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Utilization of genetic data by wildlife managers in the

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Letter of consent

AUBURN UNIVERSITY
College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment

Use of genetic data by wildlife managers in the Southeastern United States
Investigator: Dr. Janna Willoughby
Sponsor: Auburn University
(Auburn University Institutional Review Board approved this document for use 11/08/24, #STUDY00000047.)

You are invited to participate in a research study to understand factors that influence wildlife managers' use of genetic data across the Southeastern United States. Specifically, we are interested in how wildlife managers view the benefits, challenges, and future applications of genetic data in wildlife management in this region. The study is being conducted by Andrea Miranda Paez, Graduate Research Assistant, under the direction of Dr. Janna Willoughby, Assistant Professor at the Auburn University College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a wildlife management professional working in the Southeastern United States. This study specifically seeks input from individuals who are actively involved in wildlife management decision-making and may use or consider the use of genetic data in their conservation practices.

What will be involved if you participate? If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to complete an online Qualitrics survey. Your total time commitment will be approximately 5 minutes or less.

Are there any risks or discomforts? The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal. Given the nature of this survey, there may be a slight risk to confidentiality due to the online data collection platform. Any data obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. We will protect your privacy and the data you provide by storing it securely on a password-protected server, anonymizing responses, and reporting results in aggregated form to prevent the identification of individual participants. Information collected through your participation may be published in a professional journal, presented at professional conferences, and used to inform educational materials, contributing to a broader understanding of genetic data use in wildlife management.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? If you participate in this study, you can expect to contribute valuable insights that may help improve the integration of genetic data into wildlife management practices. While these improvements could benefit conservation efforts and policy development over time, we cannot promise that you will receive any direct benefits from participating.

Will you receive compensation for participating? You will not receive any monetary or material compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to a better understanding of genetic data use in wildlife management, which may ultimately benefit conservation practices.

Are there any costs? If you decide to participate, you will not incur any costs. Auburn University has not provided for any payment if you are harmed as a result of participating in this study, although the study is considered low-risk and no physical harm is anticipated.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, or the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment.

If you have questions about this study, please contact Andrea Miranda Paez at azm0272@auburn.edu or Janna Willoughby at jwilloughby@auburn.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO.

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This section will ask you about demographics

This section will ask about your demographics.

Q1

What is your current role in natural resources management?

- ◯ Wildlife manager
- ◯ Conservation biologist
- ◯ Ecologist
- ◯ Research scientist
- ◯ Other (please specify)

Q2

How many years have you worked in this role?

- ◯ 0-5 years
- ◯ 6-10 years
- ◯ 11-15 years
- ◯ 16-20 years
- ◯ 21+ years

Q3

In which state do you work in natural resources management?

- ◯ Alabama
- ◯ Arkansas
- ◯ Florida
- ◯ Georgia
- ◯ Kentucky
- ◯ Louisiana
- ◯ Mississippi
- ◯ North Carolina
- ◯ South Carolina
- ◯ Tennessee
- ◯ Other (please specify)

Q4

What type of organization do you work for?

- ◯ Federal agency
- ◯ State agency
- ◯ Non-profit organization
- ◯ Private conservation organization
- ◯ Academic/Research institution
- ◯ Other (please specify)

Q5

What is your highest level of education?

- ◯ High School
- ◯ Associate Degree
- ◯ Bachelor's Degree
- ◯ Master's Degree
- ◯ Doctorate
- ◯ Other (please specify)

Q7

What is your gender?

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Non-binary / third gender
- ○ Prefer not to say

Q8

Please select your age range:

- ○ 18-24
- ○ 25-34
- ○ 35-44
- ○ 45-54
- ○ 55-64
- ○ 65+

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This section will ask questions regarding the use/challenges

This section will ask questions regarding the use and challenges associated with applying genetic data to wildlife management.

Q9

Indicate the perceived benefits (if any) from using genetic data in wildlife management.

