

The Wildlife Society  
Maryland/Delaware Chapter  
**Jennifer L. Murrow, President**  
301-405-1179

**RE: VETO OF HOUSE BILL NO. 235 – HA 1 - AN ACT TO AMEND TITLES 11 AND 16 OF THE DELAWARE CODE RELATING TO STERILIZATION, LIFE AND SUSTAINING CARE OF CATS.**

July 24, 2018

Governor John Carney  
Carvel State Office Building, 12<sup>th</sup> Floor  
820 North French Street  
Wilmington, DE 19801

Dear Governor Carney:

The Maryland/Delaware Chapter of the Wildlife Society is a professional organization of 120 wildlife professionals dedicated to promotion of sound stewardship of wildlife resources and of the environments upon which wildlife and humans depend. We also undertake an active role in preventing human-induced environmental degradation, while increasing awareness and appreciation of wildlife values.

We encourage and support actions to eliminate the problem of free-ranging and feral cats in the State of Delaware. Irresponsible societal attitudes have resulted in millions of feral cats in the United States. Most of these cats will suffer premature mortality from disease, starvation, or trauma. This population of cats also poses a zoonotic disease risk for the public. They pose considerable risks to our native wildlife as well.

Feral and free-ranging domestic cats are an exotic species to North America. Exotic species are recognized as one of the most widespread and serious threats to the integrity of native wildlife populations and natural systems. Since many people regard feral cats as “natural” components of the environment, advocacy groups have promoted their continued presence, and few policies and laws deal directly with their control. The domestic cat is the companion animal that recently has attracted the most attention for its impact on wildlife species.

Domestic cats originated from an ancestral wild species, the European and African wild cat (*Felis silvestris*). The domestic cat (*Felis catus*) is now considered a separate species. The estimated number of pet cats in urban and rural regions of the United States has grown from 30 million in 1970 to nearly 148 million in 2016. Individuals become sexually mature as early as 6 months of age, and reproduction can occur throughout the year. A single female may produce as many as 3 litters each year with 2 to 4 kittens per litter, with the capacity to successfully raise as many as 12 offspring in any given year. Nationwide, approximately 30% of households have cats. In rural areas, approximately 60% of households have cats.

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, or which 62 – 80% those treated 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.

A growing body of literature strongly suggests that domestic cats are a significant factor on the mortality of small mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. Because free-ranging cats often receive food from humans, they can reach population levels that may create areas of abnormally high predation rates on wildlife. When the prey is endangered, threatened, or alternatively in an “island “ setting where the populations are low and stressed by other factors, or in natural areas where cat colonies are established, the results can be very pronounced.

Even using conservative estimates of prey taken, the number of prey animals killed is immense. Feeding cats does not deter them from killing wildlife for they do not always eat what they kill. Returning cats to the environment, via Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) or similar programs, significantly impacts our native wildlife populations. Since humans introduced cats to North America, humans must be responsible for the control and removal of cats that prey on wildlife.

The policy of The Wildlife Society regarding feral and free-ranging domestic cats is to:

1. Support and encourage the humane elimination of feral cat populations, including feral cat colonies, through adoption into indoor-only homes of eligible cats and humane euthanasia of unadoptable cats.
2. Support the passage and enforcement of local and state ordinances prohibiting the feeding of feral cats, especially on public lands, and the release of unwanted pet or feral cats into the wild.
3. Oppose the passage of any local or state ordinances that legalize the maintenance of "managed" (trap/neuter/release) free-ranging cat colonies.
4. Support educational programs and materials that provide scientific information on feral cats and the negative effects on cats from living outdoors, and call on pet owners to keep cats indoors, in outdoor enclosures, or on a leash.
5. Support programs to educate and encourage pet owners to neuter or spay their cats, and encourage all pet adoption programs to require potential owners to spay or neuter their pet.
6. Support the development and dissemination of information on what individual cat owners can do to minimize predation by free-ranging cats, and to minimize potential disease transmission to humans, wildlife, cats, and other domestic animals.
7. Pledge to work with the conservation and animal welfare communities to educate the public about the effects of free-ranging and feral cats on native wildlife, including birds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and endangered species.
8. Support educational efforts to encourage the agricultural community to keep farm-cat numbers at low, manageable levels and use alternative, environmentally safe rodent control methods.
9. Support efforts to reduce risks to the health of humans and other animals posed by diseases and parasites of feral cats, including but not limited to removal of free-ranging cats and

elimination of feral cat colonies. Encourage researchers to develop, obtain, and disseminate information on the impacts of feral and free-ranging cats on native wildlife populations, relative to predation, competition, and diseases.

10. Recognize that cats as pets have a long association with humans, and that responsible cat owners are to be encouraged to continue caring for the animals under their control.

We disagree with the concept that Trap-Neuter-Release of feral cats is a “humane and efficient means of reducing feral cat populations.” Implementation of such a program in Delaware perpetuates the myth that TNR programs protect and improve the lives of cats, because it specifically includes releasing the animals back into the wild. While we support the humane treatment of domestic cats, returning trapped feral cats to the wild, whether vaccinated and neutered or not, only perpetuates the wanton destruction of wildlife, and fails to solve the problem. Your support for animal welfare organizations is commendable. The belief that cats are victims is widely held and pervasive, however society needs direction from its leaders to acknowledge feral cats are no longer pets to be protected when they prey upon our native wildlife already pushed to the brink by our land use policies. The Governor’s Office has a unique leadership role to educate and persuade Delaware’s citizenry that our wildlife deserves protection from our unwanted and unregulated pets.

We are willing to provide information, education materials and our time to present professional assessments of the TNR program and to provide alternatives to its use. We would appreciate a consideration of these facts before you decide on another Feral Cat day in Delaware.

Respectfully yours,

Dr. Jennifer L. Murrow