



January 25, 2018

Verbal testimony to the House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish & Wildlife

Re: Vermont's Coyote hunting policy

I am Brenna Galdenzi, President of Protect Our Wildlife. We are a Vermont grassroots, nonprofit organization, representing over 2,000 wildlife advocates from every corner of the state. I thank you for the opportunity to present testimony to you today concerning Vermont's coyotes.

There is something very terrible happening in our state. I've had the harrowing task of seeing the gratuitous violence that's inflicted upon Vermont coyotes 365 days a year - many of these images are too graphic to share with our members, but they are imprinted on me. Some would like to claim it's only a few bad apples, but I can tell you that it is not. Coyote killers brag about bashing coyote puppies with tree branches. Others cheer on as their dogs tear apart an injured coyote. Many talk proudly about how, I quote, "*every hunting season turns into coyote hunting season.*" Coyote hunters openly admit that they leave coyote carcasses to rot where they were killed. When a Vermont coyote hunter was told that his actions make all hunters look bad he wrote, "*You think me leaving dead, stinky and*

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*disease ridden coyotes in the woods is hurting us?"* This behavior is a clear violation of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation that VT Fish & Wildlife supposedly adheres to. Coyote killing contests give prizes to those who kill the most coyotes, the biggest and smallest, and even the ugliest coyote.

Fish & Wildlife mentioned in their report from this morning that *"the Department has had a long history of promoting the role and value of coyotes on our landscape."* I wish that were true. A wildlife advocate recently asked Commissioner Porter how many outreach events they've held over the last few years that focused on coyotes. It is my understanding that they've hosted none. Ignoring the culture of loathing and disrespect toward an animal will not make it go away. It will only normalize it in the minds of those who have no shame in, to quote - *"killing every coyote I see"* and quote - *"stack up 'em bodies like cords of wood."*

Fish & Wildlife is at odds with its own adherence to the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. The model says that wildlife should only be killed for a legitimate purpose. Coyotes who are killed outside of the winter months are not a "renewable resource" (a term used by Fish & Wildlife) - their fur is only "prime" or marketable for a short period of time - normally November through February. Actually, their pelts are barely worth anything during these winter months - the bullet-riddled bodies are worthless in the fur market. This is clear wanton waste, so why does Vermont Fish & Wildlife continue to support it?

In a recent survey\* conducted by UVM's Center for Rural Studies, they asked: *"Vermont wildlife policies allow certain species, including coyotes, to be killed without limit even when there is no intent to consume or use the remains. This is called "wanton waste" killing. Should Vermont wildlife*

*policies prohibit the "wanton waste" of wildlife, except when these animals are causing damage to property or agricultural products?"* **The result of the survey indicates that 70.5% of Vermonters oppose the intentional and wasteful destruction of Vermont's wildlife.** Fish & Wildlife mentioned in their testimony that they safeguard the wildlife for the people of Vermont and shall fulfill this duty with a, I quote, "*constant and continual vigilance.*" How is this so? Their last study on coyotes was from the 80s - how is that, I quote, "*continual vigilance?*"

Lastly, Fish & Wildlife also says that they are seeking to find common ground with different stakeholders – in my 8 years of working in wildlife protection in Vermont, I have yet to see that. **There is zero compromise.** Many would like to see no coyote hunting at all since there is no science to support its necessity (as with most predator hunting.) Hunting coyotes actually causes increased breeding and worse, instability to the pack, which may lead to problematic coyotes. Coyotes are inherently shy animals and smart enough to stay away from humans, so any claims that hunting them is necessary to keep them wary of humans is purely anecdotal. So, for those who want no hunting of coyotes (except in defense of property as allowed under 10 V.S.A. §4828), we're left with an open killing season, including killing contests. Where is the compromise that Fish & Wildlife speaks of? Wildlife advocates routinely walk away with nothing and that is due to the institutional, consumptive bias that's inherent in Fish & Wildlife agencies and why we also support bill, H.336, *An act relating to membership of the Fish & Wildlife Board.*

We were hoping that the Fish & Wildlife Department would've used this time to finally endorse long overdue, legislation to address Vermont's culture of loathing and disrespect towards coyotes. It appears that they are unconcerned with ethics, so that is why we are counting on the legislature to

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right this ship. The general public is desperate for change and it will only happen through the legislature. Last month, the Fish & Game Department from our neighboring state of New Hampshire proposed a regulated coyote season - July 15th every year to March 15th, which would allow mothers to nurse their pups. Is that too much to offer Vermont's coyotes?

In closing, POW asks that the Committee introduce legislation for a regulated coyote season from October 31st - March 31st, taking pup rearing into consideration. We also ask that the Legislature introduce a ban on wildlife killing contests and help elevate Vermont's hunting heritage and our image to the rest of the country.

\*Find survey details on survey on our website

**Email sent to Commissioner Porter on 12.24.2017.**

**We never received a reply.**

**Protect Our Wildlife VT**

**<info@protectourwildlifevt.org>**

12/24/17

to Louis, David, Julie, Elizabeth, Lark,  
Peggy, Jim

Dear Louis,

I'm sure you're aware that a statewide coyote killing contest is scheduled for the month of February with a gun being awarded to the contestant with the highest accrued weight, which incentivizes killing as many coyotes as one can. What is equally alarming are the comments from Vermont coyote killers (I won't refer to them as hunters) on VCCC's Facebook page. I've attached a sampling that was provided to me from yesterday (contains profane language.)

You often say that it's just "a few bad apples" that we're dealing with, but that is not the case. The loathing towards coyotes and the gross misunderstanding towards them in general, including their impact on the deer herd and the compensatory reproductive response to unregulated killing, is glaringly clear on social media.

I know that VT residents have emailed you to ask why the Department has not taken a proactive approach in responding to a culture that is so deeply entrenched in hatred towards these animals. It seems that you're unwilling to address this issue and so it continues to fester and these "hunters" are

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emboldened to continue killing every coyote they see. An educational/outreach program, starting with youngsters, would help Vermont defuse this violent underbelly of VT's hunting culture. This outreach may take years, decades, to make a difference, but it must be done. To continue to allow people to bash coyote puppies with tree branches and brag about it on Facebook and turn a blind eye to young men who are right now rallying their buddies to kill as many coyotes as they can to win a gun, will only turn the general public against hunting in general. As of yesterday evening, POW has had two landowners, one in Bristol and the other in Wolcott, ask for help posting their land in protest of this statewide killing contest.

It should not be the sole responsibility of wildlife advocacy organizations like VCCC, POW, HSUS, GMAD, or any other group, to take the lead on educating the public on coyotes - it should come from your Department. This should be an area of common ground and yet we continue to receive push back. Your Department seems to be going against its own adherence to the NAM that dictates that wildlife should only be killed for a legitimate purpose. Many of these coyotes will end up being left to rot in the woods - carcasses shot up with bullet holes don't pull in much money at fur auctions. Even those pelts that *are* prime aren't pulling in much money with the degraded fur market.

I look forward to hearing back when your schedule allows.

Brenna

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*President*

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