

Testimony of Gerri Huck to the House Natural Resources, Fish & Wildlife Committee

Dear Chair Sheldon and members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Gerri Huck, and I support H.357. My family has a small farm in central Vermont. My background includes over 20 years in the technology field and starting and running multiple businesses. I hope you won't hold it against me, but I truly am a flatlander in that I was born and raised in North Dakota, where it is so flat that you can see what people in the next town are having for dinner. Girls were not encouraged to hunt when I was growing up, but hunting was a common activity among my relatives. We also processed deer and made deer sausage each year at our small slaughterhouse, which was the only facility in the area for slaughtering animals. While the physical landscape where I grew up was different, the hunting culture was very similar to the one we have in Vermont, so I think I can speak from a place of understanding the hunting culture, at least on some level.

I have heard some of the objections to enacting a wanton waste law in Vermont and I'd like to walk through a few of those with you now:

The first objection is that most hunters are decent and do not waste wildlife, so why punish everyone for the actions of some?

I think most of us agree that unethical hunters are not the norm. Despite that, they do have an enormous impact on both wildlife and the image of hunting. A few bad hunters, through unethical and wasteful killing, can seriously impact wildlife in a short period of time. Furthermore, those unethical hunters are quickly becoming the public face of all hunting because they tend to be prolific online. No one ever says, "Most people drive sober. Therefore, we do not need laws against drinking and driving." Besides, if I am not a drunk driver, why would I view drunk driving laws as punishment? When I am out on 89 on a Saturday evening, I am grateful for the laws we have.

Another objection we often hear is that wanton waste is too difficult to enforce.

I would like to remind everyone that it is illegal to text while driving. How difficult it is to enforce a law has no bearing on whether it should be a law. I'd like to ask why having a wanton waste law would be harder than NOT having a wanton waste law and NOT being able to hold someone accountable for wildlife abuse? Are we going to catch every instance of wanton waste? No, we are not. But law enforcement will finally have the ability to do something more than shrug and look away when a case of wanton waste is reported or discovered. And let us remember the real power of law. It is to help prevent wrong behavior. It is to communicate our values. It is to tell our community what we are willing to accept. It is to give future generations a sense of our level of justice and compassion.

A third objection we hear is that any new law or regulation related to hunting is somehow anti-hunting.

This is like saying any law or rule related to automobile safety is anti-driving. If anything, it is the opposite of that. The current lack of rules around wanton waste tells the public that hunters in general do not care about wasting animals. It tells the public that finding a pile of dead animals who were clearly killed for entertainment alone, is something to ignore, not to report. Enacting a law against wanton waste draws a distinction between those who intend to use the animal for a valid purpose and those who hunt for a host of more nefarious reasons. Wanton waste laws promote ethical hunting and they are aligned with the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

Finally, we often hear that these wild animals do not really get wasted since scavengers will come and eat the rotting corpses.

When we were kids, my brother once killed a non-game bird because he had gotten a new gun and wanted to shoot something. He quickly learned that shooting an animal you didn't intend to eat meant getting your new gun taken away. I'm certain some animal came along and ate that dead bird. But that isn't the point, is it? If we don't allow this excuse from a child, why are we allowing it from adults, who are supposed to be role models? Besides, when unethical hunters know they aren't going to use the animal, they pump it full of lead, which has consequences for the animals who feed on the carcasses. (Exhibit 1). What is the true cost of these unintended consequences? Many of us contribute time or other resources to organizations and individuals who help wildlife recover from lead poisoning. So, no, it is not a benefit to have these toxic carcasses in the woods. Let's use the law to promote the respectful hunting behavior we all want to see.

I have one final request of you. Please do not exclude coyotes from wanton waste laws. The exclusion of animals such as the coyote from wanton waste is a big part of the reason why killing coyote pups or their nursing mothers is acceptable, and even promoted, in the coyote hunting community (Exhibit 2). Excluding them from wanton waste is why coyote hunters think it is okay to decapitate a coyote, tie its legs together and throw it into a culvert or leave it to die and rot in a trap (Exhibit 3). Excluding them from wanton waste is why corporations that sell coyote-killing gadgets such as infra-red lights and distress calls give those devices to the hunters for free in exchange for advertising their kills with said devices on social media. (Exhibit 4).

I happen to love and admire the coyote, and we welcome the coyote's free rodent control services on our farm, but even if you do not share my enthusiasm for America's native dog, can we all agree that no animal deserves to be treated with such disrespect and cruelty?

Thank you again for your time and attention.

Respectfully submitted,
Gerri Huck

Exhibit 1



....

In 2014, researchers from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service examined 58 bald eagles found dead in the Upper Midwest. Liver lead analysis showed that 60 percent had detectable concentrations of lead, and 38 percent had concentrations within the lethal range for lead poisoning.

Visual: U.S. Fish & Wildlife

Poisoned Wildlife and Tainted Meat: Why Hunters Are Moving Away From Lead Bullets

Many hunters are ditching traditional ammunition amid mounting evidence that it harms scavengers and pollutes the food people eat.

By Ian Urbina Photographs by Max Whittaker

Nov. 24, 2018

ZUMWALT PRAIRIE, Ore. — Aiming a rifle loaded with a copper bullet rather than the standard type made of lead, Chelsea Cassens fired at an elk from 70 yards away, hitting it squarely behind its shoulder. To avoid spooking the animal if it was only injured, Ms. Cassens waited several minutes before approaching as her father needed her skeptically, suggesting her newfangled ammunition might not have immediately killed it.

