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NEW YORK AVIATION MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION RAISING ALARM ABOUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT SAFETY AT NY AIRPORTS

On January 20, 2020, a damaging deer strike occurred at Francis S. Gabreski Airport, Westhampton Long Island. A Cessna Citation X business jet collided with one of three deer on the runway during its landing roll. Thankfully, there were no injuries to passengers and crew, but the aircraft sustained significant damage to its landing gear door.

Wildlife strikes by aircraft are a constant concern of airport managers throughout the country. That is why the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has strict requirements for comprehensive wildlife management plans and efforts to secure the safety of airport operations.

The New York Aviation Management Association (NYAMA) is urging New York State to reinstate the complete scope of allowable wildlife management techniques available to airports. The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) must be permitted to allow for the use of safe and proven wildlife control methods by trained professionals at and around the state's airports.

State law prohibits many activities by licensed hunters. These prohibited activities include shooting of deer with a rifle in Long Island and Westchester County, the use of a firearm within 500 feet of a residence, baiting in certain areas, possessing a loaded firearm in a vehicle and shooting from a vehicle or the side of a road. Now, professional wildlife managers are no longer permitted to use these important and humane techniques for effective deer, fox, coyote and bird control at airports.

DEC must be allowed to issue waivers from these restriction to nuisance wildlife control operators—highly trained marksmen and wildlife specialist—for airport wildlife management efforts. Permission for these activities had been granted in New York and restricted by permit to professionals trained in marksmanship and wildlife management for decades without incident. Despite having had these tools, deer, birds, coyote, woodchucks and other animals large and small continued to get onto runways. The airport managers and the pilots who fly in and out of these airports are worried that these current restrictions are resulting in increased potential for more aircraft-wildlife collisions, such as the deer strike at Gabreski.

NYAMA and our aviation partners are urging elected legislators and administration officials to recognize the critical need to address this issue in a timely manner and to continue to work together to safeguard the flying public.

CRITICAL WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT EFFORTS NEEDED AT AIRPORTS

- NYAMA supports efforts to reauthorize government employees acting in an official capacity or persons acting pursuant to a NYSDEC permit to control wildlife populations in areas surrounding airports to assure safety for pilots, passengers and flight crews.
- Currently, some previously permitted deer and wildlife management methods are now being restricted with the potential for negative impacts on the safety of airport operations.
- These restrictions will make it more difficult for airports to effectively keep the runways and facilities clear of deer and birds and safe for aircraft and passengers.
- Recently a Citation Jet aircraft collided with one of three deer on the runway as it was landing at Francis S. Gabreski Airport sustaining significant damage to its landing gear.
- Airports employ best humane practices to keep wildlife populations at bay by building fences, walls, storm water control, and using pulsating lights. However, deer, birds and other wildlife still make their way onto runways, tarmacs and into flight paths.
- Until the end of 2017, the DEC issued special permits that allowed for enhanced methods for airports to manage and take wildlife when it becomes a nuisance, destructive to public or private property or a threat to public health or welfare.

NYAMA supports the restoration of authority for NYSDEC to permit professionals to use certain control methods and techniques to remove the threat that deer and other wildlife pose to public safety in and around New York airports.