

Dear Chairman Bray and members of the Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee:

First, thank you for providing an opportunity for people to testify before your committee on this bill this morning (and earlier this week as well) -- I watched this morning via Youtube.

I have been a wildlife appreciator all my life, and in recent years have been spending multiple days a week hiking and photographing wildlife in the hills of Washington County. As both a nature lover and environmental scientist, I appreciate the important role that predators such as coyotes and bobcats play in Vermont's ecosystems. I believe the use of hounds for hunting coyotes and bears should be banned because of the cruelty of this practice, the disruption to many forms of wildlife, and the threat posed to humans, pets, and farm animals. I carry bear spray with me when hiking in the Vermont woods -- not because I'm worried about being attacked by bears but because I'm concerned about being attacked by hounds (which is a much more likely scenario, sadly).

I've been hoping for reform of the Fish and Wildlife Board for many years -- the changes in S.258 seem right on target to me. I know some trappers and hunters feel like the public and the Legislature keep "coming after" them. I heard several hunters say "if it ain't broke, don't fix it". But this reform is not about coming after anyone. It's simply about bringing balance to a board that is making important policy recommendations (and up till now has been adopting rules) on wildlife management in Vermont. The Board should be representing all Vermonters, not just the hunters and trappers. Of course, consumptive users should be represented on the board. But non-consumptive users (which make up a far greater percentage of Vermonters) should also have some representation. Maybe this change wouldn't have been necessary if the Board had expressed any interest in listening to ideas suggested by non-consumptive users in the past. But given the history of the Board, I believe the reform proposed in S.258 is absolutely critical.

Here's a little analogy I find helpful. Let's say there was a town with beautiful waterfalls and streams and lakes, and 95% of the residents in the town used and appreciated these water resources in a variety of non-consumptive ways, such as for swimming, boating, scenic appreciation, picnics by the waterfalls, winter ice skating, etc. And then there was a small group of people (5% of the population) who ran a water bottling operation and had obtained permission years before to bottle and export drinking water from a spring that fed the streams and lakes. There was a Board that established policies and rules governing things like how much water could be bottled, how low water levels could get in the streams and lakes, etc. This Board had about 10 members, and they all were representatives of the group of people involved in the water bottling operation. The Board was focused on making sure that water withdrawal amounts did not compromise the company's ability to continue to extract sufficient water to meet the drinking water demand. When the other 95% of the population complained that they should have some say in decisions affecting lake levels and stream flow etc because they use these resources too, and a half-dry lake, for example, impacted their lives in a major way, the Board said "No no, the only uses that matter are the consumptive uses, so that is why we only have representatives from the bottling company on the Board". Assuming this town was set in a democratic country, I think the absurdity of this arrangement would be pretty clear.

So, I think the way S.258 would broaden representation on the Fish and Wildlife Board is a sorely needed change. And changing the Board's role to being advisory only is long overdue as

well. I've been observing the rule-making process in Vermont for about 30 years and I can't remember ever seeing a rule-making entity blow off objections from LCAR the way the Board did last December with the trapping regulations.

In summary, I strongly support S.258 as drafted!

Thank you for reading this, and your patient consideration of all the public input on this.

With much appreciation for your service,

Eric Perkins
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