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May 20, 2008

Governor Rod Blagojevich  
Office of the Governor  
207 State House  
Springfield, IL 62706

Sent via mail and facsimile to: 217-524-4049

Dear Governor Blagojevich:

On behalf of our more than 431,000 members and constituents who reside in the state of Illinois, I urge you to continue opposition to the use of taxpayer funds for pheasant stocking. Pheasant stocking for recreational shooting serves no legitimate wildlife management purpose and should not divert resources away from protecting native wildlife and habitat.

Illinois currently releases yearly 60,000 to 90,000 pheasants, exotic birds native to China. Although in some areas of the country, these animals have found the habitat to naturalize, Illinois does not have the habitat allowing these birds to survive and reproduce. Instead of accepting the failure of forcing the establishment of an exotic species, the state's wildlife stewards choreograph a mock hunt with a bird release total at the higher end of the limited states participating in stocking.

Shooting pen-reared animals is unethical and inhumane and should not be endorsed, funded, or administrated by a public agency. During the captive-reared hunting season, stocked state parks are even closed to the over 2,390,000 state wildlife watchers who outspend hunters three to one yearly, so that a few participants may expend lead shot to kill thousands of birds in the limited wildlife habitat left in Illinois.

Fair chase 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. Studies consistently show that within a few weeks of release, if not immediately killed by shooters, these animals are killed by predators or the elements. That is why in the case of Illinois released pheasants both hens and cocks may be killed as there is no chance the hens will survive to reproduce.

*Celebrating Animals, Confronting Cruelty*

Animals raised in a pen will never exhibit the same survival skills as naturalized or wild birds. At the rearing facilities the pheasant chicks progress through a series of incubators, boxes and pens, and even have "blindings" placed through their nose holes to keep the stressed birds from picking at each other. Even when operating with automated feeding and lighting systems, Illinois game-farm workers have noted that the birds still quickly learn to recognize their keepers.<sup>1</sup> 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 animals.

Most states stocking pheasants recognize these "put-and-take" programs as an anomaly from traditional wildlife management and require 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.

But even in states with a license fee solely invested in pheasant stocking, the program is rarely able to operate autonomously, especially in a state such as Illinois that operates state-owned bird rearing farms with extensive facilities and a breeder flock. In 2005, the HSUS asked for the comprehensive cost of running the state program and was told the agency does not "compile programmatic information about the cost of its captive-reared pheasant hunting program."

Finally, in states that do currently 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.

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 that takes place on one of its properties, the Cape Cod National Seashore.

Eliminating public funding for pheasant stocking is not only a humane choice to alleviate taxpayers, but a rational request that state resources be used to protect Illinois's native wildlife and habitat. The Humane Society of the United States encourages you to support the cessation of public funding for recreational pheasant stocking programs. If you wish to discuss this issue further, please contact me at 651-222-3985 or [hgoldman@humanesociety.org](mailto:hgoldman@humanesociety.org), at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Howard Goldman

Central States Regional Director  
The Humane Society of the United States

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<sup>1</sup> Hopkins, E. 1992. The state is paying for hunters' prey: state will spend some \$1.4 trillion for ring-neck pheasants. *Peoria Journal Star*, 23 February.

CC: Ben Hamilton, Deputy Director, Governor's Office  
Emil Jones, President of the Senate  
Michael J. Madigan, Speaker of the House