Resolution
Mesopredator Bounty Programs

WHEREAS, ground-nesting game birds such as northern bobwhite, ruffed grouse, and eastern wild turkey have faced population declines in many parts of their range and hunter satisfaction has subsequently decreased in many states; and,

WHEREAS, populations of mesopredators such as raccoons, opossums, and striped skunks are generally believed to be abundant and increasing, although reliable population estimates or indices to confirm such perceptions are generally lacking in many parts of their range; and,

WHEREAS, the decline of ground-nesting game bird populations and the concurrent increase in mesopredator populations have been the result of large-scale habitat loss and degradation, and reduced take of furbearers due to depressed fur markets which exacerbate mesopredator impacts; and,

WHEREAS, mesopredators are known to predate upon eggs of ground-nesting birds; and,

WHEREAS, antipathy towards mesopredators is growing amongst those who hunt ground-nesting game birds and has led to requests for a variety of regulatory and non-regulatory actions to reduce mesopredator populations; and,

WHEREAS, there is research suggesting that intensive, sustained, targeted removals of mesopredators may lead to improvement in nest survival of ground nesting birds at a small scale or local area, but in most situations, removal is less effective without concurrent intensive habitat management, and furthermore, targeted removal has not proven effective at improving nest survival at regional or statewide scales; and

WHEREAS, a common suggestion for reducing mesopredator populations is to implement statewide bounty programs in which hunters or trappers receive monetary compensation upon providing evidence of take (such as a tail) of a targeted species; and,

WHEREAS, bounty programs were once a common tool used to reduce populations of large predators such as mountain lions and wolves; and,

WHEREAS, unlike low-population density species such as mountain lions, mesopredators are abundant in many parts of their range, and the degree to which human take would need to be increased to change mesopredator population trajectories or densities at statewide levels is unknown, with uncertain but exorbitant costs; and,

WHEREAS, payments for bounty programs would not be reimbursable through federal programs such as the Pittman-Robertson fund and would fall entirely upon the states, where funding for wildlife conservation is limited; and,

WHEREAS, bounty programs have historically been subject to a high level of fraud and abuse (i.e., evidence of take, such as tails, are easily obtained from outside a bounty area and submitted for payment in areas offering a bounty); and,

WHEREAS, bounty funds are usually inadvertently wasted as payments made for animals hit by cars, taken as part of existing nuisance control operations, or from within cities where these species can reach high densities but would have no positive impact on game bird populations; and,

WHEREAS, The Wildlife Society promulgated a position statement in March 2020 that recognizes the need for wildlife damage management, including damage to other species of wildlife, but that such programs need to be biologically and economically valid, practical, and cost-effective; and,

WHEREAS, it is uncertain the impacts a large-scale bounty program would have on recreational trappers and local fur markets and prices; and,

WHEREAS, statewide mesopredator bounty programs are unlikely to be either practical or cost effective; and,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies opposes implementation of statewide bounty programs targeting mesopredators.

ADOPTED by the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies in official session at their Fall Directors' Meeting in Augusta, Georgia on December 12, 2024.