



Martin O'Malley, Governor
Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor
John R. Griffin, Secretary
Joseph P. Gill, Deputy Secretary

December 1, 2010

The Honorable Edward J. Kasemeyer
Chairman, Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West - Miller Senate Office Bldg.
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Norman H. Conway
Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
131 Lowe House Office Bldg.
Annapolis, MD 21401

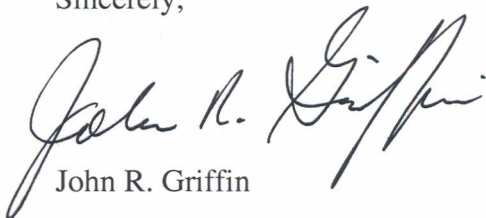
Dear Chairman Kasemeyer and Chairman Conway:

In the 2010 Joint Chairman's Report, the General Assembly directed the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) and the Maryland Legislative Sportsmen's Foundation (MLSF) to report on the future of Maryland's furbearer management program. Action by the Board of Public Works in November of 2009 abolished one position related to furbearer management within DNR's Wildlife and Heritage Service.

Representatives from DNR, MDA, the MLSF and the President of the Maryland Fur Trappers, Inc. (MFTI) met to assess the future of furbearer management in Maryland. A variety of topics discussed at that meeting are addressed in the attached report. DNR will continue to adequately address key furbearer project tasks.

We appreciate the concern expressed by the members of the General Assembly over the need to continue to use sound science in managing furbearers in Maryland. We also appreciate the cooperative relationship we have maintained on this subject with MDA, MLSF and MFTI.

Sincerely,



John R. Griffin

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The Future of Maryland's Furbearer Management Program

Prepared for the 2010 Joint Chairmen's Report

**Maryland Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife and Heritage Service
December 2010**

Introduction

In November 2009, the Board of Public Works approved a budget reduction that resulted in the abolishment of the Furbearer Project Leader position within the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Subsequent to this action, the Maryland Fur Trappers, Inc (MFTI) expressed concern regarding key furbearer management tasks and assurances that those tasks would not be neglected. MFTI is a private organization dedicated to supporting the proper management of Maryland's furbearer populations and the citizens who utilize those resources for recreation or income. MFTI appealed to several agencies and organizations to find a means to reinstate the Furbearer Project Leader position.

During the 2010 session of the Maryland General Assembly, DNR was directed to draft a JCR report as follows:

Future of Maryland's Furbearer Management Program: The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has a game management program, which lost a furbearer biologist position in the November 18, 2009 Board of Public Works actions. Given this position reduction and a reduction in associated funding, the committees are concerned about the future State oversight and management of Maryland's furbearer populations and the attendant impact of furbearer species on the integrity of natural resources, public and private property assets, and human health. Therefore, the committees request a report by DNR and the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA), in cooperation with the Maryland Legislative Sportsmen's Foundation, assessing the future of Maryland's furbearer management program by (1) developing alternative funding policies for helping to underwrite the State's oversight and management responsibility; and (2) recommending the unit within the Executive Branch of State government best capable of fulfilling this responsibility. The report should be submitted to the committees by December 1, 2010.

As a result of this language and conversations between the parties, DNR, the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA), MFTI and the Maryland Legislative Sportsmen's Foundation (MLSF) met with the goal of assessing the future of furbearer management in Maryland. The goal of the meeting was to assess the future of Maryland's Furbearer Project. A variety of conversations were held between the key parties prior to the meeting in order to allow the participants to efficiently reach final conclusions before adjourning.

This report reflects the outcome of the dialogue and DNR's plans for the future of furbearer management in Maryland.

Assessment of the Future of Maryland's Furbearer Management Project

During the meeting it was recognized by all parties that the preferred option is to have a fully funded Furbearer Project Leader position. However, it is clear that option is not fiscally possible now, or in the foreseeable future. Absent that option, the preferred approach is for DNR to delegate furbearer management tasks to appropriate staff to ensure the continued completion of those tasks using the best

science available. It was recognized by most meeting attendees that this approach was currently in place and was working. Several of the key points of discussion that lead to this assessment follow.

One option discussed was to create a Furbearer Project within MDA. This option was eliminated as MDA does not anticipate being able to support this program with a full time position now, or in any future fiscal year. Likewise, the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration funding administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service requires the state wildlife agency to be the lead for wildlife management in order to receive the significant funding associated with the Federal Aid program. Therefore the parties agreed there is no mechanism or need to shift the responsibility for this program to another Executive branch agency and it should remain within DNR.

DNR explained that, in the absence of a Furbearer Project Leader, they are successfully using a team approach to accomplish core project tasks. DNR's Game Management Program has been using a team approach for managing game species for several years. The team approach allows several professional wildlife managers and technicians from around the state to work together to make decisions and complete work tasks related to the management of game species. Subsequent to the loss of the Furbearer Project Leader position, DNR expanded the team approach by assigning additional management tasks to existing staff in order to meet basic needs.

Specifically, the Game Mammal Section (GMS) is the group within DNR that is now completing the basic tasks associated with managing furbearer species. The GMS Leader completes or assigns the work necessary to accomplish furbearer management tasks. The team was able to quickly adapt to meet the challenges of the Furbearer Project since past team efforts already made many staff familiar with most aspects of the program. Additionally, the current Associate Director of the Game Program personally managed the Furbearer Project from 1985 - 1995 and is therefore very familiar with the science of furbearer management. His extensive past experience coupled with the more recent experience of GMS staff gained via the team approach has allowed DNR to perform the basic tasks of the Furbearer Project with little interruption in public service or loss in quality.

The representative of the MFTI who attended the meeting felt strongly that a full time position should be associated with the Furbearer Project. However he was unable to immediately identify any significant Furbearer Project tasks that weren't being accomplished by DNR. He did note that communication was more straightforward when the Furbearer Project Leader was the main contact between DNR and MFTI.

DNR has addressed those concerns by appointing the GMS Leader to be the lead contact with the Maryland Fur Trappers and DNR will be available to periodically attend MFTI Board of Directors meetings in the future. It is anticipated that this approach will improve communications between the agency and stakeholders and remedy this concern. DNR will use the team approach to address any other shortcomings the MFTI may identify in the future. DNR further committed to periodic assessments as to how this team approach is working and whether it satisfies the needs of the agency and citizen stakeholders, including MFTI, after completion of a two-year trial.

The meeting attendees adjourned with the recognition that the preferred option is to have a dedicated position associated with the Furbearer Project. Absent the funding to do that, DNR is maintaining the status quo and meeting all the basic requirements to ensure Maryland's furbearer populations are healthy, in balance with their habitat and compatible with the cultural concerns of our citizens. If it is

demonstrated the team approach model is not working, DNR is committed to working with the interested parties to identify potential new sources of funding or ways the workload and additional survey work can be accomplished if warranted.