



Virginia Chapter of The Wildlife Society

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Members of the House Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources
Subcommittee: Natural Resources

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

DATE: January 27, 2015

RE: Oppose HB 2343 due to biological and sociological concerns with feeding game

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 HB 2343 (Game, game animals, and fur-bearing animals; DGIF to allow feeding of certain wildlife). A solid body of scientific evidence documents the numerous biological and sociological concerns associated with feeding of wildlife. We believe that HB 2343 would effectively undermine all of the proactive, scientifically-sound, and socially-acceptable restrictions the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has placed on feeding of game animals in recent years.

In Virginia, we are fortunate to have sensible prohibitions on the feeding of deer and bear, as well as other wildlife causing property damage, endangering any person or wildlife, or creating a public health concern (4VAC15-40-286). The prohibition on feeding of bears year-round anywhere in Virginia (4VAC15-40-282) has been an important component of managing bear-human conflicts; yet, every bear the VDGIF has had to destroy in recent years has been illegally fed. Feeding of deer is prohibited (1) year-round in and near the Chronic Wasting Disease Containment Area in the northern Shenandoah Valley as an integral part of disease management actions, (2) year-round in the elk restoration zone in Southwest Virginia to prevent human-elk conflicts and disease transmission, and (3) elsewhere in Virginia from September 1 through the first Saturday in January to address the numerous impacts outlined in the next paragraph (4VAC15-40-285).

The Wildlife Society (TWS), an international association of over 10,000 wildlife professionals and students dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education, published a technical review in 2006 and a position statement in 2007 on baiting and feeding of game wildlife, both of which I have enclosed. Concerns enumerated in these documents regarding feeding game species include: increasing wild animal densities above natural levels, leading to elevated risks for disease transmission, habitat damage, and social competition; increasing wild animal habituation to humans, diminishing wild behavior and increasing the potential for negative human-wildlife interactions; and, redirecting emphasis away from natural habitat management and toward a more artificial form of wildlife management. It should be noted that many of these negative impacts can accrue to *nontarget* animals

(such as songbirds, small mammals, domestic or feral animals) as well as the target game animals that are intentionally fed.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on this issue. If additional information is desired, please feel free to contact me at (540) 831-6537 or kpowers4@radford.edu .

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

Encl.