

1 H.581

2 Introduced by Representative McCullough of Williston

3 Referred to Committee on

4 Date:

5 Subject: Fish and wildlife; Department of Fish and Wildlife; funding

6 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to establish the
7 Vermont Working Group on Wildlife Funding to advise the General Assembly
8 regarding the funding of all activities of the Department of Fish and Wildlife
9 for the conservation and management of fish, wildlife, and fur-bearing animals
10 of the State in a manner that serves the interests and values of all of the people
11 of the State.

12 An act relating to the funding of the Department of Fish and Wildlife

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

14 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

15 The General Assembly finds that:

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

17 (A) The Commissioner of Fish and Wildlife is required to safeguard

18 the fish, wildlife, and fur-bearing animals of the State for all of the people of

19 the State.

1 (B) How the people of Vermont interact with, recreate with,
2 understand, and appreciate wildlife in Vermont has shifted significantly and
3 quantifiably over recent decades, as evidenced by the following:

4 (i) the number of Vermonters participating in hunting, fishing, and
5 trapping is steadily declining as demonstrated by the reduction in resident
6 license sales;

7 (ii) since 1985, resident hunting license sales have decreased by
8 56 percent, resident trapping license sales have decreased by 51 percent, and
9 resident fishing license sales have decreased by 25 percent;

10 (iii) since 2011, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service data indicate that
11 the number of Vermonters identifying as wildlife watchers has increased to
12 83.5 percent of the population, in contrast to 11.5 percent of the population
13 who identify as hunters; and

14 (iv) although wildlife watchers who are not hunters, trappers, or
15 anglers do not currently contribute to Department revenues, the U.S. Fish and
16 Wildlife Service concludes that wildlife watchers who are not hunters,
17 trappers, or anglers generate \$3.00 for every dollar generated by hunters.

18 (2) The Department of Fish and Wildlife has recognized that, according
19 to demographic projections, Vermont's population will continue to age and, as
20 a result, Department revenues from the sale of licenses and permits will
21 continue to decline.

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

5 (B) Between 1990 and 2018, license funding dropped from
6 approximatley 65 percent of the total Department of Fish and Wildlife budget
7 to approximately 30 percent, federal funds have increased from less than 10
8 percent of the Department budget to 34 percent, and General Fund monies
9 have increased from 27 percent of the Department budget to 35 percent.

10 (3) The decrease in stable Department funding has developed in parallel
11 to a growing need for additional funding to serve the Department's goal to
12 safeguard the fish, wildlife, and fur-bearing animals of the State for all of the
13 people of the State.

14 (A) The duties and responsibilities of the Department have grown
15 exponentially since the days of focusing primarily on deer herd management
16 and now include management of all wildlife species, including game and non-
17 game; law enforcement; monitoring and restoring threatened and endangered
18 species; habitat conservation; technical assistance; regulatory review;
19 educational programs for hunters, youths, and teachers; public license sales;
20 and management of grants issued or received by the Department.

1 (B) The need for increased funding of the Department will be
2 heightened by:

3 (i) required attention to endangered and threatened non-game
4 species that have not been the traditional focus of hunters, trappers, and
5 anglers; and

6 (ii) the increased research, monitoring, and interventions required
7 by new, contemporary, and well-documented challenges to all wildlife in
8 Vermont, such as climate change, pollution, invasive species, and habitat
9 degradation.

10 (4) To address declining license and permit fee revenue, the State must
11 find a stable, long-term revenue source to pay for the costs of the Department
12 of Fish and Wildlife conserving and managing fish, wildlife, and fur-bearing
13 animals of the State and the natural systems upon which they depend for all of
14 the people of the State.

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

16 REPORT

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

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

3 (1) three current members of the House of Representatives who shall be
4 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 or
13 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 Funding
17 shall review and analyze the funding, management, and policies of the
18 Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) under statute and rule, and
19 shall:

20 (1) Assess how the principles and priorities for the conservation and
21 management of fish, wildlife, and fur-bearing animals and the natural systems

1 upon which they depend will impact sources and amounts of funding needed
2 by the Department for the next 10–15 years. The assessment shall address:

3 (A) changing standards resulting from the evolution of ecological
4 science and values and how those will influence the work of the Department;

5 (B) changing environmental trends, such as habitat loss, climate
6 change, invasive species, pollution, and other threats to wildlife and the
7 implications of these trends for future Department action;

8 (C) cultural changes emphasizing wildlife values over wildlife uses;

9 (D) changing demographic trends and the likely impact of these
10 trends on traditional funding streams for the Department;

11 (E) the stability of all current Department funding streams going
12 forward;

13 (F) changes to Department responsibilities and public expectations of
14 the Department that have occurred over time and the resulting further
15 expansion of Department responsibilities that are likely to occur in the future;

16 (G) current allocation and adequacy of resources, such as funds,
17 personnel, expertise, and research, for existing programs within the
18 Department, including growing statewide law enforcement and increasing
19 Agency of Natural Resources' needs for scientific reporting and permitting;

20 (H) estimated revenues and other resources needed for new and
21 additional programs at the Department;

1 (I) an estimate of the total resources required to meet the changing
2 standards and trends set forth under subdivisions (1)(A)–(F) of this subsection;
3 and

4 (J) an assessment of the equitability and reasonableness of current
5 allocation of Department resources by customer segment, service type, and fee
6 amount.

7 (2) Recommend how the Department can create and maintain stable and
8 adequate funding for the next 15 years by considering:

9 (A) projected costs over the next 16 years related to meeting
10 identified and anticipated challenges to wildlife conservation and protection,
11 including expanded and intensified monitoring, research and the application of
12 contemporary science, and expansion of services to meet the needs of a
13 changing and increasingly diversified demographic; and

14 (B) new, diversified, stable, and adequate funding sources, including
15 an estimate of the funding to be generated to complement, replace, or expand
16 existing Department revenues sufficient to satisfy current and projected
17 Department costs or needs.

18 (d) Assistance. The Vermont Working Group on Wildlife Funding shall
19 have the administrative, technical, and legal assistance of the Office of
20 Legislative Council. The Working Group shall have the assistance of the Joint

1 Fiscal Office on fiscal issues and the assistance of the Department of Fish and
2 Wildlife on issues related to the jurisdiction of the Department.

3 (e) Report. On or before January 1, 2021, the Vermont Working Group on
4 Wildlife Funding shall report to the House Committees on Natural Resources,
5 Fish, and Wildlife, on Appropriations, and on Government Operations and the
6 Senate Committees on Natural Resources and Energy, on Appropriations, and
7 on Government Operations with its findings and any recommendations for
8 legislative action.

9 (f) Meetings.

10 (1) The Office of Legislative Council shall call the first meeting of the
11 Vermont Working Group on Wildlife Funding to occur on or before July 1,
12 2020.

13 (2) The Vermont Working Group on Wildlife Funding shall select a
14 chair from among its members at the first meeting.

15 (3) A majority of the membership of the Vermont Working Group on
16 Wildlife Funding shall constitute a quorum.

17 (4) The Vermont Working Group on Wildlife Funding shall cease to
18 exist on February 1, 2021.

19 (g) Compensation and reimbursement. For attendance at meetings during
20 adjournment of the General Assembly, a legislative member of the Vermont
21 Working Group on Wildlife Funding serving in his or her capacity as a

1 legislator shall be entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of
2 expenses pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 406 for not more than 10 meetings. These
3 payments shall be made from monies appropriated to the General Assembly.

4 Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

5 This act shall take effect on passage.