

Brian Ames
142 East Putney Brook Road
Putney, Vermont 05346

An open letter to the Vermont House Committee On Environment and Energy on Bill S.258.

Dear Members,

I write this as a very concerned Vermont citizen with a keen interest in this subject in hopes of convincing you to vote no on the above mentioned Bill. I believe I have a unique perspective on this matter as I spent ten years on the Fish & Wildlife Board including more than six as the Chair. In my time on the Board we handled a wide variety of rules to best manage Vermont's grand fish and wildlife resources.

As I have watched and listened to how this Bill has been debated in the Senate I have been struck by the vast amount of inaccuracies and flat out falsehoods that have been portrayed by many of the proponents of this legislation. "Statements such as the F&W Board has not listened to the public! The F&W Board has not acted in the best interest of the resource! The F&W Board has an Agenda that is counter to the average Vermont citizen!" All of these statements could not be farther from the actual truth.

All F&W Board rules go through a vast amount of public comment and public debate. During my time on the Board I traveled to literally every corner of this state to take testimony from the public. That's a difference from the legislative process where in person testimony is taken in Montpelier as the F&W Board literally travels to Vermont's citizens to solicit input. It is true that there are specific interest groups that believe they have not been listened to strictly because their ideas have not swayed the F&W Board to act in accordance with their beliefs. Many of these groups look at wildlife management on an individual animal basis as opposed to a population wide one, which any Biologist will tell you is the correct way of managing populations.

The F&W Board has always acted in the resources best interest even when it ran counter to the sporting public's interest. An example would be when the fish disease VHS was introduced to the great lakes from sea going ships dumping infected ballast water and decimating fish populations in New York waters. The fear was great and real that it would spread to Vermont waters through the movement of baitfish. The F&W Board immediately began crafting a permanent rule to protect Vermont's fish populations. This could not have happened at a worse time as it coincided with the very beginning of the hard water fishing season. Many fishermen were very upset at both the F&W Department and Board for the emergency rules as they greatly inconvenienced them but through the education done by the Dept. and Board the fishing public got on board with protecting the resource. As a result, to this date, some 15 plus years later, VHS is not known to be in Vermont waters. Another of the many examples I could cite is the rule banning the importation of unprocessed cervids (deer, elk, moose etc.) from CWD positive states. CWD being a disease similar to mad cow disease that has been found as close as New York State. This again was not popular with the sporting public as it put extra work and energies for the Vermont hunters harvesting deer out of state but with the prompt response and education efforts from the Dept. and Board the sporting public got behind the rule and Vermont is currently CWD free.

I believe the above listed examples are just a few of the many that prove the F&W Board has always acted in the resources best interest. It also proves that the way the F&W Board is currently made up is the best for the resource. Those with the most interest in the long term health of the state's game populations are the ones who put the most time actually afield in the woods and on the water dedicating both their vacation time and monies to the resource. The amount of money the above spend on licenses and special excise taxes (Dingle/Johnson) that flows back to this state's F&W Dept. is in the millions of dollars.

Another point I heard as an example of why this legislation is necessary is that the rule making process needs to be dictated by the biologists. Yet the very legislation contradicts this argument and deliberately takes the biologist out of the rule making process and puts it into the legislative with animal specific segments. The contradiction here must be recognized.

The consumptive users have over and over again proven themselves to be the absolute best stewards of the resources in question. The 14 member F&W Board, one from each county, appointed by the Governor is and has been an excellent representation of Vermont. I could go on about the vast array of expertise on the F&W Board or their absolute commitment to the resources or the great amount of time they put into deciphering all the material from the biologist in order to make the best decisions possible for the resources. I have sat through meeting after meeting and listened to the F&W Board question the biologists about why this or why that. I have numerous times watched the Boards discussions and input make the proposed rules better and more complete. As F&W Board meetings are always open to the public, this process has also vastly helped the public to understand the necessity for a proposed rule as they follow the process.

The F&W Dept. has not asked for this change, in fact they have actively testified against it. The sporting population has not asked for this legislation, they have actively testified against it. The current system not only works, it works extremely well and has for over 60 years.

I can come to no other conclusion than that this legislation is purely being pushed by special interest groups who are not consumptive users of Vermont's resources. I have witnessed them try again and again to initiate a radical nonconsumptive agenda on this state wildlife agency. I do not believe their agenda is in alignment with the vast majority of Vermont's citizens or is best for the resources in question.

I thank you for your time and I would welcome the opportunity to meet with any or all of you to further this conversation and help in whatever way I can to vote down S.258.

Brian Ames
Fish & Wildlife Board 2005-2015
802-376-7593