

Dear Mr. Edmunds:

I am writing you today on behalf of the Virginia Chapter of The Wildlife Society, an association that represents wildlife professionals in the Commonwealth. Specifically, we are requesting legislative assistance in order to remove a legal barrier that is hindering research and management of the invasive nutria in Virginia.

In summary, the nutria is an invasive rodent that is expanding its range in Virginia (see attached article from the current issue of Virginia Wildlife). This species has been known to destroy native marshes through its herbivory and, in addition, can cause damage to water control structures and crops in fields adjacent to the wetlands where they are found. Federal and state agencies in Virginia are collaborating with others in Maryland and North Carolina to address the issue of eradicating nutria. As you may be aware, Maryland has been conducting a successful eradication effort for the past 10 years in the upper Chesapeake Bay system and, in 2021, declared the nutria extirpated from the state.

If we are to achieve similar results in Virginia we must prepare the way for effective management and research. At present, the Code of Virginia limits what sorts of actions can be implemented by professional biologists related to nutria. Specifically, the current code reads:

§ 29.1-545. Possession, sale, offering for sale or liberation of live nutria.

It shall be unlawful for any person, firm, association or corporation to possess, sell, offer for sale, or liberate in the Commonwealth any live fur-bearing animal commonly referred to as nutria.

This prevents biologists from conducting routine practices such as housing captive nutria to harvest urine or glandular secretions which have proven useful in luring animals to trap locations and training detector dogs. Further, it prevents us from implementing potentially crucial research practices such as outfitting nutria with radio transmitters to gain a better understanding of movement and habitat use. This data will improve our overall understanding of nutria in Virginia and, ultimately, our probability of success in eradicating them.

We respectfully request that you consider sponsoring a friendly amendment to the Code of Virginia that would permit the capture, holding, and release of nutria for strictly defined research and management purposes. Specifically, we suggest the following changes (in bold):

§ 29.1-545. Possession, sale, offering for sale or liberation of live nutria.

It shall be unlawful for any person, firm, association or corporation to possess, sell, offer for sale, or liberate in the Commonwealth any live fur-bearing animal commonly referred to as nutria (**Myocaster coypus**). **This section shall not apply to employees of the Department of Wildlife Resources, United States Department of Agriculture, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, or any cooperators involved in research or management activities authorized by these agencies.**

This simple amendment is critical for moving forward with successful eradication of the nutria from Virginia. We would welcome the opportunity to provide additional information in support of this request in a format that best suits your needs and schedule. If you are unable to sponsor this change, we would appreciate a response as such so that we may identify another potential patron. Thank you very much for your time and consideration of our request.

Respectfully,

David Luther  
dluther@gmu.edu  
Chair, Conservation Affairs Committee  
Virginia chapter of The Wildlife Society