

National Action Plan for European Mink Scientific Committee of May 3rd 2021 Record of decisions

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After a brief presentation of the consultation results on the 3rd PNA project and how comments have been taken into account, it is pointed out that it is unfortunate not to update the distribution map in paragraph I.3.b with the latest contacts from European Mink. Since the standardized surveys have not been completed, the choice has been made to keep the map as it is and to mention recent captures in the text.

The members of the Scientific Committee (CS) were then consulted on the following points:

1. Which latin name for the American Mink ?

In the National Atlas of Mammals of France, *Mustela vison* was chosen for consistency with other nearby mustelids. In other scientific publications, it is rather *Neovison vison* that is used.

➔ In the PNA, the two names will appear (*Mustela vison* and *Neovison vison*)

2. Validation of action 1.2 « Characterise European Mink populations »

Following many comments made on this action during the consultation (Steering Committee and CS), it has been completely rewritten and is therefore subject to the opinion of the CS.

- ➔ This new version is validated, but it's necessary to add the notion of space occupation to understand the structure of populations, in addition to the use of habitat.

The priority level of sub-action 1.2.2 « Improve knowledge of habitat use » was debated.

- ➔ Finally, the choice is made to keep it as priority 2 because it is considered more important to carry out management actions than to improve knowledge. In fact, it will be checked that the importance of habitats is highlighted in the action files dealing with their improvement and / or preservation.

3. Priority level of sub-action 1.1.2 « Assess and compare alternative methods to capture survey campaigns »

All members of the CS agree that updating of distribution map is of major importance, regardless of the method used. It is also important to have alternative methods (or a combination of methods) that are less time-consuming than direct detection and that the repetition of these methods is important, given the low detectability of the species. The use of alternative detection methods is being tested under LIFE VISON, so it is not a priority in terms of funding needs.

- ➔ The sub-action is kept in priority 2.

4. Priority level of sub-action 3.1.1 « Verify the state of the American Mink fur farms »

The French ministry announced on September 29th, 2021 that the American mink fur farms would all be closed by 2025. This is why this action was initially in priority 3.

- ➔ This choice is confirmed by the CS, specifying that the PNA must have an accompanying role when the last farms will be closed, in particular concerning the fate of the animals.

5. Shall we consider genetic homogeneity as a cause of decline of the European Mink?

It is confirmed that the European mink population should be considered as a single entity, there are no significant genetic differences between the western and eastern populations that justify managing them separately. Low genetic diversity is not a threat factor by itself but weakens populations and makes them more sensitive, for example when new diseases arrive. In addition, given the low number of individuals in the French European Mink population (the estimate of 200-250 individuals is probably optimistic), the decrease may be rapid (extinction vortex), the reintroduction of individuals in the wild is therefore an urgent priority. The choice of reintroduction sites is crucial and should be done in good quality habitats free from the presence of American Mink. This fragility of small populations will be reaffirmed in the introduction of the PNA.

- ➔ The CS concludes that low genetic diversity must be considered as a threat factor but does not lead to specific action. This question, as well as that concerning hybridization with the European Polecat, will be gathered in a single paragraph dealing with genetic population.

It is also proposed to change the threats order in chapter 6.

- ➔ Although secondary, the « predation by carnivores », can have a major local impact and should therefore appear earlier in the list.

6. Is Raccoon a threat for the European Mink?

Some CS members doubt that the Raccoon is a potential competitor to the European Mink. In high densities, the Raccoon could pose problems of food competition or habitats occupation, but this has not been demonstrated.

- ➔ Without concrete evidence, the Raccoon is kept among potential threats and the associated action (sub-action 3.3.2 « Study the potential impact of other non-native species on the European Mink ») in priority 3. The Raccoon population will be monitored.

The mid-term assessment of the 3rd PNA will be an opportunity to revise this action and include control if an impact is demonstrated. The CS nevertheless warns of the need to lead an appropriate fight in order not to generate a demographic explosion.

7. Action 3.3.1 « Study the American Mink to improve the control strategy »

Studies do not appear to be a relevant action, the fight remains a priority and can provide enough data to continuously improve it. The use of rafts remains the best way to fight. The analysis of data from rafts and corpses can help to study the structure of the population and thus adapt the fight.

- ➔ It was decided to delete this sub-action and to include the valuation of data in the action 3.2 « Control the American Mink found in the natural environment ».

8. Indicators

The indicators currently chosen in the PNA are achievement indicators, and the question is asked about the need for efficiency indicators. Their choice is important because some results can pose interpretation difficulties.

- ➔ The members of CS have one week (until 10/05/2021) to propose additional indicators.