

Dear Chair Sheldon, Vice Chair Sibilila and Honorable Members of the House Committee on Environment and Energy

Over the past seven years, I have frequently attended VTF&W Board meetings and can attest to the fact that VTF&W Board members exhibit an explicit bias against wildlife advocates. Public comments have been largely ignored and petitions routinely denied. The lack of diverse opinions among board members makes it impossible for wildlife advocates to be heard.

There has been a discernible value shift in how Vermonters regard wildlife. Traditionalists who view wildlife as a resource to benefit humans are now outnumbered by mutualists who believe that humans and wildlife should be able to exist side by side. However, this changing attitude is not reflected in the make-up of the F&W Board or the Department.

S.258 creates a pathway for a more balanced way to manage wildlife.

While hunting is and will remain an important management tool in keeping our abundant deer herd in check due to the lack of natural predators, the number of hunters has declined by half since 1987. Only about ten percent of Vermonters hunt and with wildlife being a Public Trust, it is time to include both hunting and non-hunting members in an advisory board to encourage a more democratic discussion on how our wildlife is managed, while leaving rule-making to the biologists of the VTF&W Department who have the expertise to make informed and rational decisions.

S.258 not only supports a more democratic process, it also ends the egregious practice of baiting and hounding coyotes for no other reason than killing for so-called sport. Time and again, certain members of the hunting community claim that coyotes are an invasive species. That is not so. Even the VTf&W Department agrees that coyotes are a naturalized species that has existed in the eastern US for at least one hundred years. In fact, coyotes are a truly native North American species that has filled an important niche after wolves and mountain lions were extirpated from the eastern US.

We no longer live in the 19th century. Global warming and the loss of habitat are real threats to our wildlife and ultimately to us. We need to work together to conserve these wild species for future generations and I believe S.258 is a step in the right direction.

Please support S.258.

Thank you,

Claudia Mucklow

Charlotte