

# MICHIGAN HAS ALREADY SAID NO TO THE SHOOTING OF OUR MOURNING DOVES!

*Michigan voters: “NO to using our state’s traditional backyard songbirds as target practice.”*

In the November 7, 2006 Michigan general election, citizens overturned a law authorizing the shooting of mourning doves by a landslide vote—a margin of 69% to 31%. In fact, all 83 of our state’s counties voted NO on the proposal. That decisive vote returned Michigan’s peaceful mourning doves to protected status, as they had been for more than 100 years. What’s more, in 2016 the Michigan legislature passed a law preventing the state’s Natural Resources Commission from designating mourning doves as a game species.



But shockingly, some trophy hunting groups want to ignore the will of Michigan citizens and open a shooting season on our state’s mourning doves. They plan to do this by pressuring the Michigan legislature to hand over to the unelected, politically-appointed Natural Resources Commission—whose decisions are not subject to public opinion or even the state’s own biologists, and can’t be overturned by voters—the power to designate our state’s mourning doves as a game species to be needlessly targeted.

*Banned since 1905, the shooting of mourning doves is not a tradition in Michigan. These gentle backyard songbirds would be shot only for what proponents describe as “fun,” or for target practice.*

**Shooting mourning doves is scientifically unnecessary and serves no wildlife management purpose.** Mourning doves—also known as ‘the farmer’s friend’—are ground-feeding birds that eat pest weed seeds; they pose no threat to agricultural crops, homes, or anything of value to people. Many northern breeding states also have long-standing policies of protecting mourning doves. There are no management problems with the species in those states, and no one has suggested that mourning doves are overpopulated.



**Significant economic value as live songbirds.** These beloved backyard birds are an important part of the multi-billion dollar birdwatching and bird-feeding industry in Michigan, and scientific studies show they are among the most frequently reported birds at feeders.<sup>i</sup> More people participate in wildlife watching in Michigan than in all forms of hunting combined, and nationwide, wildlife watchers outspend hunters by a margin of nearly three to one.<sup>ii</sup> The majority of Michigan hunters also oppose the target shooting of mourning doves.

**Not a viable human food source.** Doves are small and, even if shot properly, have very little “edible” flesh on their bodies. In states that hunt them, doves are actually at their lightest body weight of the year during the 60-day shooting season of September and October.



**Shooting doves creates orphaned young.** Doves nest during the 60-day shooting season of September and October. They mate for life because both parents are required to successfully fledge squabs, so the killing of one parent will cause dependent young to die in the nest of starvation.

**An unacceptably high wounding rate.** Scientific research confirms an average wounding rate of 30 percent in areas where doves are hunted<sup>iii</sup>—meaning that nearly one in three birds is wounded and not retrieved after being shot. In Michigan, where few hunters have had the experience of shooting at doves, the wounding rate could be even higher—if shooters kill 300,000 mourning doves a year, they may wound and fail to retrieve nearly 100,000 others.

**There are plenty of other species to pursue.** At least 38 species are classified as “game” in Michigan—many of which are birds. Turkeys, pheasants, geese, ducks, woodcock, rails, snipe, and many other bird species give recreational hunters more than ample shooting opportunities at all times of the year in Michigan. In fact, hunting seasons are longer and bag limits are larger than ever for many species.

**Shooting at doves can produce mistaken identity kills.** In the process of a mourning dove hunt, American kestrels, Sharp-shinned hawks, and several other federally protected species may look enough like mourning doves to be mistakenly shot by hunters.

**More toxic lead shot discharged into the environment.** According to long-term studies, dove hunters discharge as many as eight shots for every one dove that is shot and bagged.<sup>iv</sup> Densities of greater than 860,000 pellets per hectare have been reported in dove shooting fields,<sup>v</sup> which are usually crop-growing soils. Cumulative lead deposits pose a significant risk to ground-feeding mourning doves and to other wildlife that directly and indirectly ingest toxic shot—including protected birds of prey such as eagles, falcons, hawks, and owls, for whom mourning doves are an important source of food.



## TELL YOUR MICHIGAN SENATOR AND REPRESENTATIVE:

**Please do not support any legislation that designates mourning doves as a game species, or removes the current prohibition on the Natural Resources Commission from doing so.**

Find your state legislators at [www.michiganvotes.org/Find.aspx](http://www.michiganvotes.org/Find.aspx)



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<sup>i</sup> Project FeederWatch, The Cornell Lab of Ornithology/Bird Studies Canada

<sup>ii</sup> U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: *2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*.

<sup>iii</sup> Haas, G.H., “Unretrieved Shooting Loss of Mourning Doves in North-Central South Carolina.” *Wildlife Society Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Autumn, 1977, pp. 123-125.

<sup>iv</sup> Franson, J.C., Hansen, S.P., and Schulz, J.H., “Ingested Shot and Tissue Lead Concentrations in Mourning Doves,” US Geological Survey, National Wildlife Health Center, 2008.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid.