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Project WILD Materials Represent Pro-Hunting Bias

In early November of last year, a coalition of eight of the largest animal welfare and animal rights groups in the United States issued a joint statement and press release expressing concern with *Project WILD*, a two-volume curriculum on wildlife being distributed to teachers by fish and wildlife agencies in more than thirty states. The statement, which was sent to the governors of all fifty states, identified a strong bias in the *Project WILD* materials in support of hunting, trapping, and the use of wild animals as "renewable resources" and expressed the coalition's opposition to the use of public funds to purchase, promote, and/or distribute the materials:

Although many of the activities contained in the Project WILD teaching guides are designed to create an understanding and appreciation for wildlife, the materials' explicit acceptance and support of sport hunting and commercial or recreational trapping as necessary or desirable tools for controlling or manipulating animal populations, represent strong biases which permeate much of the document and destroy its credibility as objective educational material.

The eight groups represented in the coalition were the American Humane Association (an Associate Sponsor of *Project WILD*), The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Animal Protection Institute, Fund For Animals, The Humane Society of the United States, International Fund for Animal Welfare, The Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. As of January 1, Defenders of Wildlife (also an earlier sponsor of the materials) and more than 200 local and regional animal welfare/rights organizations have added their support to the statement, and additional groups continue to join the protest every week. Although NAAHE traditionally has devoted its efforts to helping educators locate *appropriate* materials for humane education rather than identifying and criticizing *inappropriate* ones, the widespread distribution of *Project WILD* using public funds, its

promotion as unbiased material, and the confusion generated by the early support of the project by two national animal welfare organizations make this a unique case.

During the past several months, NAAHE has been working with the wildlife department of The Humane Society of the United States to prepare an extensive critique of the *Project WILD* activity guides. This critique has been sent to the developers of the materials; and as we go to press, the *Project WILD* steering committee has indicated a willingness to make revisions in the guides before they are reprinted this year. In the meantime, NAAHE has developed a packet of balancing information and activities for distribution to teachers who are currently using *Project WILD* guides; and humane organizations in a few states have been successful in persuading their fish and wildlife agencies to distribute these balancing packets. In addition, at least one state that has not yet begun distribution of *Project WILD* has agreed to postpone workshops and distribution until the materials have been revised and/or the controversy resolved.

The extent to which the *Project WILD* guides will be revised is not yet known. Many members of the animal welfare/rights community are skeptical about potential for change in those activities that support a need for "harvesting" wildlife, given that the sponsors of the project are agencies that derive their financial support from the sale of hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses. We will try to keep you posted on the revision of the materials. In the meantime, if you would like more information about the status of *Project WILD* in your state or for a copy of the complete Joint Position Statement, The HSUS Critique, or NAAHE's supplementary balancing materials, write to us at NAAHE, Box 362, East Haddam, CT 06423.♥

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