

House Committee on Natural Resources and Energy  
Testimony for S.258- An act related to the management of fish and wildlife

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Rod Coronado and I am a resident of the Town of Orange where I have lived for the past five years and work as the wildlife programs director for the 600-acre Sage Mountain Botanical Sanctuary which has provided environmental education programs to youth and adults since 1987. I am also an indigenous member of the Yaqui Nation of southern Arizona and northern Mexico and the state director of the registered non-profit, Vermont Wildlife Patrol, which succeeded a non-profit I started in Wisconsin in 2015 to investigate and monitor the conflict between hound hunters and gray wolves. A large part of my monitoring in Wisconsin related to coyote hunting with dogs, which is why I am a strong supporter of S.258.

In February 2022, I began investigating hound hunting for coyotes outside of Shoreham in Addison County, after I spoke to a resident who told me every Saturday early morning in winter, "like clockwork" coyote hound hunters would release their hunting dogs in their area in pursuit of coyotes, sometimes trespassing onto their posted private property. The next Saturday morning, as I was driving through the area, a loose hunting hound crossed so close in front of me that I had to slam on my brakes to avoid hitting the animal. That same day I witnessed a coyote hound hunter standing on the road with a loaded rifle, waiting for his dogs to push a coyote onto the road where he could take a shot. Shooting from roads is illegal. I also documented hound hunters trespassing on other legally enclosed (posted) lands near Shoreham. These incidents were reported to the Vermont Fish & Wildlife warden service. In addition, on Lapham Bay Rd, I discovered the remains of fish, poultry and rib cages of unidentified animals being used as a bait site to attract coyotes according to local residents. I've learned that most wildlife conflicts are created when wild animals are attracted to a food source, think bears and bird feeders. It's the same when anyone intentionally places bait for coyotes. Baiting for wildlife creates conflicts; it doesn't resolve them. [Exhibit](#)

On March 5, 2022 I returned to document coyote hunting with hounds practices in the same area of Addison County. This time the hound hunters became aggressive and attempted to run my vehicle off the road by driving towards me in the middle of the narrow road while honking on their horns and otherwise demonstrating intimidating behavior with their vehicles. [Exhibit](#)

On February 10, 2024 while monitoring areas in Caledonia County, I came upon coyote hound hunters parked at the Calendar Brook Wildlife Management Area. One individual was standing just outside of the vehicle with a handheld GPS receiver in his hand. As I drove past the vehicle, I noticed a large number of crows flying away from an area less than 50 yards from the road. From my vehicle I could identify remains of a large mammal which I later identified as the remains of a freshly butchered cow. As in Addison County, this was an active bait pile being used by coyote hound hunters. Dogs could be heard barking in the distance and within a few minutes, another vehicle with a dog box appeared and parked 200 yards away. About ten minutes later, three loose hounds appeared on Sheffield Rd and were physically captured by a handler and placed in their dog box. [Exhibit](#)

The further away a hound is from their handler, the more difficult it is to recall the animal, be it with voice, tone or shock collar. In addition, with any hound out of sight, it is nearly impossible to determine whether that animal is on the scent of the desired prey or distracted by the many other scents encountered by hounds when hunting freely. The basis for effective hound recall is best determined by the level of training by a dog handler, not whether they are using GPS, shock or tone collars. The legislative intent of Act 165, which mandated the regulation of coyote hunting with hounds was largely a result of landowner conflicts with coyote hounds trespassing where they were not welcomed. Unlike waterfowl or rabbit hunting with dogs, when coyote hunting dogs are out of sight, they are much more difficult to control.

Last fall, when the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules objected to the Fish & Wildlife Board's interpretation of the legislative intent of Act 165 and made recommendations to the proposed rules regarding control of loose hounds, the board voted against LCAR's proposed changes and argued that requiring hunting hounds to be within sight or voice control was a "de facto ban" of the sport. In the years that I have been monitoring coyote hound hunting activities, I have encountered both good and bad dog handlers. Some kept their dogs within visual and audio range, others sat in their vehicles while remotely monitoring the movements of their loose hounds sometimes over a mile away.

