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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE  
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Standing Committee**

33<sup>rd</sup> meeting  
Strasbourg, 3-6 December 2013

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**Possible File:**

**POSSIBLE SPREAD OF THE AMERICAN MINK  
(*NEOVISON VISON*) IN POLAND**

***REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT***

*Document prepared by  
The General Directorate for Environmental Protection of Poland*

**RESPONSE TO THE COMPLAINT OF INFRINGEMENT OF THE BERNE CONVENTION FOR NOT INCLUDING THE AMERICAN MINK (*MUSTELA VISION*) IN THE REGULATION ON THE LIST OF NON-NATIVE PLANTS AND ANIMALS SPECIES, WHICH IF RELEASED TO THE ENVIRONMENT MIGHT ENDANGER NATIVE SPECIES OR NATURAL HABITATS.**

In 2011, the Minister of the Environment issued a Regulation on the list of non-native plants and animals species, which if released to the environment might endanger the native species or natural habitats (Journal of Laws of 2011, No. 210, item 1260, uniform text).

Including species in the above-mentioned list means, in accordance with Art. 120 of the Act on the nature protection, that bring in these alien species from abroad, requires a permission of the General Director of the Environmental Protection, and their keeping, breeding, reproduction, offering for sale and selling, requires the permission of the competent regional director of the environmental protection.

Originally, the American mink (*Mustela vision*) was included in a draft of the above-mentioned Regulation. However, during the work on the draft and its arrangements, the mink has been removed from the list.

The main reasons were: the fact that this species is not a wild animal, but according to the Law of 29 June 2007 on the organization of breeding and reproduction of farm animals (Journal of Laws No. 133, item. 921, as amended) a farm animal and therefore cannot be included in the Regulation mentioned above.

In addition, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, breeding American mink on farms do not jeopardize to native wildlife. It was also stated that mink farms are well secured against animal escapes. Escaping mink occur only sporadically, mostly during reloading of animals.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in 2010 about 4 million American mink skins was produced in Poland.

Polish population of wild American mink has formed on the basis of individuals emigrating from the area of Belarus and Lithuania and individuals who have escaped from breeding farms. According to information obtained from questionnaires sent to hunters at the end of the 80 the last century, American mink colonized 9 of 16 Polish provinces. Over the next decade, this species was observed in the next six provinces. For example, in the Warmia and Mazury (north-eastern Poland) American mink was confirmed by 90% of hunting district.

Colonization of mink in individual regions was correlated with a decrease in population of muskrat and waterfowl.<sup>i</sup>

Practice shows that the effective prevention of escapes of animals from farms is not feasible. We can only try to reduce the living into the wild mink number by hunting or capture and killing, but such action would have to be carried out permanently. In recent years, as a result of legal restrictions on American mink farming introduced in Western Europe, foreign farmers began to invest in the development of animal fur farms in Poland, near the western border of our state. As a result, in the contiguity of the National Park "Ujście Warty" (just 20 km from the border) operates five mink farm with more than 260 000 animals.<sup>ii</sup>

**Measures restricting the activities of American mink:**

Elimination of American mink from the wild is usually a component of running active protection measures of animal species, including birds, in protected areas. Some examples of such actions are pointed below:

- In 2011 the project on: "Protection of waterfowl in five national parks - habitat restoration and mitigation of impacts of invasive species" was started. The coordinating beneficiary of this Project is the Mammal Research Institute PAS. This project is partly funded by the European Commission and the National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management.

The project is run in the following national parks: Biebrza, Drawieński, Narew, and Slowinski National Park as well as National Park "Ujście Warty".

In frame of this project, measures on reducing the negative impacts of invasive alien species, particularly the American mink and raccoon are carried out, including reducing the number of these predators and limiting their colonization of the area.

In the first stage, mink are captured by using live traps and removed from the neighborhood of the most important areas from the point of view of the protection of birds. Catches are run twice a year.

After each series of catches, next activity is monitoring the effectiveness of removing predators with special rafts.

At this time, before the end of the project, it is difficult to assess the effects of these measures especially the influence on breeding birds. However, after almost three years of running the project, the increase in number of native predators in the area, was observed (for example rats have been seen more often).<sup>iii</sup>

- In recent years, in the Biebrza National Park (BNP) (which is located in the north-eastern part of Poland ) two projects for the elimination of American mink were carried out. In 2009-2011, 39 individual minks per 10 km along the Biebrza to the north and south of the village Brzostowo were caught.

