**RESOLUTION # 18**

**WILDLIFE AND AGRICULTURE**

**WHEREAS**, excessive populations of wildlife, and the accompanying economic and natural resource losses to farmers, livestock owners, homeowners, businesses and public lands caused by such wildlife populations, continue at critical levels in New Jersey; and

**WHEREAS**, widespread development in New Jersey has led black bear, geese, starlings, turkeys and other birds, as well as small mammals, to retreat to the relatively open spaces of New Jersey farmland and its appurtenant woodlands, infiltrating and feeding upon the crops farmers depend upon for their livelihood and that residents depend upon for fresh, nutritious, locally grown and produced foods, and risking the introduction of diseases common to wildlife into the domestic animal population and to humans; and

**WHEREAS**, while most farmers report at least some crop damage by deer annually, a third of farmers recently studied by the New Jersey Farm Bureau and Rutgers NJAES reported at least $10,000 in annual crop damage from wildlife, and five percent reported $50,000 or more in annual wildlife crop damage; and

**WHEREAS**,the burgeoning black bear population, in particular, poses a threat to crops, smaller agricultural animals such as sheep, goats and chickens - as well as to New Jersey beekeepers’ honeybee colonies that are vital to pollinating many of New Jersey’s leading produce crops and which account for a growing fresh honey supply - and these bears have increasingly come into contact with humans in residential areas, with multiple bear-human encounters reported over the past several years; and

**WHEREAS**, in an attempt to curb the black bear population, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection’s Division of Fish and Wildlife in 2015 expanded the state’s annual bear hunt to include additional areas and the use of bows and arrows; and

**WHEREAS,** multiple bills in the Legislature have sought to end the annual bear hunt and replace it with “non-lethal” methods of limiting human-bear interaction such as requiring the use of “bear-resistant” trash cans and prohibiting the feeding of bears by residents; and

**WHEREAS**, the Governor has issued an executive order banning bear hunting on state-owned lands, many of which abut the private lands of farmers; and

**WHEREAS**, the 1999 Report to the Governor on Deer Management in New Jersey and the 2005 adoption of the Comprehensive Black Bear Management Strategy call for using hunting, among other methods, as a tool to manage wildlife populations; and

**WHEREAS**, baiting, for wildlife, is an important tool to properly and safely control hunting efforts in New Jersey, since residential and open-space areas often are in close proximity; and

**WHEREAS**, the sale of corn, sweet potatoes, apples and other farm products provides a strong revenue source for farmers and retailers; and

**WHEREAS**, the use of snares is an important tool, especially for farmers seeking to control wildlife to prevent crop and property loss; and

**WHEREAS**, pending legislation would prohibit the use of “enclosed foothold traps,” which the legislation’s sponsors say are “inconsistent with plain language and legislative intent of a 1984 law banning animal traps of steel-jaw leghold type…”; and

**WHEREAS**, the number of permits for beaver trapping is limited by statute to 200 permits per year for the entire state, which is significantly less than what is known to be needed to manage the beaver population; and

**WHEREAS**, beaver depredation permits that are issued often carry restrictions that make them, for all practical purposes, useless to farmers trying to control the damage done by beavers; and

**WHEREAS**, all agencies of state government involved in wildlife management must examine the need for greater control of the black vulture population in the state, as in the past year, black vulture interaction with other birds was a major contributing factor to the occurrence of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) at several “backyard flocks” and one animal rehabilitation center/sanctuary in New Jersey; and

**WHEREAS,** those same agencies, especially the NJDA, should investigate the potential for creating a registration system for “backyard flocks” in New Jersey, as they are

often likely to see their owned birds exposed to wild birds that could carry HPAI, and a lack of registration makes it difficult to ensure the Department is protecting all premises near a detection of HPAI in order to limit the spread of the devastating disease; and:

**WHEREAS,** the deer-farming industry has been strong in Europe, New Zealand and Canada for years, and is growing rapidly in the United States; and

**WHEREAS**, New Jersey deer farmers need state support to protect the health and well-being of livestock entering the food supply, through disease-control programs, humane standards for care, and surveillance and response for diseases that impact their animals; and

**WHEREAS**, a comprehensive, long-term, multi-species wildlife-management plan, including times when the farmer’s crops are in the field and when they are not, with a permit worded accordingly, would greatly help New Jersey’s farmers plan for a consistent, goal-oriented management of crop-damaging wildlife, including fencing available from the NJDA; and

**WHEREAS**, the Director of the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife, working within the framework of the Fish and Game Council, which includes farmers among its membership, can determine wildlife policy in the state.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that we, the delegates to the 109th State Agricultural Convention, assembled in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on February 7-8, 2024, do hereby strongly urge that the Governor, the Legislature, the New Jersey Fish and Game Council and/or the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife and/or all other appropriate state, federal, and local agencies to effectuate the following:

1. Work with USDA-APHIS and the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife as appropriate to expand black bird and starling control programs in New Jersey, and to work to limit interaction between kept birds and wild birds such as black vultures, which this past year contributed greatly to instances of HPAI in New Jersey backyard flocks.
2. Continue to work with the U.S. Department of the Interior, Division of Migratory Birds, and the Atlantic Flyways Council to extend the statewide resident Canada

goose season to the maximum extent possible, not to interfere with migratory birds, and increase the daily bag limit and to encourage greater control strategies for Canada geese and snow geese.