Besides the issue of trespass, there is the issue of animal cruelty within this sport. Specifically, hounds are allowed to bite, maul and fight with coyotes who, unlike bears, cannot climb a tree to escape hounds. In the 8 years I've investigated this practice I've seen hunters who intentionally wound a bayed or cornered coyote, so their hounds can "get fur" or "stretch" the live wounded animal. I have documented this behavior in at least one hound hunter from Wallingford, who shared photos of one of his hounds fighting with a wounded coyote. We know he was involved because he also posted a photo of himself standing over the same coyote giving the thumbs up. The pictures (below) were shared on Facebook by the Vermont hound hunter on January 16, 2022.

I'd like to now address why I believe legislative action is necessary to change the Fish & Wildlife Board. I did not move to Vermont with the intention of continuing my citizen monitoring of hound hunting and trapping practices. I moved here because my partner purchased the 600-acres we live and work on, and I was more than happy to become the caretaker for this important wildlife corridor in Orange County. Within a year of moving here, we had our first case of trespassing hounds on our botanical and wildlife preserve. A year later, the same individual again came onto our lands asking to retrieve his loose hounds from our legally enclosed (posted) lands. The following year, a contracted trapper with VTrans removed all the beavers in our local wetland. These incidents and my documentation of other cruelty associated with certain hound hunting and trapping practices led me to get involved on behalf of wildlife in our state's legislative process.







Above: Bait pile in Calendar Brook Wildlife Management Area, February 12, 2024.

Since January 2023, I have been attending (in-person) every Vermont Fish & Wildlife Board meeting to provide testimony on a variety of what I believe are important wildlife issues. I have also participated in public comment meetings held throughout the Summer of 2023 on proposed hound hunting and trapping rules. I've included links for testimony I've given at recent Fish and Wildlife Board meetings.

Much of my testimony has related to my support for the restoration of extirpated species. So when I've recently heard opponents of S.258 testifying to the "abundance and flourishing of Vermont's wildlife" I think of some of Vermont's imperiled species like the American marten, Canada lynx, and fisher which have tested positive for rodenticides in 100% of the state's trapped population. These and other species are not flourishing and abundant.

At a recent Board meeting I listened to the Dept's moose and deer biologist, Nick Fortin speak of our need to manage our deer herd and that "we needed another lever to pull" to bring numbers within management goals because the Dept is simply not selling enough hunting licenses to meet those goals. Where is the consideration for native predators like the wolf and cougar who once helped maintain the ecological balance in this state?

In regards to Vermont's controversial moose hunt, last week the board voted unanimously to approve the Department's proposed hunt without any discussion or acknowledgement that 20 of the 28 public comments received were in opposition to the hunting of moose as means of addressing winter tick infestations. The hunt is intended to reduce vulnerable moose cow and calf numbers, but in last year's hunt, only one calf was taken and half (37) of the either-sex permits were filled with mature bulls because rather than shoot a calf, they want to choose a trophy-sized animal instead.

At the same April 10, 2024 board meeting I addressed concerns about the proposed liberal bag limit for eastern mallards in Vermont. Did you know that the mallard population in Vermont and other New England states has declined 38% since 1998? You'd think the board would be restricting the bag limit for the species, but when they tried that before, it negatively impacted hunting opportunities. The current proposed daily bag limit is 4 with a total possession limit of 12 mallards. When I spoke to the Dept's biologist, he acknowledged that despite a slight uptick in the overall population, Vermont's mallards continue a stable and steady decline in numbers. I asked how low the population needed to be before more conservative bag limits were proposed.

I'd like to briefly talk about representation. We all believe it is a right of every Vermonter, but being a person of color with a traditional indigenous worldview, I know what it feels like when I am being ignored or not represented. My therapist who I work with says these micro-aggressions can be someone with more agency and power simply choosing to "not see me" even if I'm in the same room. I hadn't yet told them that is what I've experienced for over a year since I started attending Fish and Wildlife Board meetings. The Commissioner and Department biologists have made an effort to be inclusive, but 13 of the 14 board members have not.

