




*Letter to the Editor*

## Of Mink and Men? Surveilling Human Attitudes at the Zoonotic Human–Wildlife Boundary

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On December 14, the first case of COVID-19 in a non-captive wild animal was confirmed when a wild mink tested positive in disease surveillance of meso-carnivores around an Utah fur farm.<sup>1</sup> This detection event provides an extraordinary opportunity to take a problem-oriented approach to solving the problem rather than a disciplinary one.<sup>2</sup> The One Health investigation is laudable for its interagency coordination and proactive monitoring; however, no wildlife or risk management plan has yet to be communicated. Human behavior is an essential variable for addressing the incentive structures facilitating spillover. Failure to incorporate public attitudes and behaviors into COVID-19 decision-making responses involving wild animals could degrade the comprehensiveness of disease surveillance. Our research<sup>3</sup> on regulated trapping of meso-carnivores in Michigan baselines how trappers perceive risks associated with COVID-19. In an online survey of furbearer license holders ( $N = 506$ ), October 2020, 76.5% indicated the pandemic did not prevent them from

accessing land to trap furbearers, and 93.7% were not concerned about contracting COVID-19 from exposure to furbearers, although science to support this is lacking to date. Sixty percent indicated COVID-19 had changed their level of trust in government agencies. Attitudes toward the state wildlife agency correlated with perceived likelihood of trapping violations; trappers who believed the agency was trustworthy believed illegal trapping was less likely. Data indicate perceptions of wildlife risks can be influenced by attitudes toward the human element of wildlife agencies (e.g., trust). The human dimensions of wildlife management are a paramount consideration for problem-oriented solutions to health security.

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<sup>1</sup>Maron, D. (2020). First case of the coronavirus is detected in the wild. National Geographic Society. Accessed December 14, 2020.

<sup>2</sup>Dehgan, A. (2020). Preventing the next pandemics: an upstream approach to novel national security threats. Day One Project Policy Brief. www.dayoneproject.org. Accessed December 14, 2020.

<sup>3</sup>Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program deemed this research to be exempt (IRB # x16-979e Category 2).