



# THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

*Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation*

DATE: 18 September 2015

TO: District of Columbia Council, Committee on Transportation and the Environment

RE: Scientific Foundations of the District's Draft Wildlife Action Plan

FROM: Keith Norris, AWB®, Director of Government Affairs & Partnerships,  
The Wildlife Society

The Wildlife Society would like to thank the Council of the District of Columbia's Committee on Transportation and the Environment for the opportunity to testify today. We wish to testify broadly on our support for the District's drafted Wildlife Action Plan.

The Wildlife Society was founded in 1937 and is a non-profit scientific and educational organization representing over 9,000 professional wildlife biologists and managers, dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education. Our mission is to inspire, empower, and enable wildlife professionals to sustain wildlife populations and habitats through science-based management and conservation.

Our organization is a strong supporter of Wildlife Action Plans that are developed by each state, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Territories to direct strategic and effective conservation efforts of all of our diverse wildlife resources. We regularly support Congressional funding of the State & Tribal Wildlife Grants program that provides some of the resources necessary to implement these plans. Government agencies, such as the District's Department of Energy & Environment, are tasked with the responsibility of sustaining wildlife resources that are held in Public Trust. It is in an effort to achieve this responsibility that Wildlife Action Plans are developed.

We applaud the District's Department of Energy & Environment, Fish & Wildlife Division for their diligent work in collecting and critically analyzing a vast array of information regarding the challenges and opportunities facing wildlife management and conservation within the entire District. This plan provides a comprehensive framework to conserve rare wildlife and critical habitat in the District for the next ten years. The Division has worked closely with a variety of partnering organizations and technical experts to identify the species of greatest conservation need, the condition of critical habitats, specific threats to wildlife and their habitats, and recommended actions the District government and partnering organizations can take to minimize threats and ensure conservation of wildlife.

Wildlife management can often present challenging situations that result in tough decisions. The Wildlife Society believes that wildlife and its various habitats need concerted attention from researchers, managers, and planners in urban ecosystems in order to promote establishment of diverse, self-sustaining urban wildlife populations that benefit the surrounding human community. Scientific information can guide our practices and decisions – through science, we can determine which actions are needed to best sustain wildlife and their habitats. We support

the District Department of the Environment's (DDOE) Fisheries and Wildlife Division's efforts to incorporate science-based management decisions into their Wildlife Action Plan.

A large part of wildlife management is to strike a balance between wildlife populations and human population needs by addressing conflicts between the two. Some wildlife populations can become abundant to the point of causing conflict with humans; the conflicts can negatively impact wildlife conservation overall by generating negative associations with wildlife. In addition, such abundant populations can negatively impact other wildlife species by over-utilizing the local habitats. We believe the Plan's recommendation to combat human-wildlife conflicts brought on by white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) and a resident subspecies of Canada geese (*Branta canadensis maxima*) is a good recommendation that supports appropriate wildlife management in the District. Both of these native species can have detrimental impacts by damaging vegetation that supports other important wildlife species and by creating conflicting situations with the District's human population. A reduction in deer and goose populations through DDOE's proposed lethal and sub-lethal measures will allow for both wetland and hardwood vegetation to regenerate in damaged areas and the District's citizens to appreciate their presence. DDOE's plan to monitor white-tailed deer populations to ensure they are reaching ecologically and socially tolerable levels follows TWS' support of wildlife control programs that integrate sound science while minimizing human-wildlife conflict.

The Wildlife Society agrees with the District's WAP assessment that invasive species are a threat to both wildlife and their habitats. In urban areas, free-roaming cats often pose a direct risk to sensitive wildlife populations. We approve of the Plan's recommendation to have free-roaming cats be taken in by adoption facilities, as well as DDOE's support for 'cats indoors' programs via education and outreach. A study in 2013 estimated 1.4-3.7 billion birds and 6.9-20.7 billion mammals are killed annually in the U.S. by feral and free-roaming domestic cats; the largest human-influenced source of mortality for birds and mammals in the country.<sup>1</sup> In addition, numerous scientific studies have found TNR programs fail to reduce populations within a colony.<sup>2,3,4,5,6,7</sup> As a result, feral cats released back into native ecosystems, even those sterilized and vaccinated, continue to have significant consequences for native wildlife and people.

The Wildlife Society encourages, recognizes, and publicly advocates the appropriate use of wildlife, ecological, and conservation science in policy determination and decision-making processes. As such, we support the overarching goal of the Plan as stated in section 1.4 "to bring together the best science available to conserve priority fish and wildlife and their habitats through innovative public-private partnerships".

Thank you for considering the views of wildlife professionals. Please feel free to contact Keith Norris, Director of Government Affairs & Partnerships, at (301) 897-9770 x309 or [keith.norris@wildlife.org](mailto:keith.norris@wildlife.org) if you need further information or have any questions.

Citations:

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