



Why Words Matter

Language is one of the most powerful tools we have—it shapes how we think, what we value, and ultimately, what policies get put in place. In wildlife management, the words we use aren't just neutral descriptors; they often reflect outdated, harmful ways of thinking about nature. When we call wolves “predators” or say they “depredate” livestock, we’re subtly reinforcing the idea that they are threats rather than key ecosystem players. These terms aren't just technical—they actively influence public attitudes and policy decisions.

Language drives policy and public perception.

Many terms used in wildlife management reinforce outdated, harmful, and even violent narratives. These words frame wildlife as commodities, enemies, or problems to be controlled, rather than as integral parts of ecosystems.

Why can't we just stop using these words altogether? The reality is, when we're talking to wildlife agencies, we sometimes have to use these terms just to be understood. Agencies have been using this language for so long that if we walked in and refused to say “depredation” at all, they might not take us seriously. We have to use existing language strategically while working to shift it.

Wildlife agencies operate within a rigid framework, but **by strategically using their language while introducing better alternatives, we can shift the narrative.**

Key Harmful Terms + Alternatives

1. Depredation

- Used for wildlife killing livestock
- Frames wildlife as criminals committing an act of destruction.
- Implies wolves, bears, and mountain lions are intentionally harming humans.
- Leads to disproportionate retaliation, such as lethal control.



Better Alternative: “Livestock-wildlife conflict” or “predation event”

When Talking to Agencies: Acknowledge “depredation” in their language but push for neutral phrasing to encourage coexistence solutions.

2. Predator / Nongame / Furbearer Species

- **“Predator”** creates fear-based framing rather than highlighting ecological roles.
- **“Nongame”** makes species seem like they have no value unless hunted.
- **“Furbearer”** defines an animal by its economic worth, not its ecological role.

Better Alternatives: “Carnivore,” “keystone species,” “wildlife,” “ecosystem engineer”

When Talking to Agencies: Suggest shifts in classification that reflect ecological importance, not just human use.

3. Harvest

- Used for killing animals in hunting/trapping, especially in agency language about quota and reporting.
- Sanitizes the act of killing wildlife by equating it with farming.
- Makes it sound as if wildlife populations are crops to be managed rather than sentient beings.

Better Alternative: “Hunt,” “kill,” or “trap” (depending on context)

When Talking to Agencies: Using “harvest” can maintain communication but push for terminology that acknowledges the ethical considerations of killing wildlife.

4. Nuisance Species / Invasive Species

- **“Nuisance”** reinforces the idea that some species don’t belong and should be removed.
- **“Invasive”** often carries xenophobic undertones, particularly when used in public discourse without ecological context.
- Overuse of these terms justifies indiscriminate killing rather than addressing underlying habitat issues.

Better Alternative: “Human-wildlife conflict species,” “introduced species”

When Talking to Agencies: Push for non-lethal solutions and greater focus on habitat restoration instead of just species removal.



5. Game Species

- **“Game”** defines animals by their role in sport rather than their ecological function.

Better Alternative: “Wildlife species,” “Species that have economic value”

When Talking to Agencies: Challenge policies that prioritize economic value over conservation ethics.

6. Wildlife Take / Bag Limit

- **“Take”** reduces killing to a neutral action, obscuring the real impact on animal populations.
- **“Bag limit”** treats animals like objects rather than living beings.

Better Alternative: “Kill limit,” “hunting quota”

When Talking to Agencies: Encourage more explicit language to make the consequences of policies clear.

7. Wildlife Management / Resource Management

- Implies humans have total control over ecosystems rather than being part of them.
- Treats wildlife as “resources” to be used, rather than living beings with intrinsic worth.

Better Alternative: “Wildlife stewardship,” “ecosystem restoration”

When Talking to Agencies: Use their language when necessary but emphasize **holistic, science-based conservation rather than control-based management.**

8. Carrying Capacity

- Often used to justify artificial limits on wildlife populations without acknowledging that human activities (like habitat destruction) are the real limiting factor.
- Can reinforce population control measures that ignore ecosystem complexity.

Better Alternative: “Ecological balance,” “habitat capacity”

When Talking to Agencies: Encourage a shift from static population control toward dynamic, ecosystem-based approaches.