



February 4, 2014

To the House Committee on Fish, Wildlife and Water Resources,

I am writing to you today on behalf of Green Mountain Animal Defenders—Vermont’s largest, volunteer-run, 501(c)(3) animal protection organization—and our 3,000-plus members and supporters statewide.

First, we’d like to thank the Committee for your efforts and for your decision to remove the proposed reversal of the existing ban on snares in our state. We now request that you also consider the following concerns with H. 589.

Concern Regarding Wildlife Population Regulations:

As Vermont wildlife advocates, Green Mountain Animal Defenders are concerned about proposed changes to the current language contained in H. 589, should the result be to allow the Department of Fish and Wildlife the authority to bypass some of the current system of checks and balances. The public relies on these oversights to ensure that wildlife is protected for all Vermonters.

Specifically regarding Section 4. 10 V.S.A. § 4082 (b) (1) and (b) (2) RE: migratory game birds and Section 5. 10 V.S.A. § 4084 (a) (1) and (b) (2) as well as Section 6. 10 V.S.A. § 4741 RE: redefining the deer season, we question what the demonstrated need is for these proposed changes?

If this change is made, what, if any, guidelines or parameters would be put in place?

- Allowing the Fish and Wildlife Board, which is comprised of only fourteen individuals, to determine the future of our wildlife populations with no required training or expertise of animal populations, herd management or ecology is worrisome at best.
- We believe that shifting decision-making authority away from legislators, and thereby away from the public through our elected representatives, would be a step in the wrong direction.

Thus, we request §4741 remain unaltered.

Concern Regarding Reallocation of Funds from Conservation Plates:

Green Mountain Animal Defenders oppose this proposed change in H. 589, Section 10 on page 14 stating:

“The Commissioner of Fish and Wildlife is authorized to deposit fees collected under subsections (b) and (c) of this section into the Conservation Camp Fund when the fees collected exceed the annual funding needs of the Non-Game Wildlife Account and the Watershed Management Account.”

Our concern is that, a change of this sort:

- is in conflict with the intended use should it divert funds from Watershed Management and Non-Game Wildlife accounts since people who purchase conservation license plates have been told that the funds would



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be used specifically for non-game and watershed programs.

- would divert money intended for conservation to a camp with programs such as Hunter Education, Furbearer Management and Trapping instruction. These activities do not fall under allowed uses of those ear-marked funds. In fact, this change may even cause harm, intended or otherwise, to the very non-game species that it has promised the public to protect with this fund.
- would allow funds to be reallocated after being collected under guise of benefitting only Non-Game Wildlife and Watershed Management. We believe this is misleading to the public.
- could put the motor-vehicle conservation plate program at risk once citizens realize that funds are being redirected to other projects. In fact, some of our members have informed us that they intend to return their plates and request a refund should this change take effect.

Some other questions for consideration:

How can the Department of Fish and Wildlife afford to divert funds from conservation when current conservations needs aren't being met?

Our organization has reached out to the Department of Fish and Wildlife for assistance with issues such as the public's concern for turtles being killed or maimed in large numbers on stretches of Vermont's roads. We were informed that the department does not have the financial resources to help with such matters. As a result, we believe that any and all funds collected could easily be utilized for their intended purposes.

Further, how would it be determined that funds collected for Watershed Management and Non-Game Wildlife could be legally be considered "excess"?

In the unlikely event that the concerns of the public regarding watershed issues and non-game species protection have been met, we suggest that a more appropriate use for any surplus should include the Fish and Wildlife Department's Wildlife Rehabilitator program whose unpaid licensed rehabilitators are currently unfunded. Other possible recipients to be considered should include recommendations from our many respected Vermont organizations, which are working on protecting non-game species and water quality.

I request on behalf of our membership that the portions of H. 589 referenced above be stricken from the bill.

Respectfully submitted,



Kristen Cameron
Green Mountain Animal Defenders

