

**OFFICERS** 

Anita W. Coupe, Esq. Chair of the Board Jennifer Leaning, M.D., S.M.H. Vice Chair of the Board Walter J. Stewart, Esq. Wayne Pacelle President & CEO G. Thomas Waite III Treasurer & CFO Roger A. Kindler, Esq. General Counsel & CLO Janet D. Frake

Andrew N. Rowan, Ph.D. Executive Vice President Operations

Michael Markatian Executive Vice President External Affairs

## STAFF VICE PRESIDENTS

Senior Vice President Communications International John W. Grandy, Ph.D. Senior Vice President

Wildlife & Habitat Protection Constance Harriman-Whitfield Senior Vice President Philanthropy Holly Hazard Chief Innovations Officer

Heidi Prescott Senior Vice President Campaigns

Geoffrey L. Handy Communications Katherine B. Liscomb Administration & Animal Care Centers

Jonathan R. Loworn, Esq. Animal Protection Litigation Kathleen C. Milani Investigations and Video

Mivum Park Farm Animal Welfare Nancy Perry, Esq. Government Affairs

Robert G. Roop, Ph.D., SPHR Human Resources & Education Programs Melissa Seide Rubin, Esq. Field & Emergency Services John M. Snyder

Companion Animals Animal Research Issues

DIRECTORS Leslie Lee Alexander, Esq. Patricia Mares Asip Peter A. Bender Eric L. Bernthal, Esq. Barbara S. Brack Anita W. Coupe, Esq. Neil B. Fang, Esq., C.P.A. Jane Greenspun Gale Jennifer Leaning, M.D., S.M.H. Kathleen M. Lineha Dwight E. Lowell II William F. Mancuso Mary I. Max Patrick L. McDonnell Gil Michaels Judy Ney Sharon Lee Patrick Judy I. Peil Marian G. Probst Joshua S. Reichert, Ph.D. Marilyn G. Seyler Walter J. Stewart, Esq. John E. Taft Andrew Weinstein

December 9, 2008

Pete Grannis Commissioner New York Department of Environmental Conservation 625 Broadway Albany, New York 12233-1011

## VIA U.S. MAIL AND FACSIMILE

Dear Commissioner Grannis:

On behalf of our more than 815,000 members and constituents who reside in the state of New York, I thank you for closing the Richard E. Reynolds game farm and urge the Department of Environmental Conservation to take this opportunity to end pheasant stocking in New York. Pheasant stocking for recreational shooting serves no legitimate wildlife management purpose and in a time of budget shortfall should not divert resources away from protecting native wildlife and habitat.

The New York DEC currently spends at least \$750,000 per year to disperse 100,000 pheasants, a species native to China. Instead of accepting that the establishment of an exotic species in the state has failed, the state's wildlife stewards choreograph a mock hunt in which pen-reared birds are released for a shooting season.

Among the limited states that stock, most recognize these "put-and-take" programs as an anomaly from traditional wildlife management by requiring those shooting the stocked pheasants to pay an exclusive hunting license fee so that limited public and general hunting license sale funds are used to administer the program. Yet even with a license fee solely dedicated to stocking, these programs are rarely able to operate autonomously.

In New York, pheasant shooters only purchase a small game license, a pool of funding that continues to shrink as the same exorbitant number of pheasants are released each year. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported that in New York small game hunters declined by 36 percent from 1996 to 2006, going from approximately 256,000 down to 164,000 individuals. In 1996, small game hunters made up 42 percent of all hunters; in 2006, small game hunters made up only 29 percent of all hunters. Additionally, the DEC's own surveys show that pheasant hunting participation itself steadily declined from 105,244 shooters in 1982 to 37,856 in 1999. Pulling resources away from hunting license sales for this unsustainable and inhumane program only makes the agency more dependent on taxpayer funding.

In states that do stock, vetoing and curtailing funding for pheasant stocking programs is increasingly the choice of decision-makers faced with economic shortfalls. Recently, the Pennsylvania Game Commission reduced its pheasant stocking program by half to address agency funding gaps. For the current Illinois fiscal year, the governor vetoed funding for the state's stocking program. Prior to closing the Reynolds farm, the DEC also closed an additional game farm in 1999 to save money.

Persia White David O. Wiebers, M.D. Also, in 2007 the National Park Service determined that pheasant stocking is at odds with its exotic wildlife management policies and announced plans to phase out stocking on the Service's only stocking property, the Cape Cod National Seashore. It is also timely for the state to follow the trend of ending recreational pheasant programs, as the agency's management plan for naturalized and stocked pheasants will be reviewed in 2009.

Closing the Reynolds game farm will save the state funds, but The Humane Society of the United States urges the DEC to not spend additional funds to purchase birds from private breeders or establish a new license fee for pheasant stocking.

Quite simply, hunting demands that animals be given a reasonable chance to escape, not released from the back of a truck at an announced date and time. Animals raised in a pen will never exhibit the same survival skills as naturalized or wild birds. Consequently, studies consistently show that within a few weeks of release, if not immediately killed by shooters, these captive-reared animals are killed by predators or the elements.

At rearing facilities, the pheasant chicks progress through a series of incubators, boxes and pens, and even have "blinders" placed through their nose holes to keep the stressed birds from pecking at each other. Unlike wild birds, these animals grow up viewing humans as a beneficial presence, not a cause for alarm. A state wildlife agency should not be providing, or even supporting, this type of shooting of captive-reared, exotic animals.

Shutting down the Reynolds game farm was not only a wise move to alleviate taxpayers, but a humane choice to curtail an unsustainable and wasteful program. The Humane Society of the United States encourages you to support the cessation of funding for recreational pheasant stocking programs and advocate the use of state resources to promote the agency's mission to conserve, improve and protect the state's natural resources. If you wish to discuss this issue further, please contact me at 917-331-7187 or pkwan@humanesociety.org, at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Patrick Kwan

New York State Director

The Humane Society of the United States

CC: Laura L. Anglin, Director, Division of the Budget

Judith Enck, Deputy Secretary for the Environment, State of New York Executive Chamber Vincent Esposito, Asst. Counsel for Environmental Conservation, State of New York Executive

Chamber

Sheldon Silver, Speaker, New York State Assembly

Robert K. Sweeney, NYS Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee