and coyote. This genetically engineered recombinant vaccine is packaged with bait and distributed from the air or ground.
- o ORV programs have been used by state and local governments since the early 1990s. Recently, APHIS-WS has expanded its role to coordinating ORV efforts with the states.
- o In July 2001, a finding of no significant impact was issued on a programmatic Environmental Assessment on ORV prepared by APHIS-WS.

CURRENT STATUS:

- o Units in five regions of the National Park System have been, or may soon be, requested to participate in ORV programs.
- o The Biological Resource Management Division and NPS Public Health Program are engaged in discussions with APHIS-WS, CDC, and Texas regarding NPS involvement in ORV programs; however, no guidance on ORV participation is currently available to parks.

POSITION OF INTERESTED PARTIES:

- o APHIS-WS, CDC, and rabies-affected states (particularly Texas) support ORV programs and believe that lack of participation by NPS may leave reservoirs of disease and sources for re-infection.
- o In 2000, Secretary of Agriculture declared rabies an emergency.
- o Congress appropriated \$16 million to APHIS for ORV in FY2002.

BUREAU PERSPECTIVE: The Biological Resource Management Division recommends that Regional Directors and Superintendents be advised to engage in discussions with APHIS-WS and, subject to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance, allow for ORV use in parks.

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