

	Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)	
	Background Information for the Capture, Handling & Release of Wildlife in the Northwest Territories	
Wildlife Care Committee	Dr. Marc Cattet	V. 1 - Approved on July 30, 2004; updated July 2015

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1. Purpose

- To capture and handle wildlife using the most humane methods, while still allowing the appropriate research or management to be conducted.

2. Application

- This standard operating procedure (SOP) applies to employees of the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and any other personnel involved with the capture and handling of wildlife in the NWT.

3. Development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's)

- SOPs are consistent with general principles advocated by the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC) in their 2003 document entitled "Guidelines on the Care and Use of Wildlife".
- Animal welfare is not assessed simply through scientific means but also reflects community sensitivities including factors such as respect.
- Although many of the recommendations within species-specific SOPs are directed toward safe and humane handling of wildlife, issues of human safety must be a primary concern in any capture operation.
- In situations where multiple procedures can be used for the same purpose, appropriate procedures are those which minimize pain or distress for the animal in the short term, and which cause the least impediment to the normal behavior of the animal and its long-term survival.
- Some recommendations contain '**must**' and others contain '**should**'.

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- The word ‘must’ is used to emphasize the importance of a specific practice and indicates there is an obligation to comply with the recommendation. For example, the physiologic response of an animal to anesthesia **must** be monitored throughout handling. It is also used in instances where there may be an enforceable statutory requirement.
- The word ‘should’ is used to emphasize recommendations that may be conditional upon other factors. For example, effort **should** be made to find darts that missed their target. This is particularly important in areas frequented by humans where potential for someone to find a “lost” dart is high, but may be less important in remote areas.
- Every effort has been made to develop recommendations consistent with science-based evidence and, to illustrate this, key references are provided within species-specific SOPs. Other recommendations, in the absence of scientific evidence, have been developed in a precautionary manner with the intent of reducing potential for adverse effects.

4. Responsibilities of the Investigators

- Investigators planning to capture and handle wildlife in the Northwest Territories have responsibilities to meet before, during, and after field operations. These include:
 - Demonstrate that the capture and handling of wildlife will contribute to the understanding of biological principles or to outcomes that can be expected to benefit animals and the ecosystems they form
 - Ensure the proposed work undergone peer review to make sure it is of scientific merit, and that the experimental design is appropriate
 - Ensure the proposed work has undergone community consultation to address the concerns of local communities and is sensitive to cultural views
 - Submit a completed “Application to Handle Wildlife” for evaluation by the NWT Wildlife Care Committee (NWT-WCC). The proposed animal handling protocol described within the application must be approved by the NWT-WCC prior to starting the project.
 - For projects involving threatened or endangered species, or species of special concern, the protocol must meet the requirements of protective legislation, including the federal [Species at Risk Act](#) and the [NWT Wildlife Act](#).
 - For species or special procedures (e.g., long-distance translocation, captive breeding) where SOPs are not available, specific animal handling protocols should be developed with the consultation and participation of a wildlife veterinarian and additional experts as appropriate.

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- Use the fewest animals and the least invasive practical procedures required to achieve the study objectives. In many cases, the “fewest animals” is the minimum number of animals that an *a posteriori* statistical power analysis indicates is necessary to meet the research objectives.
- Avoid undertaking procedures likely to have lasting negative effects on an individual or population, or to affect the existence of a population. If circumstances are extraordinary and such impacts are likely, it will be necessary to demonstrate by concurrence of recognized experts that the procedure is necessary.
- Where capture work is to be conducted in the NWT by an outside agency or institution, the Animal Care Committee (ACC) of the home institution carries the overall responsibility for the work. However, a well-defined arrangement for monitoring the proposed project and the welfare of animals should be agreed upon between the ACC of the home institution and the NWT-WCC before the project begins.
- Ensure their conduct, and the conduct of all other personnel involved in the project, is consistent with SOPs and any recommendations or requirements of the NWT-WCC. Use of drugs for the immobilization of wildlife should be done in compliance with the Policy/Directives/Guidelines on Wildlife Immobilization Drug Use in the NWT Environment and Natural Resources Operations Manual.
- Although field operations require some flexibility, depending on a number of factors including environmental conditions, procedures employed must remain humane and meet the requirements of the experimental design. Further, any changes to the animal handling protocol must be justifiable.
- Avoid handling animals at times when they may be more sensitive to distress, e.g., late pregnancy.
- Minimize disturbances by observational activities that may lead to abandonment of home ranges, pre-emption of feeding, disruption of social structures, and alteration of predator-prey relationships.
- Monitor released animals to detect any capture-related morbidity or death to ensure that capture and handling techniques used are effective and safe.
- Be prepared to deal with the range of environmental conditions that may be encountered during a field operation. This may include terminating the project, either temporarily or permanently, because of mounting concern for animal or human safety.
- Submit an annual progress report to the NWT-WCC, and home institution ACC if applicable.

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The progress report must include a basic summary of progress to date, a list of species and numbers of each handled including animals captured unintentionally (e.g., by-catch), and a summary of any capture-related deaths. Additionally, include any recommendations that may improve the well being of the animals or the outcome of the study. The progress report is a means of educating the WCC and improving standards of future protocols.

5. Responsibilities of the NWT Wildlife Care Committee (NWT - WCC)

- The responsibilities of the NWT-WCC are:
 - Review of all studies that are conducted by principal investigators either employed by the Government of the NWT or employed by another agency or institution but conducting research on wildlife in the Northwest Territories. Further details are provided in the Terms of Reference for the NWT-WCC.
 - Seek advice from independent experts who can provide an understanding of the nature and impact of a proposed field investigation, when relevant expertise is lacking among the members of the NWT-WCC.
 - Seek assurance that all personnel involved with the use of wildlife for research are adequately trained in the ethics of animal use and have the necessary training and experience to perform the procedures described in the animal handling protocol.
 - Ensure that one of the members of the NWT-WCC is a wildlife veterinarian employed by the Government of the NWT.

The veterinarian is available for consultation for all capture-related projects and may participate in projects involving immobilization activities or potential animal health concerns, such as translocation of animals and medical or surgical procedures.