

1 H.190

2 Introduced by Representatives McCullough of Williston, Sheldon of
3 Middlebury, Webb of Shelburne, Dolan of Waitsfield, Squirrell
4 of Underhill, and Sullivan of Burlington

5 Referred to Committee on

6 Date:

7 Subject: Fish and wildlife; Department of Fish and Wildlife; wildlife
8 management; Fish and Wildlife Board

9 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to establish the
10 Vermont Working Group on Wildlife Governance to advise the General
11 Assembly regarding the management of fish, wildlife, and fur-bearing animals
12 of the State in a manner that serves the interests and values of all of the people
13 of the State.

14 An act relating to the management of fish and wildlife

15 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

16 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

17 The General Assembly finds that:

18 (1) It is the policy of the State that:

1 (A) The fish and wildlife of Vermont are held in trust by the State for
2 the benefit of the citizens of Vermont and shall not be reduced to private
3 ownership;

4 (B) The protection, propagation control, management, and
5 conservation of fish, wildlife, and fur-bearing animals in this State are in the
6 interest of the public welfare; and

7 (C) The Commissioner of Fish and Wildlife is required to safeguard
8 the fish, wildlife, and fur-bearing animals of the State for all of the people of
9 the State.

10 (2) How the people of Vermont interact, recreate, and appreciate
11 wildlife in Vermont has shifted significantly and quantifiably over recent
12 decades.

13 (A) The number of Vermonters participating in hunting, fishing, and
14 trapping is steadily declining as evidenced by the reduction in resident license
15 sales.

16 (B) Since 1985, resident hunting license sales have decreased by
17 56 percent, resident trapping licenses sales have decreased by 43 percent, and
18 resident fishing license sales have decreased by 23 percent.

19 (C) Since 2006, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service data indicate that the
20 number of Vermonters identifying as wildlife watchers has increased to

1 86 percent of the population, in contrast to 11.5 percent of the population who
2 identify as hunters.

3 (3) The Department of Fish and Wildlife has recognized that, according
4 to demographic projections, Vermont's population will continue to age and, as
5 a result, Department revenues from the sale of licenses and permits will
6 continue to decline.

7 (A) As a result of declining license and fee revenue, the General
8 Assembly has increased, and may need to further increase, the amount of
9 General Fund dollars annually appropriated to the Department of Fish and
10 Wildlife.

11 (B) To address declining license and permit fee revenue while also
12 reducing the need for additional General Fund appropriations, the Department
13 of Fish and Wildlife must find a predictable, long-term source of revenue to
14 pay for the costs of managing the fish, wildlife, and fur-bearing animals of the
15 State for all of the people of the State.

16 (4) The General Assembly should form a working group on wildlife
17 governance to:

18 (A) assess how the principles and priorities for the management of
19 fish, wildlife, and fur-bearing animals of the State will evolve in the near
20 future;

1 (B) recommend how the statutes, rules, and policies of the State
2 regarding the management of fish, wildlife, and fur-bearing animals should be
3 amended for the benefit of all of the people of the State;

4 (C) recommend whether the membership and authority of the Fish
5 and Wildlife Board should be amended to align the authority of the Board with
6 the diversification of the values the people of the State have regarding the fish,
7 wildlife, and fur-bearing animals of the State;

8 (D) recommend new or additional programs at the Department of
9 Fish and Wildlife to serve the citizens of Vermont who value the fish, wildlife,
10 and fur-bearing animals of the State, but who are not hunters, fishers, or
11 trappers; and

12 (E) recommend sustainable funding sources for the long-term
13 operation of the Department of Fish and Wildlife that are not dependent on
14 license and permit sales for hunting, fishing, or trapping.

15 Sec. 2. VERMONT WORKING GROUP ON WILDLIFE GOVERNANCE;

16 REPORT

17 (a) Creation. There is created the Vermont Working Group on Wildlife
18 Governance to advise the General Assembly regarding the management of
19 fish, wildlife, and fur-bearing animals of the State in a manner that serves the
20 interests and values of all of the people of the State.