It's taken me just over a year of attending board meetings before any board member actually spoke to me at a meeting. At the February 2024 board meeting, I told the board that my representative for Orange County has never reached out to speak to me, despite my having been his only constituent to regularly attend so many board meetings in person and speak to important wildlife issues. During a break in the meeting, he finally came over to me and thanked me for calling him out on this and agreed that it was time for a discussion. I've invited him to my work and home so he can see how we operate and are aligned with the board and Department, but I'm still waiting.

It shouldn't take any Vermonter who is informed and passionate about wildlife a year before their voice is heard by their representative. That's not how I feel when I come to speak to my legislators, but that's been the way it is with the current board. We need a board that can work with a variety of constituents who recreate and enjoy being outdoors in nature, not only trappers, hunters and anglers. Unfortunately, the current board has demonstrated that they believe any critic of hunting and trapping practices is an "anti" or "bunny-hugger." We know this because they've called us these names during board meetings. I call the board's current strategy "circling the wagons" because that's how they view most wildlife advocates, as an enemy at the gate, threatening death by a thousand cuts.

Did you know that last month two Fish and Wildlife board terms expired? I am watching closely to see if our Governor is listening to the discussion around S.258 or whether he will simply appoint two more outspoken advocates of trapping and hound hunting as he has with the most recent appointment of two trappers to the board in 2023. S.258 would not be necessary if the Governor chose to appoint more diverse members to the board.

The mission of the board and the Dept is to protect all wildlife. The board's role has been to protect game animals and furbearers and I applaud their service on behalf of Vermont's wildlife, but we need a new board that recognizes the interconnectedness of all beings. Especially as we increasingly address the impacts of climate change on our wildlife. Threats to wildlife and our environment should require a certain level of training. We need a board with the willingness to address wildlife conflicts in a more holistic fashion than just reducing the population with more hunting opportunities, that was the old approach which has proven to be scientifically questionable.

We need a board that acts in the best interests of the species before the interests of hunters, trappers and anglers. That is the challenge and mission we face today and why I support S.258. In closing I'd like to say that because of my views on wildlife, I do not want to be seen as an enemy of the board and Dept, but as an ally. I am guardedly optimistic and even excited at the possibility of being equally represented by my fish & wildlife board, not only as someone who enjoys trout fishing every Spring from my kayak in Rood Pond, or as a lover of all things wild, but possibly most importantly, as an indigenous person with my own traditional worldview. That kind of representation and recognition helps end literally centuries of mis-representation and oppression by our dominant society.

## Rod Coronado's Testimonies at Vermont Fish & Wildlife Board Meetings 2023-24

[February 15, 2023 6:45 Wolf restoration](#)

[March 15, 2023 15:10 BMPs for body-gripping traps](#)

[May 25, 2023 5:05 Trapping/ Trapper surveys](#)

[July 26, 2023 9:40 BMPs for body-gripping traps](#)

[September 20, 2023 9:00 Sale of bear gallbladders](#)

[October 18, 2023 8:30 Petition to prohibit shooting sows with cubs](#)

[November 30, 2023 4:05 Indigenous perspective/Response to LCAR hearing December 14,](#)

[2024 10:00 No public process for use of gas chambers/ BMPs for body-gripping traps](#)

[January 17, 2024 10:30 Coyote hunting with dogs](#)

[February 21, 2024 11:10 Why support S.258](#)

[April 10, 2024 6:25 38% Decline in eastern mallard population in VT](#)

April 10, 2024 VT Fish & Wildlife Board minutes with handouts and public comments related to proposed moose and migratory game bird rules:

[https://vtfishandwildlife.com/sites/fishandwildlife/files/documents/Vermont%20Fish%20and%20Wildlife%20Board%20Meeting%20Documents/2024-meeting-minutes/Board\\_Meeting\\_Minutes\\_4.10.24\\_Unapproved.pdf](https://vtfishandwildlife.com/sites/fishandwildlife/files/documents/Vermont%20Fish%20and%20Wildlife%20Board%20Meeting%20Documents/2024-meeting-minutes/Board_Meeting_Minutes_4.10.24_Unapproved.pdf)