Moments later, Ms. Cassens, her father, Ed Hughes, and the three others in their hunting party descended on the fallen 450-pound beast, carved it open, inspected the internal damage, and found the spent bullet.

“Will you look at that!” Mr. Hughes said, pleasantly surprised. The copper bullet had expanded on impact, as it was designed to do, opening a gaping hole in the elk’s lungs and killing it almost instantly.

“Her bullet did the trick just fine,” Mr. Hughes, 63, conceded, adding later that he also planned to switch from lead to copper bullets, a transition more and more hunters are making amid mounting evidence that lead bullets are poisoning the wildlife that feed on carcasses and polluting the game meat that many people eat.

[Link to article](#)

Across the country, state wildlife agencies have tried a range of tactics to encourage hunters to switch from lead ammunition. In Arizona, non-lead ammunition is free in some areas, and is delivered in bulk to a Native American tribe that lives near habitats with the most vulnerable scavenger species. In Minnesota, game wardens host shooting clinics for hunters to compare copper and lead bullets, hoping to show that lead bullets break apart in ways that make them more prone to contaminate the animals they kill.

Posted November 25, 2018

Report post

It's been very slowly gaining traction over the years. Some areas lead free ammo is required so that forces some hunters to use it. Up here in NH even small lead sinkers and lead weighted lures are illegal because so many loons die of lead poisoning after eating lost lures and weights.

I do use lead free ammo while bird hunting. It's easier than worrying if I crossed into a lead free zone or not.

Exhibit 2

Coyote puppies killed using various methods. Two of these were sent to the Vermont Coyote Coexistence Coalition by the coyote hunters.



Exhibit 3

Examples of reported abuse and wanton waste of coyotes. We have many more examples from hikers, clean-up crews, and property owners.

| Name | Value |
|---------------|-------|
| Yes | |
| No | |
| Name | |
| Address | |
| City | |
| State | |
| Zip | |
| Phone | |
| Violationdate | |
| Violationtime | |
| ViolationType | |
| violationTown | |
| city | |

Violation Not really a violation but thought it should be reported - There is a decapitated carcass of a coyote deposited on the side of the road near my driveway. It's legs are tied together with a piece of rope. It is laying in a water runoff from a culvert. The carcass is partially decomposed. (I will try to move it out of waterway.)

Constable [redacted] reaching out to you about complaints I have been receiving regarding folks who say they are "chasing" coyotes on Lord Road off of Hortonville Road. These guys are bringing in 7-10 dogs with the radio collars and releasing them into posted property. When questioned by the property owners they tell them they are not trespassing, and the dogs are chasing coyotes. Anyway I need to know what the law is regarding these dogs, and trespassing on private property with the dogs. I am checking our dog ordinance to see if they are violating the running at large section . Any help would be appreciated.

```

+- Complainant: 970112 -----+
x Lst: [redacted] Mid: L x
x Adr& [redacted] DOB: [redacted] x
x Cty: [redacted] SSN: - - x
x Tel: [redacted] Wants: Adr: x
x Alrt: [redacted] x
-----+

```

```

Contact: geoff Tel: ( ) -
Address: L Plate: St:
Info: (See below)
Calls: Dupl: Names: w/Alrts: Wants: Prem: Adr:
How Rcvd: T Telephone Occurred between: 13:39:12 05/06/17
Rcvd by: Larned, C and: 13:39:12 05/06/17

```

=====
Call Taker Comments:
 coyote carcass in trap

COYOOTE CARCASS IN TRAP

CALL TAKER COMMENTS:

=====

Exhibit 3, continued

All coyotes mentioned in the sampling of comments below were being wasted. Coyotes mauled by dogs have damaged fur, regardless of season. Other coyotes suffered extensive damage from overkill, were intentionally left in the woods, or were stacked to dump elsewhere after the photo op.

We just sustained property damage from pack of coyote killing dogs who ran a coyote into our back yard.

It was the most disturbing, violent and blatant disrespect of my home and safety. Vermont Fish & Wildlife in terms of coyote hunting has a dangerous mess on their hands. Every day these guys are running their dogs that are trained to kill in neighborhoods with small children and families, poses more and more danger to the public. I've had enough.

What is most frustrating is that we have a structure in place for hunting deer and moose to keep hunters and the public safe, yet we can't do this with coyotes? Something is VERY wrong here.

7400 semi .30-06 feeding them 180 grain Core-Loct soft points, serious overkill on this guy and made a hell of of mess on the exit.

After dark doesn't matter with coyotes as that is recognized at the only practical time to hunt them. There is no closed season on the, they are killable all year long. And any dead coyote is a perfect coyote.

Like · Reply · 7w

but it's a residential area with developments on 3 sides.

Like · Reply · 7w

Minor problems.



well we gotta be able to see it haha I'm not sitting out in the cold all nite waiting for a coyote lol I can shoot them out of my bedroom window here and drink at the same time

Exhibit 4

Killing and then staging the bodies for advertising. The fur on these animals is worthless for two reasons: 1) It is out of season. Their fur has value Dec - Feb. 2) Even when fur is prime, to avoid fur slippage, the animal must be handled carefully and processed within a very short amount of time. According to a well-regarded fur expert, you have about 60 minutes.



Left: Using a dead coyote's body to advertise coyote killing gadgets in exchange for freebies from the corporation who sells the devices