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January 15, 2005

Commissioner Russ Schleiden
Pennsylvania Game Commission
2001 Elmerton Avenue
Harrisburg, PA 17110-9797

Dear Commissioner Schleiden,

After receiving the P.G.C. press release of January 12 (Release #02-05), the authors of the report on deer management, "Managing White-tailed Deer From An Ecosystem Perspective," would like to clarify some important points that you mentioned in the release.

As the facilitator of the project, I am forwarding the group's response. Both your comments and our response will be posted to the report's download website, http://pa.audubon.org/deer_forum_report_main.htm.

Your comments indicate that you believe that the report advocates merger of the natural resource agencies. This is not the case; in fact, agency merger is not one of our recommendations. We note in our findings that merger has been proposed by others (for example, on page 5, number 4 of the executive summary where we quote Scientific Certification Systems), but it is not one of our recommendations.

The report notes that most states have merged natural resource agencies, enhancing coordination and efficiency, but that the political realities in Pennsylvania make merger unlikely. The Forum proposes an alternative that can achieve many of the same benefits, namely, adding general state funds to the Game Commission's funding base, modifying the mission and makeup of the Board of Commissioners to represent the wildlife concerns of all the citizens of Pennsylvania, and using the Natural Resource Working Group to enhance inter-agency cooperation.

We also assure you that we are not attempting to marginalize the views and opinions of hunters. In fact, you'll find strong support for hunters and hunting throughout our report (more than half of the report's authors are hunters), and we acknowledge recent efforts by the PGC to include various stakeholders in the process. However, we recommend that a further step be taken to ensure that a broader range of stakeholders beyond hunters is represented on the Board of Game Commissioners.

Note that we do not specifically call for "non-hunters" on the board. As we state in the report, inclusion of such members as recommended above does not bar them from also being hunters. Surveys have shown that the majority of hunters in Pennsylvania support managing deer to promote healthy and sustainable forests. As you well know, candidates for commissioner who are hunters can be as committed to advocating for a wide range of stakeholder interests as non-hunters.

Finally, we hope that the scientific staff employed by the PGC will be encouraged to consider seriously the scientific framework suggested in our report.

We sincerely hope that the entire board of commissioners will read the full report, spend some time discussing the merits and areas of disagreement, and use it as part of the ongoing dialog about deer management.

In the meantime, please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions or feedback.

Sincerely,

Jan Beyea, Ph.D.

cc: P.G.C. Board of Game Commissioners
Vernon Ross, Executive Director, P.G.C.
Report Co-authors
Web site: http://pa.audubon.org/deer_forum_report_main.htm