

Testimony to the House Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife
Committee January 25, 2018

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On Behalf of the Vermont Wildlife Coalition

Chairman Deen and Members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to offer comments on the controversy surrounding coyote killing contests and public policy regarding coyote management.

First, let me say very clearly that the knowledge and experience I've accumulated in my life and career convince me that predators belong on the landscape; they bring valuable ecological services; and that natural systems have evolved around predator-prey relationships. Our current public policy towards this species is an affront to the essential ways in which the ecosystem functions.

It is also an affront to the North American Wildlife Management Model and to the values that most Vermonters hold towards wildlife as demonstrated in a recent scientific poll conducted by UVM.

My views have been informed in part by playing a small role during my professional career in one of the greatest conservation milestones in the US in the last century-the translocation and restoration of wolves to Yellowstone and Idaho. I was in Hinton, Alberta (Canada) where we processed captured wolves for transport to the US and since 1995 I have made numerous trips to Yellowstone to witness this restoration of an ecosystem. I have also studied wolves in the high Arctic and the Northwest Territories.

Vermont's coyote killing contests have touched a raw nerve as the public learns about this practice-the incentivized killing for the sake of killing. These contests bring to mind the waterfowl hunter in Burlington who hunted from the waterfront but had no way of collecting the birds shot; or the hunter from NY who came to the Kingdom to successfully shoot his moose this past fall but ended up dumping hundreds of pounds of meat to rot once he returned home; or of an Irasburg resident who is accused of illegally shooting a lactating moose last year while he says he was hunting coyotes, and dragging the moose for 11 miles in his truck only to dump the carcass to rot. No reports exist on what happened to the calf. All of these acts share a disdain for moral responsibility towards wildlife, but only the contests turn that disdain into organized social events.

Vermont- we have a problem when killing wildlife for the sake of killing becomes the objective. It is time to stand and say enough, and that starts with ending current state coyote policy

which actually sanctions and I believe fosters this behavior. It is time for coyotes to be treated and managed like other game animals-the coyote is neither a demon or a lamb- a coyote is a coyote. To quote the department:

Today, the Department considers the coyote a permanent and valuable resident of the state, one that provides important ecological functions.

The challenge is to translate that statement into ethical, public policy which at least consistent with the North American Model of Wildlife Management.

It would be a mistake to fail to recognize the important context for this request for this change in public policy. The national industry voice for all state fish and wildlife agencies including Vermont's DFW has issued a report in 2016 stating, "to stay relevant state Fish and Wildlife agencies will need to transform their structures, operations and cultures to meet the changing expectations of their customers."

The wildlife profession as expressed in articles in their key professional journal is stating it is time for change. In academia, there is a growing voice to bring wildlife governance structures into the 21st century. There is growth in the sheer number of organizations across the nation that are organizing in order to push for public participation. And here in Vermont there is a growing push by wildlife advocates to democratize how wildlife decisions are made in the face of the so called Iron Triangle (the DFW joined at the hip with the FW Board coupled with consumptive advocacy groups) that collectively keep the public on the outside, looking in. The Iron Triangle has had its way for decades...it is time for change and that must come from the legislature. The DFW can't or is unwilling to evolve; the FW Board is controlled by the executive branch to serve special interests exclusively. The legislature is the only body that can act on behalf of the citizens until such time that the public has a seat at the table.

Vermont values its natural resources. The current use program protects farm and woodland; forestry plans under current use protect forests, water quality standards strive to protect our lakes, Act 250 encourages wise development, the list goes on. Why, when it comes to wildlife-a public resource, do we resort to the wild west?