Wildlife Population Control

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I. General or large-scale population reduction programs have generally not proven effective for controlling rabies, however wildlife population reduction programs may be useful in the following instances:

a. to remove animals from localized areas of extremely high human-contact, such as picnic areas where, after attempts at modifying human behavior, wildlife still show little fear and approach humans expecting handouts; or

b. as part of a scientifically based study to develop or test methods to control wildlife rabies.

II. The following disadvantages of population reduction must be taken into account before deciding any such activity:

a. in an area of normal habitat where animal populations are high (urban settings may support higher populations of some species than rural ones), a 60-80% reduction of the population is probably required before intraspecies transmission can be terminated;

b. reduction efforts must be continuous because new animals will move into the territory from adjacent areas and the reproductive capacity of the remaining animals may increase;

c. continuous population reduction efforts are usually prohibitively expensive;

d. in an endemic or epidemic area, naturally immune animals may be removed thus eliminating a barrier to transmission and encouraging the spread of the disease;

e. other species may be at risk of being inadvertently affected by the population reduction methods;

f. live trapping has been demonstrated to be the least cost effective of all population reduction methods; and

g. live trapping requires that the animals be euthanized because relocation is generally prohibited by law and could increase the risk of rabies transmission.

Note: The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) should always be consulted when wildlife population reduction programs are being considered. A directory of DGIF offices and information about Virginia’s wildlife can be found at www.dwr.virginia.gov.