

Developing policy on moving threatened species called 'a grand challenge for conservation'

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the act of purposely relocating a threatened species, population, or genotype to an area that is foreign to its natural history—is a controversial response to the threat of extinction resulting from climate change. An article in the August 2012 issue of *BioScience* by Mark W. Schwartz and his colleagues reports on the findings of the Managed Relocation Working Group, an interdisciplinary group of scientists, researchers, and policymakers whose goals were to examine the conditions that might justify the use of managed relocation and to assess the research being conducted on the topic. The authors note that although traditional management strategies are not likely to address the effects of climate change adequately, guidelines and protocols for managed relocation are poorly developed. "Developing a functional policy framework for managed relocation is a grand challenge for conservation," they assert.

Moving a [species](#) to a higher elevation, for instance, may allow it to survive rising temperatures or an elevated sea level, but doing so in an ethically acceptable way is fraught with both legal and political complications. Unforeseen environmental consequences of such an action may be severe—the species might become invasive in its new location, for example. Some question the appropriateness of conserving a single species at the expense of possibly disrupting an entire ecosystem. What is more, lax regulation of managed relocation may open the door to exploitative movement of species. Regulation is often

dispersed among states, the federal government, and various agencies, which may have conflicting agendas, and most relevant policies and laws were not written with [climate change](#) in mind.

The current state of ecological knowledge is such that predicting accurately the effects of any particular proposed relocation is difficult and likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. This makes it hard to know which species are most likely to benefit from managed relocation. Even so, ad hoc managed relocation projects are already under way in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Schwartz and colleagues recommend action by government agencies to develop and adopt best practices for [managed relocation](#). They urge a transparent approach, with integrated research and international involvement of scientists, policymakers, resource managers, and other stakeholders. The BioScience authors provide a list of key questions that identify the main areas of possible contention. What is needed, they write, is more research to make better predictions; clearly written policies to define the responsibilities of various parties, to enable management and to limit abuse; and stakeholder involvement to minimize social conflict.

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