



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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12 March 2010

The Honorable Alcee Hastings
United States House of Representatives
2353 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Hastings,

Thank you for your leadership and initiative in introducing H.R. 4497, the Wildlife and Zoological Veterinary Medicine Enhancement Act of 2010. There is a pressing need for more affordable training and increased job opportunities for individuals who are seeking to become wildlife and zoo veterinarians. We commend your dedication to the issue and appreciate your efforts to bolster the veterinary profession and wildlife health. Providing such opportunities for students not only protects our nation's wildlife, but also provides information about human health issues, improves our national response to infectious disease, and contributes to our long-term highly-skilled workforce. The Wildlife Society is committed to improving the health of wildlife populations, and we support legislation that aligns with these goals.

The Wildlife Society was founded in 1937 and is a non-profit scientific and educational association of over 9,000 professional wildlife biologists and managers, dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education. Our mission is to represent and serve wildlife professionals—the scientists, technicians, and practitioners actively working to study, manage, and conserve native and desired non-native wildlife and their habitats worldwide.

As you know, there is a shortage of positions for wildlife and zoo veterinarians in this country, as well as a shortage of opportunities for students interested in such positions to be properly trained in wildlife ecology and medicine. This shortage is of serious concern for not just wildlife professionals, but for everyone because of the strong connection between wildlife, domestic animal, and human health. Good wildlife health not only protects our wildlife heritage, but it also serves as an important indicator of ecosystem health; as an example, the deadly West Nile Virus not only harms humans and birds, but it also serves as a general indicator of environmental health, with research suggesting that the effects of climate change may increase its distribution. Additionally, good wildlife health plays a major role in preventing the spread of infectious disease; many of the major human disease outbreaks in the past century have come about as a result of human-wildlife contact, including Hantavirus, influenza, AIDS, and Ebola. Having an adequate number of well-trained wildlife veterinarians is just another weapon in our public health and national security arsenal.

While TWS supports legislation that enhances wildlife health by improving education, training, and job opportunities for wildlife veterinarians, we have some suggestions for how to further improve H.R. 4497. First, while training students to become highly-specialized wildlife

veterinarians is undoubtedly important, we are concerned that as written H.R. 4497 does not place enough focus on creating job opportunities. Increasing training for students without increasing the number of positions available for them could result in a glut of highly-skilled, specialized, and jobless individuals. We recommend that Sec. 101 of this legislation designate that the funding allocated to institutions for the creation of new positions be sufficiently large to absorb the expected number of graduates from these newly-funded training programs.

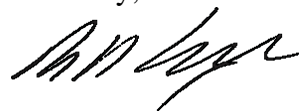
Second, TWS notes that the maintenance of strong, healthy wildlife populations requires a range of expertise from a variety of wildlife professionals and managers, and wildlife medicine is only a small part of that. In addition to wildlife veterinarians, many others play an integral role in wildlife health, including: microbiologists, who identify wildlife disease; epidemiologists, who track the disease in human and wildlife populations; wildlife managers, who isolate and capture sick individuals; wildlife biologists, who study the effects of the disease; and a myriad of basic scientists and human health care professionals who provide input into the pathology, etiology, and treatment of disease across the human-animal interface. We also note that many academic and wildlife institutions already offer the specialized training that would provide veterinarians with the skills to contribute to wildlife health issues. We support H.R. 4497 as written because it makes a good start towards improving wildlife health, however, we urge you to consider including training and job opportunities for not only wildlife veterinarians, but other wildlife health professionals as well. We also urge you to consider expanding the scholarship and grant sections of H.R. 4497 to also include post-graduate education in areas such as wildlife ecology and other disciplines that would provide veterinarians with enhanced training in wildlife health.

Finally, we urge you to consider the appropriate agency for administration of this Act. As it is written, Sec. 5 of the Act designates the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the Director of the National Wildlife Health Center of the United States Geological Survey, as the administrator. While this may be the best agency for administration of the Act, we remind you that it is important to consider the size, personnel, and resources available to any agency that will oversee the Act, and that the appropriate funding and resource allocations should be made to the administering agency if necessary.

In summary, TWS supports action to bolster the wildlife health through increased training and job opportunities for wildlife veterinarians, and therefore we endorse H.R.4497, the Wildlife and Zoological Veterinary Medicine Enhancement Act of 2010. We also would hope to support any future legislation that would more broadly address wildlife health issues. We applaud your efforts on behalf of wildlife, and we ask that you will continue to show strong support for wildlife health, wildlife habitats, and wildlife professionals.

Please feel free to contact Laura Bies (301-897-9770 ext. 308 or laura@wildlife.org) if you have any questions, or to let us know if we can be of any more assistance.

Sincerely,



Bruce Leopold
President