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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 29

Offered January 8, 2014

Prefiled December 27, 2013

Requesting the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to study the overpopulation of wild game in the Commonwealth. Report.

Patron—Marshall, D.W.

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth has historically been known for its abundant wildlife populations, held in the public trust and making important contributions to the Virginia economy and quality of life; and

WHEREAS, much of the growth of Virginia's wildlife population began in the early twentieth century following the near extinction of many species, and is due in large measure to increased conservation efforts that include an increase in wildlife protection laws, the establishment of state agencies charged with wildlife management, and significant financial investments by the Commonwealth in the promotion of wildlife and habitats; and

WHEREAS, these conservation efforts have been so successful that they have led to wildlife populations more abundant than could have been envisioned decades ago, with some species having established populations approaching those present at the time of the first settlement of the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, changes in land use across the Commonwealth have also created ideal habitats for many species while decreasing opportunities for control methods such as hunting; and

WHEREAS, increased urbanization and suburbanization across the Commonwealth, especially in specific areas, have increased interactions between the Commonwealth's now more than 8 million citizens and these abundant wildlife populations; and

WHEREAS, despite its positive aspects, this increased interaction is associated with significant problems, including millions of dollars in damage to crops and property, thousands of vehicle accidents each year, and disease and safety risks to the Commonwealth's citizens; and

WHEREAS, in Fairfax County alone there are 4,000-5,000 vehicle-versus-deer accidents annually; and

WHEREAS, left unchecked, native wildlife populations may continue to expand, and with this expansion could come increased conflicts; and

WHEREAS, non-native species have appeared on our landscape with increasing frequency, posing additional threats; and

WHEREAS, failure by the Commonwealth to successfully plan for future conflicts between humans and wildlife and for management of expanding wildlife populations could lead to continued increases in threats to the Commonwealth's citizens and their property interests; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries be requested to study the overpopulation of wild game in the Commonwealth.

In conducting its study, the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries shall (i) determine the extent, if any, of overpopulation of game animals statewide, (ii) determine whether and how overpopulation varies by region and species, and (iii) develop game management strategies to control overpopulation of game animals. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries for this study, upon request.

The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries shall complete its meetings by November 30, 2014, and shall submit to the Governor and the General Assembly an executive summary and a report of its findings and recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. The executive summary and report shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports no later than the first day of the 2015 Regular Session of the General Assembly and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.

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