1. Increase the number of available turkey hunting permits and conduct and/or support extramural research on turkey damage.
2. Support the expansion of wildlife damage surveys and plans for New Jersey, as well as wildlife damage research and education at the Rutgers/NJAES.
3. New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife stop the practice of pulling a depredation permit if the carcass of a shot animal covered by that permit cannot be found.
4. Continue to support a science-based black bear management methodology that incorporates hunting seasons as needed.
5. Support the continued development and use of a multi-species depredation permit to streamline the process of obtaining such permits for farmers facing crop damage from multiple species, instead of requiring separate depredation permits for each species causing damage.
6. Increase the number of trapping permits for beaver and remove restrictions on depredation permits that hamper their proper implementation.
7. Allow “baiting” with corn, apples and other produce for the hunting of deer and bear, as it both helps to improve the safety of hunting in areas near residential development and provides a revenue source for farmers and food retailers.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** that we strongly urge the Division of Fish and Wildlife to permit farmers to establish comprehensive, long-term, multi-species wildlife-management plans, including times when the farmer’s crops are in the field and when they are not, and issue a permit worded accordingly.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we support the ongoing survey work of Rutgers University to create a clearer, fact-based view of the state’s black bear population and its impact on farms.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we acknowledge the Governor’s willingness to examine hard evidence regarding the impact on farms and residents of the black bear population and to judge accordingly the need for hunting to be a part of the overall bear-control methods employed by the state.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we oppose any legislation, executive order or regulation that would remove hunting as a method of controlling the state’s black bear population, especially those that expressly characterize bear hunting as “trophy hunting,”

thus showing a lack of understanding of the need to hunt bear to prevent crop and livestock damage, and insist that the Governor consult state wildlife biologists in addressing bear management.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we strongly urge the passage by the Legislature and the signing by the Governor of legislation to move the administration of the New Jersey deer farming industry from the Division of Fish and Wildlife to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**,that we strongly urge the Governor and Legislature to support legislation that calls for moving the New Jersey Fish and Game Council and the

Division of Fish and Wildlife into the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, creating a more logical alignment with USDA and its myriad of wildlife programs, and thus resulting in a better-coordinated effort to balance the needs of wildlife with those of the agricultural sector, provided that all concerns about such a realignment are addressed through a combined effort of the NJDA and NJDEP, with an eye toward accomplishing the missions of both departments.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we strongly urge that the farmer members of the New Jersey Fish and Game Council, nominated by the delegates to this convention, be expeditiously appointed to that Council, as some nominated farmer members have waited years for their appointments to become effective.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that regardless of the alignment of the agencies, that the current Director of the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife meet with a group of farmers and agricultural advocates designated by the State Board of Agriculture to discuss ongoing issues regarding wildlife’s impact on agriculture in New Jersey by June 30, 2024.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we strongly urge the Legislature to reject any legislation that would prohibit the use of snares as a means of controlling wildlife in New Jersey.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**,that we strongly urge that New Jersey’s Congressional Delegation sponsor and support federal legislation to increase, by at least

$400,000, the USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services budget for staffing and support for a pilot Cooperative Waterfowl Damage Management Program in New Jersey, and to implement actions in support of the “Depredation Order at Agricultural Facilities” contained in the Environmental Impact Statement for Canada Geese.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** that we strongly urge the Division of Fish and Wildlife to broaden the allowed use of crossbows for use in hunting under a depredation permit, and strongly urge the Division of Fish and Wildlife explore the simplification of depredation permits and opportunities for sportsmen to be added to permits at any time, and for depredation reporting to be done with the automated check-in system to reduce farmer reporting.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the decisions made to change purchased land from agricultural production to an overgrowth area should have the consideration of farmers or the NJDA before the decision is made.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that we urge the Fish and Wildlife Council farmer representative to bring forth these concerns about how allowing this overgrowth is contributing to the wildlife population issue, and in turn adversely affects the agricultural productivity of the land.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, we urge the Legislature to provide a stable source of funding, currently standing at $1 million annually, for continued implementation of the wildlife fencing program administered by the NJDA, which aligns with the statutory intent of the wildlife-fencing law.