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**Testimony of Beth W. Carlson, DVM
Deputy State Veterinarian
House Bill 1110
Senate Agriculture Committee
Brynhild Haugland Room
March 5, 2009**

Chairman Flakoll and members of the Agriculture Committee, I am Deputy State Veterinarian Beth Carlson. I am here today on behalf of the North Dakota Department of Agriculture and the State Board of Animal Health in support of HB 1110, which will put regulations in place which will better help us deal with feral swine issues in North Dakota.

NDCC §36-01-08 defines the duties of the State Board of Animal Health. Included in this statute is the mandate to 'protect the health of the domestic animals and non-traditional livestock of the state'. This can be done 'by using the most efficient and practical means for the prevention, suppression, control, and eradication of dangerous, contagious, and infectious diseases among the domestic animals and nontraditional livestock of the state, and shall prevent the escape and release of an animal injurious to or competitive with agriculture, horticulture, forestry, wild animals, and other natural resource interests'.

Feral swine are an invasive species. They are a risk to domestic animal and wildlife health. They also can be very destructive to crops, pastures, wildlife, and the environment. There are about 4 million feral swine in the United States. In Texas alone, it is estimated that there are approximately 2 million feral swine which cause 52 million dollars per year in damages.

Since animal health is my responsibility, I will focus on the animal health concerns with feral swine. They have the potential to carry many diseases, including pseudorabies, brucellosis, tuberculosis, tularemia, leptospirosis, classical swine fever/hog cholera, vesicular stomatitis, and foot and mouth disease. These diseases can affect multiple species; many of them can affect humans as well. These diseases can have a broad spectrum of implications that can include widespread disease in domestic and wild animal populations as well as economic devastation. There are documented cases of outbreaks of some of these diseases that were directly linked to feral swine. Recently, a pseudorabies outbreak in Wisconsin was directly linked to an operation which released Eurasian boars for sport hunting.

In the past year and a half, we have addressed three reports of feral swine in North Dakota--one near Medora, one in the Turtle Mountains, and one in Sheridan County. Additionally, we have investigated several other reported sightings. As a result, we formed a feral swine working group. This group was composed of individuals from the State Board of Animal Health, the ND Game and Fish Department, UDSA Veterinary Services, USDA Wildlife Services, the US Forest Service and the ND Department of Health. With this multiagency effort, we were able to remove about 48 feral swine in two locations and monitor to ensure that none remained. All animals which were removed were tested for a battery of diseases, and we were fortunate in that all tests were negative. Because they are not considered wildlife, the Board of Animal Health is responsible for dealing with feral swine, but we would be unable to do so without the assistance

of other agencies. Most of this on-the-ground work was done by USDA Wildlife Services with the assistance of the Game and Fish Department. Without this assistance, we would not have been able to successfully handle these situations. The feral swine working group also assisted in drafting this bill and approved it as submitted.

HB 1110 enacts specific regulations prohibiting the importation, release, and hunting of feral swine. The purpose of prohibiting hunting of these animals is prevent “pig hunting” from becoming a sport. Other states that are dealing with this issue have found that allowing the animals to be hunted does not help in eradicating them, and in fact, can promote the activity.

The bill does allow landowners to destroy feral swine on their property with no penalty as long as they report to our office and make the swine available for disease testing.

We appreciate the support of the House in passing this bill. We do have concerns, however, that the penalty we requested has been reduced to \$500 in the amended version which passed the House. A quick internet search shows pig hunts advertised for sale in other parts of the country for between \$400 and \$900. The Board of Animal Health has statutory authority to fine up to \$5000 for most violations of our laws, although this is rarely done. Attached to my testimony you will find a copy of the fining authority of the Board, as well as a copy of our penalty matrix for violations. We urge you to consider amending this bill to change the penalty to ‘up to \$5000’ which will be consistent with violations of other laws of the Board of Animal Health. We feel this is necessary to provide a deterrent to feral swine activity. This amount is minimal compared to the economic consequences to agriculture, wildlife, and the environment, should a feral swine population become established.

Chairman Flakoll and committee members, for these reasons, we urge a do pass on HB 1110, with a change to the penalty portion to provide consistency with other Board penalties. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.