The project has shown that in the BNP the American mink's density is relatively low. Minks colonizing BNP are much smaller than those inhabiting the western areas of Poland.<sup>iv</sup>

- In 2012, in frame of the project: "Active protective measures for endangered bird species in the Natura 2000 site – Dolina Środkowej Wisły" which was carried out by the Polish Society for the Protection of Birds and the Centre for Ecological Research of Polish Academy of Sciences, five actions of American mink catches on the islands in the river and both banks of the Vistula River were carried out. These action had been taken in two parts: between Pulawy and the mouth of the Pilica (km 371-457 waterway) and between Warsaw Zeran and Zakroczym (522-555 km water trail)

These measures covered 94 km of the river. 19 minks were caught and anesthetized within 78 days of the action .<sup>v</sup>

### **Control of mink farms and measures to prevent escaping American mink into the wild**

Running fur farms in Poland falls within the state supervision in the scope of complying of the veterinary, environmental protection and building legislation by the entities which are running such activities. The bodies authorized to conduct an inspection in the above field are:

- Chief Veterinary Officer, based on the Act of 29 January 2004, on the Veterinary Inspection (Journal of Laws of 2010 No. 112, item. 744 uniform text),
- Chief Inspector for Environmental Protection, based on the Act of 20 July 1991, on the Inspection of Environmental Protection (Journal of Laws of 2013, item 686 uniform text),
- General Office of Building Control, based on the Act of 7 July 1994 – Building Law (Journal of Laws of 2010, No 243, item 686, as amended).

In 2011, the Supreme Audit Office (SAO) presented the results of the audit (conducted in 2009-2010) on performing of the state inspection institution, which should control the functioning of the fur farms in Wielkopolska region.

This evaluation focused in particular on:

- veterinary supervision,
- implementation of environmental inspection tasks.

The purpose of the audit was to assess the effectiveness of state supervision on the fur farms functioning, by checking if entities which run fur farms comply with veterinary, construction and environmental protection legislation.

The inspection results showed a number of negligences on fur farms, including the lack of necessary security, increased acceptable stocking density or increasing the number of pavilions with mink cages in relation to management plans. These irregularities cause mink escapes into the environment.<sup>vi</sup>

Therefore, on November 4, 2011, the Minister of the Environment addressed a letter to the Chief Inspector for Environmental Protection (CIEP) and the General Office of Building Control (GOBC) with a request to pay special attention in the planned audit activities on issues related to irregularities of running fur farms which has been presented in the report SAO. The Minister of the Environment stressed that although the quoted report of the SAO indicates the overall ineffectiveness of the supervision in fur farms in the Wielkopolska region, the case which has been shown may also occur in other parts of the country.

It has been also stated that the information contained in the report raises a great concern to the Ministry, especially in the context of possible American mink escaping into the natural environment from animal farms and very high impact of this expansive species on lowering the population of native species of fauna, including several protected species, which was confirmed in scientific research.

In response CIEP assured to extend, within their allowances, of inspection plans for 2012, in respect of all the American mink farms in the country, in which the number of the animals is not less than 210 livestock units (LU).

The GOBC has reported that in the first half of 2012, the building supervision authorities carried out 426 controls of fur animal farms, during which 2382 constructions were inspected. In view of recorded irregularities, authorities have taken action against 580 buildings (24.3% of the total audited).

**Considering the above, the Minister of the Environment has decided to make amendments to the Regulation on the list of plants and animals native species, which if released to the environment might endanger native species or natural habitats, under which both the American mink and raccoon will be included in Annex I of the Regulation. Draft amendment of the Regulation and its annex is under preparation and soon the discussion will be taken on this issue again.**

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<sup>i</sup>Marcin Brzeziński, Magdalena Marzec, The origin, dispersal and distribution of the American mink *Mustela vison* in Poland, Acta Theriologica December 2003, Volume 48, Issue 4, pp 505-514

<sup>ii</sup><http://www.iop.krakow.pl/gatunkiobce/>

<sup>iii</sup><http://www.ptaki-life.pl/> and informantion received from phone call

<sup>iv</sup><http://www.biebrza.org.pl/266,ograniczenie-populacji-norki-amerykanskiej.html>

<sup>v</sup>[http://www.ptakisrodkowejwisly.pl/index.php?mact=ActionsJobs,cntnt01,default,0&cntnt01what=project\\_job&cntnt01alias=Zmniejszanie-liczebnosci-norki-amerykanskiej-i-lisa&cntnt01returnid=63](http://www.ptakisrodkowejwisly.pl/index.php?mact=ActionsJobs,cntnt01,default,0&cntnt01what=project_job&cntnt01alias=Zmniejszanie-liczebnosci-norki-amerykanskiej-i-lisa&cntnt01returnid=63)

<sup>vi</sup> Information on the results of the control of state inspection supervision on the functioning of fur farms in Wielkopolska region, Supreme Audit Office, Delegacy in Poznan, Sempteber 2011 (Informacja o wynikach kontroli sprawowania nadzoru przez inspekcje państwowe nad funkcjonowaniem ferm zwierząt futerkowych w województwie wielkopolskim, **Najwyższa Izba Kontroli**, Delegatura w Poznaniu, wrzesień 2011 r.)