



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

FEB 20 2002

N 16(2340)

Memorandum

To: Regional Directors and Superintendents in Northeast, National Capital, Southeast, Midwest, and Intermountain Regions

From: Director *Iron P. Monella*

Subject: Proposed oral vaccination of certain wildlife species in units of the National Park System with an oral rabies vaccine

Parks in your region may have been, or may soon be, approached by USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service-Wildlife Services (APHIS-WS) or state public health departments to participate in an effort to control the spread of rabies in raccoons, coyotes or gray foxes through the use of an orally administered vaccine. I ask each park or group of parks so approached to constructively engage in discussions with APHIS-WS and states regarding the extent of proposed actions and aspects of park resource management needs that may influence NPS participation. Prior to undertaking any actions within the parks environmental planning documents, including NEPA and Section 7 consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, will need to be prepared. APHIS-WS has offered to assist with the preparation of these documents.

This environmental compliance will tier off of a programmatic environmental assessment prepared by APHIS-WS. A FONSI was issued on that EA on July 30, 2001. The preferred method for rabies control is to distribute via air or on the ground a genetically engineered recombinant vaccine packaged in bait specially formulated for the target species. This oral vaccine is effective in raccoon, coyote, and fox and has been tested for safety in more than 50 vertebrate species.

Use of an oral rabies vaccine is consistent with NPS policy to control exotic organisms. Rabies is clearly an exotic disease in raccoons in the eastern United States, except Florida, and coyote in Texas. Scientific information is inconclusive on the native vs. exotic status of raccoon rabies in Florida and gray fox rabies in Texas; however, experts believe that these outbreaks would not have occurred without post-Columbian human intervention.

Further, rabies is considered a serious public health problem by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The NPS Public Health Program concurs with the CDC

assessment that rabies is a significant public health risk and suggests that every reasonable effort should be made to control the disease.

The Biological Resource Management Division and the NPS Public Health Program are engaged in discussions with APHIS-WS, CDC, and the state of Texas regarding potential NPS participation in oral rabies vaccination programs. If you have questions or need more information please contact Dr. Margaret Wild, NPS Wildlife Veterinarian, in the Biological Resource Management Division at 970-225-3593.