A Sociopolitical Perspective on the Illegal Take of Wildlife in the Southeastern, USA

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Keywords:
illegal take
law
radicalization
subculture
wildlife

Issue Date:
2016-06
Illegal take of wildlife is a complex and growing phenomenon, influenced by various factors. Scholars have paid limited attention to structural influences, however. We examine the structural processes that influence illegal take behavior in rural areas of the southeastern USA. Engaging historical and contemporary qualitative data from the region, we first identify that struggles between a rural hunting sub-culture and outsiders over the meaning and governance of human-wildlife interactions in rural areas emerged from several sociopolitical shifts. We then associate illegal take behavior performed by the rural hunting sub-culture with a radicalization framework consisting of injustice, vulnerability, superiority, and distrust. Regulators should not be surprised by the occurrence of illegal take behavior because sociopolitical factors contributed to delegitimization of wildlife law among the sub-culture. Engaging sub-culture gatekeepers in ways that limit exclusionary wildlife governance and imposition of external values may moderate negative outcomes caused by major sociopolitical shifts.

Type:
Article

ISSN:
1835-6672

URI:
http://doi.org/10.18061/1811/78046

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