1 (b) Membership. The Vermont Working Group on Wildlife Governance
2 shall be composed of the following members:

3 (1) three current members of the House of Representatives who shall
4 be appointed by the Speaker of the House and who shall include:

5 (A) the Chair of the Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and
6 Wildlife or designee;

7 (B) the Chair of the Committee on Appropriations or designee; and

8 (C) the Chair of the Committee on Government Operations or
9 designee; and

10 (2) three current members of the Senate, who shall be appointed by the
11 Committee on Committees and who shall include:

12 (A) the Chair of the Committee on Natural Resources and Energy
13 or designee;

14 (B) the Chair of the Committee on Appropriations or designee; and

15 (C) a member of the Senate at large.

16 (c) Powers and duties. The Vermont Working Group on Wildlife
17 Governance shall review and analyze the funding, management, governance,
18 and policies of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) under
19 statute and rule, and shall:

1 (1) provide an accounting of existing funding of the Department and
2 how funding and staffing are allocated according to Department program,
3 function, or audience served;

4 (2) recommend additional funding necessary for the Department to
5 adequately serve all of the citizens of Vermont who value the fish, wildlife,
6 and fur-bearing animals of the State, including proposed sustainable, stable,
7 and sufficient funding sources for all Department programs;

8 (3) analyze whether the purposes and guiding policy of the Department
9 reflect the current values of the public regarding the management of fish,
10 wildlife, and fur-bearing animals, including whether Vermont statutes, rules,
11 and policies are consistent with 21st century wildlife governance principles,
12 such as those stated in the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation
13 as updated;

14 (4) identify additional opportunities for increased participation by all
15 members of the public in the governance of fish, wildlife, and fur-bearing
16 animals of the State through proposed changes to the structure, culture, or
17 operation of the Department or the Fish and Wildlife Board; and

18 (5) propose new Department or State programs or opportunities to
19 meet the needs or interests of citizens of the State who value the fish,
20 wildlife, and fur-bearing animals of the State, but who are not hunters,
21 fishers, or trappers.

1 (d) Assistance. The Vermont Working Group on Wildlife Governance
2 shall have the administrative, technical, and legal assistance of the Office of
3 Legislative Council. The Working Group shall have assistance of the Joint
4 Fiscal Office on fiscal issues and the Department of Fish and Wildlife on
5 issues related to the jurisdiction of the Department.

6 (e) Report. On or before January 15, 2020, the Vermont Working Group
7 on Wildlife Governance shall report to the House Committees on Natural
8 Resources, Fish, and Wildlife, on Appropriations, and on Government
9 Operations and the Senate Committees on Natural Resources and Energy, on
10 Appropriations, and on Government Operations with its findings and any
11 recommendations for legislative action.

12 (f) Meetings.

13 (1) The Office of Legislative Council shall call the first meeting of the
14 Vermont Working Group on Wildlife Governance to occur on or before
15 August 1, 2019.

16 (2) The Vermont Working Group on Wildlife Governance shall select
17 a chair from among its members at the first meeting.

18 (3) A majority of the membership of the Vermont Working Group on
19 Wildlife Governance shall constitute a quorum.

20 (4) The Vermont Working Group on Wildlife Governance shall cease
21 to exist on February 1, 2020.

1 (g) Compensation and reimbursement.

2 (1) For attendance at meetings during adjournment of the General
3 Assembly, a legislative member of the Vermont Working Group on Wildlife
4 Governance serving in his or her capacity as a legislator shall be entitled to
5 per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses pursuant to 2 V.S.A.
6 § 406 for not more than eight meetings. These payments shall be made from
7 monies appropriated to the General Assembly.

8 (2) Payments to members of the Vermont Working Group on Wildlife
9 Governance authorized under this subsection shall be made from monies
10 appropriated to the General Assembly.

11 Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

12 This act shall take effect on passage.