

# Vermont Fish & Wildlife has not met legislative mandates outlined in Acts 159 & 165



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Presented by: Brenna Galdenzi, President & Co-founder



# How We Got Here

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There were two bills in 2022

1. S.201, a ban on leghold traps
2. S.281, a ban on coyote hounding

Both had tremendous support from the public, but they were not supported by the VT Fish & Wildlife Department.



# How We Got Here

The Senate Committee on Natural Resources amended these bills to instead require that Vermont Fish & Wildlife promulgate rules to address (not complete list):

- 1. animal welfare concerns**
- 2. reduce non-targeted animals getting trapped**
- 3. violation of landowner rights by packs of hounds traversing posted land**
- 4. public safety**



Hounds biting at coyote in Vermont—this will remain legal

# The Working Group

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- Department underrepresented data on non-targeted animals that were trapped and misrepresented our position in the minutes and on their website (see appendices B-G)
- Trapping interests were overrepresented 7 to 3 (*originally only 2 wildlife advocates; POW was only invited after requests made by Senators and our colleagues*) (see appendix A)
- Pertinent data was omitted in some of the Department's presentations, leading to distrust in the process (see appendices B-G)





# Act 159 (Trapping)

**Legislative mandate requires (*not full list*):**

1. improve animal welfare for both domestic and wild animals
2. reduce non-target animals from being trapped
3. humane methods of killing trapped animals
4. placement of traps on any public location where persons may reasonably be expected to recreate



# Act 159 (Trapping)

This substantial change was never discussed in the working groups, public hearings or Board meetings.

If the Department wishes to make such a controversial change with far-reaching ramifications, it should be done in a transparent, democratic fashion, not attached to Act 159.

3.20 "Trapping" means to hunt, take or attempt to take fur-bearing animals with traps including the dispatching of such lawfully trapped fur-bearing animals.





# Vermont Fish & Wildlife Failed Most Mandates

## **Legislative mandate:**

*Trapping techniques, including the appropriate size and type of a trap for target animals, use of lures or other attractants, trap safety, and methods to avoid non-target animals;*

## **Wildlife Advocates Recommended:**

*Restrict body-crushing kill traps to underwater only*

## **Vermont Fish & Wildlife Proposed:**

*Allowing kill traps on ground and above ground in a tree*



Bobcat killed out of season in a kill trap in Winhall, Vermont

# BMPs Allow Unacceptable Levels of Harm

## This is a “Padded” Leghold Trap

This severed paw was found in one of our member’s back yards.

This is a **BMP approved** trap: an Oneida™ Victor Softcatch, “padded” leghold trap.





# Vermont Fish & Wildlife Failed Most Mandates

## **Legislative mandate:**

*Criteria for how live, captured animals should be released or dispatched*

## **Wildlife Advocates Recommended:**

*Gunshot only*

## **Vermont Fish & Wildlife Proposed:**

*Loophole waiting for Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies' recommendations (**that currently allow bludgeoning, stomping on trapped animal etc.**)*



# Approved Method of Killing Trapped Animals per Association of Fish & Wildlife Agency (creator of BMPs)



## Common Methods to Kill Used by Trappers:

- Beating an animal to death (clubbing)
- Stomping on the animal's chest to crush their heart and lungs (see photo)
- Drowning
- Strangling

**Photo from Born Free USA's undercover investigation**



# Act 165 (Coyote Hounding)

This Act has very clear legislative intent that's been ignored by Vermont Fish & Wildlife:

*The General Assembly intends that the rules required under this section support the **humane taking of coyote**, the **management of the population in concert with sound ecological principles**, and the **development of reasonable and effective means of control**.*



Coyote hounder photographed in Addison County in 2022 collecting his hounds from the road



# Vermont Fish & Wildlife Failed Most Mandates

## Legislative mandate:

*Definition of control to minimize the risk that dogs pursuing coyote:*

- (A) enter onto land that is posted against hunting;*
- (B) enter onto land where pursuit of coyote with dogs is not authorized;*
- (C) harass or harm people or domestic animals; and*
- (D) cause other unintentional damages to people or property;*

## Wildlife Advocates Recommended:

*Hounds must be under verbal and visual command at all times*

## Vermont Fish & Wildlife Proposed:

*Considers hounds running at large, miles away, to be "in control" as long as they're wearing GPS and shock collars*