	Highly beneficial	Sometimes beneficial	Not beneficial
Improved management strategies	○	○	○
Understanding of population dynamics	○	○	○
Enhanced conservation outcomes	○	○	○

Q10

Indicate **degree of concern** (if any) for the following potential challenges to using genetic data in your work:

	Very high	Somewhat high	Neutral/Unsure	Somewhat low	Very low
Access to tissue/DNA samples	○	○	○	○	○
Data interpretation and analysis complexity	○	○	○	○	○
Integration with other data sources (e.g., ecological, behavioral)	○	○	○	○	○
Limited expertise within your team	○	○	○	○	○
Time required for data collection and analysis	○	○	○	○	○
The applicability of genetic data to conservation outcomes	○	○	○	○	○
Availability of funding	○	○	○	○	○
Accessibility of appropriate technology and equipment	○	○	○	○	○

Q11

Indicate your **degree of trust and reliability** of genetic data related to

	Very high	Somewhat high	Neutral/Unsure	Somewhat low	Very low
Suitability for managing wildlife	○	○	○	○	○
Institutional decisions in wildlife management	○	○	○	○	○
Collection and analysis methods	○	○	○	○	○

Q12

In your opinion and experience, are laws and regulations about wildlife management clear regarding the use of genetic data for conservation?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Unsure

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This section will ask questions regarding anticipated future trends

This section will ask questions regarding anticipated future trends in your or your field's use of genetic data in wildlife management.

Q13

In the next 10 years, do you think the trajectory of your organizational support for using genetic data in wildlife management will

- ○ Increase
- ○ Decrease
- ○ Stay the same
- ○ Unsure

Q14

In the next 10 years, do you think funding that is available to you for using genetic data in wildlife management will

- ○ Increase
- ○ Decrease
- ○ Stay the same
- ○ Unsure

Q15

What do you think are the most important training and education needs for effectively using genetic data in wildlife management? (Select all that apply) :

- ☐ Undergraduate/introuductory courses and training (e.g., Introduction to Genetics, Molecular Biology)
- ☐ Graduate/advanced courses and training (e.g., Advanced Genetics, Population Genetics)
- ☐ Certifications in genetics and management
- ☐ Online courses in genetics and management
- ☐ Workshops on genetic data analysis (e.g., Genetic data analysis Workshop, Bioinformatics bootcamp)
- ☐ Workshops on wildlife conservation genetics
- ☐ Field training in wildlife genetics (e.g., sample collection, and wildlife tracking)
- ☐ Research experience in genetics
- ☐ Training in genetic data software tools (e.g., R, Python, STRUCTURE, GenePop)
- ☐ Other (please specify):

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Knowledge Questions: The following questions on core genetics topics help us ...

The following questions on core topics will help us understand how widely known genetics topics are in wildlife management.

Q16

How would you rate your familiarity with using genetic data in wildlife management?

- ◯ Very familiar
- ◯ Somewhat familiar
- ◯ Neutral/Unsure
- ◯ Somewhat unfamiliar
- ◯ Very unfamiliar

Q17

What are the important uses of genetic data in wildlife management? (Rank the following options from most important to least important.)

Tracking disease outbreaks and gene flow in populations	1
Monitoring inbreeding and maintaining genetic diversity	2
Understanding evolutionary processes in populations	3
Identifying individuals for population monitoring	4
Estimating the age of individuals	5
Determining the diet of individuals	6

Q18

Which of the following is a common method used to collect a sample of genetic data from wildlife? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Direct observation of behavior
- ☐ GPS tracking collars
- ☐ Collection of blood or tissue samples
- ☐ Analysis of satellite imagery
- ☐ Collection of hair, scat, or saliva samples

Q19

Why is maintaining genetic diversity important in wildlife populations? (Select any that apply.)

- [ ] It can support population adaptation to change
- [ ] It reduces the need for human intervention
- [ ] It decreases the likelihood of animal-human conflicts
- [ ] It increases the chances of locating animals in the wild

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End of Survey

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.

Your response has been recorded.