



## Virginia Chapter of The Wildlife Society

Chartered October 15, 1982

### MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Members of the Senate Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources Committee

FROM: Karen Powers, Ph.D., President, Virginia Chapter of The Wildlife Society

DATE: January 21, 2015

RE: Oppose SB 693, 698, and 699 due to ecological and health concerns from feral cats

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On behalf of the Virginia Chapter of The Wildlife Society, the principal organization representing wildlife professionals across the Commonwealth, our Executive Board would like to express opposition to SB 693 (Feral cats; trapping, neutering, and returning to site activity), SB 698 (Companion animal; surgical sterilization program, fund, penalty), and SB 699 (Community cat programs; localities to authorize operation of programs). A growing body of scientific research shows that free-ranging cats destroy native wildlife and pose risks to human health. At the same time, trap, neuter, release (TNR) programs *have not* been shown to reduce feral cat numbers.

In Virginia, cats kill 3-26 million songbirds, 27-78 million small mammals, and 2.5-9 million reptiles each year. Cats are responsible for the *extinction* of at least 33 bird species around the world. Of cat kills, *un-owned* cats cause more than 66% of wild bird deaths and nearly 90% of wild mammal deaths in the United States.

Cats are more likely to expose humans to rabies than wildlife because they are more likely to make direct contact with humans. An emerging threat from free-roaming cats is toxoplasmosis, which may cause neurologic symptoms or abortions in humans. The parasite causing toxoplasmosis may be maintained and spread by feral cats, of which 62-80% those tested had positive results. Feral cats are likely driving white-tailed deer infections of toxoplasmosis in some areas - another route of infection for people and wildlife consuming venison. Cats may also transmit cat scratch fever, plague, ringworm, bartonella, and salmonellosis to humans.

The Wildlife Society, an international association of over 10,000 wildlife professionals and students dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education, recognizes that feral and free-ranging cats have widespread detrimental effects on native wildlife populations and natural ecosystems (Attachment 1). The Society's Feral and Free-Ranging Domestic Cats position statement (Attachment 2) encourages the humane elimination of feral cat populations and urges state and local governing bodies to oppose TNR programs.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the issue of feral cats in Virginia. If additional information is desired, please feel free to contact me at (540) 831-6537 or [kpowers4@radford.edu](mailto:kpowers4@radford.edu).

Cc. VA-TWS Executive Board, VA-TWS Conservation Review Committee

Encl.