Morey. Ms. ██████ could hear dogs barking in the distance from the South West of her location. Ms. ██████ didn't think anything of it and continued heading east. Approximately 30 minutes had passed when Ms. ██████ looked back and saw a hound dog running toward her. Ms. ██████ was unsure what the dog was going to do, it was then joined by a second and third dog. Ms. ██████ said at that point she knew the dogs were coming after her and ██████. Ms. ██████ attempted to get away. The three hound dogs jumped on ██████ and attacked him. Ms. ██████ attempted to get the hound dogs off of ██████, but was not able to. Ms. ██████ told me the only thing she could do was try to get away. Ms. ██████ told me ██████ is trained to stay at her side, so she pedaled her bike as fast as she could. ██████ broke free from the hounds and caught up to her. Ms. ██████ told me every time she would slow down briefly the hound dogs would jump on ██████ and attack him. Ms. ██████ advised this kept happening for approximately 2 miles. Ms. ██████ said the hounds attacked ██████ over 10 times. Ms. ██████ is a Veterinarian and has been so for 22 years. Ms. ██████ told me it was her professional opinion that the hound dogs were trying to kill ██████. Ms. ██████ told me she thought ██████ was going to die. Ms. ██████ made it the Culver Outdoor Center located at the North end of Lake Morey. Ms. ██████ jumped off her bike, she and ██████ ran up onto the porch of an unoccupied cabin. Ms. ██████ could see that ██████ was injured and was bleeding. Ms. ██████ spent the next approximately 15 minutes yelling for help and trying to keep the hound dogs from coming up onto the porch. Ms. ██████ said she then noticed that there were 4 hound dogs all wearing GPS radio collars.

Ms. ██████ said she then saw a truck heading toward her, Ms. ██████ yelled and waived her arms. The truck pulled into the drive and a male subject got out. The male subject grabbed one of the dogs. Ms. ██████ said the truck had a dog box in the back and she realized the male subject was the owner of the hound dogs. Ms. ██████ was yelling at the male subject, stating that his dogs tried to kill her dog. Ms. ██████ said the male subject loaded the dogs into the dog box. Ms. ██████ said the male subject would not tell her his name. Ms. ██████ later said that she was very upset and was yelling at an elevated tone and possibly using profanities. The male subject then left with all 4 dogs. Ms. ██████ then went immediately home.

Ms. ██████ keeps a medical kit and some emergency medical supplies at her home. Ms. ██████ examined ██████ and because of her profession she was able to treat his wounds at home. Ms. ██████ treated three deep puncture wounds and a few other abrasions on ██████. Ms. ██████ advised that if ██████ would have been treated at the clinic it would have cost approximately \$500.

Ms. ██████ provided her story in a sw

**Dog mauled by hounds pursuing coyotes in Fairlee Vermont, 2021**

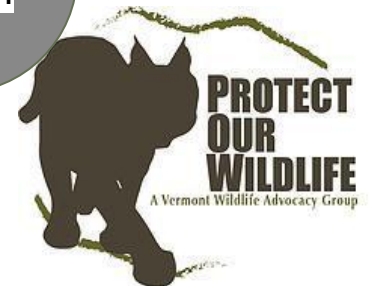
# Vermont Fish & Wildlife Failed Most Mandates

## A GPS and shock collar is not a method of control

- How will a hounder know if their hounds are pursuing someone's dog or a coyote or a deer?
- How can a hounder know when to inflict a correction to their hound when the hounder can't see what the hound is doing?
- The public, as well as landowners, deserve to feel safe on our shared public lands and on our own property.

Public record | Senate Natural Resources Committee, Feb 2022

"I encountered my first coyote hound hunting group in Addison County. I literally had to slam on my brakes to avoid hitting one of their hounds as it dashed out of the woods onto the road I was driving on. Minutes later, I rounded a corner in the road and saw a hound hunter with his truck parked in the road and standing in the road itself with a rifle watching the area the hound had entered. He was ready to shoot any coyote his hound might flush out of the woods I had seen the hound enter."



# Vermont Fish & Wildlife Failed Most Mandates

## **Legislative mandate:**

*A limit on the number of dogs that may be used to pursue coyote*

## **Wildlife Advocates Recommended:**

*One hound on one coyote*

## **Vermont Fish & Wildlife Proposed:**

*Four hounds on one coyote, which is dog fighting*



Separate incidents in VT.  
Hounds chase coyote onto ice | Hounds corner injured coyote



# Closing

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We ask the Committee to reject Fish & Wildlife's rules before you as it is our position that the proposed rule is:

- beyond the authority of the agency
- is contrary to the intent of the Legislature
- arbitrary

The will of the people has not and will not be addressed by Vermont Fish & Wildlife. These matters must be taken up by the legislature where democracy is possible.

