

To: New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
P.O. Box 420
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0420

Re: 2022 Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy and Game
Code Amendments

Position: Support

Date: February 2, 2023

Honorable Members of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection:

We, the undersigned organizations which represent sportsmen and women across the nation, write to you today in strong support of the 2022 Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy (CBBMP) and Game Code Amendments. As you well-know, prior to the truncated opportunity presented in December 2022, there has not been a full-season black bear hunt in New Jersey since 2017. Pursuing black bear in the state was at one point a hunting tradition enjoyed by resident and non-resident sportsmen and women alike. Following the elimination of the bear hunting season by way of a lapsed CBBMP, the anticipated negative ramifications predicted by sportsmen and women were fully realized. By reauthorizing black bear hunting through the CBBMP, New Jersey will be reinstating a powerful management tool relied on by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for controlling the bear population, reducing human-wildlife conflicts and improving public safety while bolstering contributions to the American System of Conservation Funding. **For these reasons, we urge you to support the 2022 CBBMP and Game Code Amendments.**

During the brief but effective black bear season that New Jersey held in December 2022, the state saw a 7.1% cumulative harvest rate – a testament to utilizing hunting as a means of species population management. Compared to hunting, unconventional methods for population control (i.e., sterilization, contraception, etc.) are expensive, require a significant amount of manpower and are publicly funded by state resources. Furthermore, these methods have not been proven effective for managing free ranging populations. To date, hunting continues to be the most effective, cost-efficient, and generally acceptable method of population control. Governor Murphy made special note of this out in his November 10 press release, stating, *“From the data we have analyzed to the stories we have heard from families across the state, it is clear that New Jersey’s black bear population is growing significantly, and nonlethal bear management strategies alone are not enough to mitigate this trend.”* By reinstating black bear hunting through the 2022 CBBMP and Game Code Amendments, New Jersey will be taking significant strides towards balancing a healthy and sustainable black bear population within the state.

A plethora of conflicts between bears, humans, their pets, and property have been well-documented in the media in New Jersey over the past several years. It stands to reason that the frequency of these occurrences will continue to grow should New Jersey carry on without a black bear hunting season. Governor Murphy stated that *“Incidents reported to the DEP from January through October of this year have increased by 237% compared to the same period in 2021,”* which included *“62 aggressive encounters with humans, 1 human attack, 12 dog attacks, 12 home entries, 15 attempted home entries,*

84 instances of property damage exceeding \$1,000, and 52 attacks on protected livestock.” Reinstating hunting – a valuable management tool – to deal with issues of state-wide overabundance of black bears, thereby reducing human-wildlife conflicts, is a step towards ensuring the public’s safety.

For more than 85 years, sportsmen and women have been the primary funders of state-level conservation efforts in this state and are thus an important constituency that provides significant benefits for all New Jersey residents. In 2021 alone, New Jersey’s sportsmen and women generated over \$23.19 million for conservation through revenue derived from license sales and excise taxes on sporting-related goods in the unique “user pays – public benefits” structure known as the American System of Conservation Funding. The funds collected through this program are the lifeblood of state fish and wildlife agencies (such as the DEP) – the primary managers of our nation’s fish and wildlife resources. These conservation dollars fund a variety of efforts including enhanced fish and wildlife habitat and populations, recreational access to public and private lands, boat access facilities, wetlands protection and its associated water filtration and flood retention functions, and improved soil and water conservation – all which benefit the public at large, not just sportsmen and women. By reauthorizing a black bear hunting season through the 2022 CBBMP and Game Code Amendments, sportsmen and women from New Jersey and across the nation will further contribute to the ASCF by purchasing the necessary licenses and equipment for the season – all of which will further assist the conservation-driven mission of the DEP.

In recognition of the many positive bearings mentioned above, we offer our staunch support for the 2022 CBBMP and Game Code Amendments. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this crucial issue.

Sincerely,

American Woodcock Society
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Conservation Force
Dallas Safari Club
Dallas Safari Club Northeast
Delta Waterfowl
Fur Takers of America
Houston Safari Club
National Deer Association
National Rifle Association
National Trappers Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
New Jersey Outdoor Alliance
Ruffed Grouse Society