



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

What is trophy hunting?

The Humane Society of the United States (“HSUS”) defines trophy hunting as a hunt in which the primary motivation for the hunter is to display an animal’s body parts, to obtain a photo with the dead animal (usually for posting on social media), and for bragging rights.¹ Trophy hunters primarily kill wildlife for bragging rights, but not for food. Hunting carnivores for food is unsustainable.² Darimont et al. (2017) write:

... inedible species, like carnivores [e.g., black bears, mountain lions, wolves, bobcats and lynx] commonly targeted by trophy hunters, make nutritional and sharing hypotheses implausible. Second, evidence for show-off behaviour appears clear. Trophy hunters commonly pose for photographs with their prey, with the heads, hides and ornamentation prepared for display”³

Batavia et al. (2018) write that animals hunted as trophies “have sophisticated levels of intelligence, emotion and sociality” which is “profoundly disrupted” by trophy hunting.⁴ In other words, the trophy hunting of such intelligent, familial animals is profoundly cruel.

Trophy hunters and trappers are heavily subsidized by all Americans

According to a 2020 economic study by Dr. Cameron Murray, trophy hunters depend largely on funding provided by others in order to hunt or trap trophy animals.⁵ Dr. Murray found that federal taxes paid by all Americans support the federal lands (e.g., Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service) and the state parks where wildlife live. And most land trusts are maintained by non-profit organizations, such the Humane Society Wildlife Land Trust, whose purpose is to set aside land to protect wildlife habitat, rather than for hunting and trapping.⁶

Additionally, only about 13.5% of the federal excise tax revenue from gun and ammunition sales, through the Pittman-Robertson Act, and boating and fishing fuel and equipment sales, through the Dingell-Johnson Act, comes from the purchase of equipment that is used for hunting (the rest are for non-hunting purposes). And because trophy hunters are a much smaller percentage of hunters overall—Dr. Murray estimates only about 2% of all hunters are trophy hunters—ultimately only about 0.3% of all Pittman-Roberson and Dingell-Johnson revenue comes from trophy hunters.⁷ Trophy hunters are already such a small population of Vermonters, but an even smaller number use hounds to hunt bears – in 2019, only 17% of the bears were killed using hounds.⁸ On the other hand, managing hunting and trapping is expensive; paid staff are needed to set regulations, conduct law enforcement and monitor wildlife populations. Therefore, the costs of administering hunting and trapping can exceed the cost of those hunting and trapping license sales.⁹

Wildlife-watching revenue dwarfs that of hunting and trapping because of values-driven economics

The public is concerned both with the conservation and the welfare of animals, including native wildlife.¹⁰ Trophy hunting and trapping are highly unpopular with most Americans, including Vermont residents.¹¹ A recent landmark study found that most Vermont residents polled, 34%, considered themselves to be “Mutualists” who want to live in

¹ The HSUS does not include hunters of ungulates such as deer and elk in our definition. While ungulate hunters may collect body parts and pose with the dead animal, their primary motivation to hunt is for food.

² Chris T. Darimont et al., “The Unique Ecology of Human Predators,” *Science* 349, no. 6250 (2015).

³ Chris T. Darimont, Brian F. Coddling, and Kristen Hawkes, “Why Men Trophy Hunt,” *Biology Letters* 13, no. 3 (2017).

⁴ Chelsea Batavia et al., “The Elephant (Head) in the Room: A Critical Look at Trophy Hunting,” *Conservation Letters* 0, no. 0 (2018).

⁵ Cameron Murray, “Trophy Hunters of Native Carnivores Benefit from Wildlife Conservation Funded by Others,” *A report for the Humane Society of the United States* https://www.humaneociety.org/sites/default/files/docs/HSUS_Trophy-Hunting-Economics-2020.pdf (2020).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Vermont Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, “2020 Black Bear Harvest Report,”

<https://vtfishandwildlife.com/sites/fishandwildlife/files/documents/Learn%20More/Library/REPORTS%20AND%20DOCUMENTS/HUNTING/HARVEST%20REPORTS/bear/2020-Black-Bear-Harvest-Report.pdf> (2020).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Kelly A. George et al., “Changes in Attitudes toward Animals in the United States from 1978 to 2014,” *Biological Conservation* 201 (2016).

¹¹ National Shooting Sports Foundation and Responsive Management, “Americans’ Attitudes toward Hunting, Fishing, Sport Shooting and Trapping 2019,” <https://asafishing.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Americans-Attitudes-Survey-Report-2019.pdf> (2019).

harmony with wildlife.¹² Only one-quarter of Vermonters polled, 25%, identify as “Traditionalist,” believing that they hold dominion over wildlife and that wild animals should be managed for the benefit of people.¹³ Twenty-nine percent of residents polled considered themselves “Pluralists,” meaning they hold either Traditionalist or Mutualist values, depending on the specific context, and only 12% considered themselves “Distanced,” showing little interest in wildlife matters.¹⁴

According to data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau and used in reports by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, wildlife watchers are a much larger constituency than hunters, in terms of number of people and dollars spent in the economy. Fig. 1. While wildlife watchers are growing in number, hunters are in decline. Fig. 1.

Fig. 1 Wildlife recreation participation & expenditures: 2011 vs. 2016 data U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service				
	2011	2016	Percent change	
No. wildlife watchers	71.8M	86.0M	20	
No. hunters	13.7M	11.5M	-16	
Wildlife watcher expenditures	\$59.1B	\$75.9B	28	
Hunter expenditures	\$36.3B	\$25.6B	-29	
Hunter numbers by category		2011	2016	Change
Big game		11.6M	9.2M	-2.4M
Small game		4.5M	3.5M	-1M
Migratory birds		2.6M	2.4M	-0.2M
Other animals		2.2M	1.3M	-0.9M

Wildlife-watching tourists in Vermont spend millions of dollars in local economies to view wildlife. According to the National Park Service: “In 2019, 46.0 thousand park visitors spent an estimated \$2.7 million in local gateway regions while visiting National Park Service lands in Vermont. These expenditures supported a total of 37 jobs, \$1.1 million in labor income, \$2.1 million in value added, and \$3.4 million in economic output in the Vermont economy.”¹⁵

Fig. 2 Outdoor recreation spending in Vermont (2019) (Data from U.S. Bureau of Analysis)		
Description	Spending [thousands of dollars]	% of total
Equestrian	20,815	1.18
Canoe, kayak, sail and other boating	29,509	1.68
Hunting and trapping	29,693	1.69
Skiing and snowboarding	198,149	11.27
Travel and tourism	830,781	47.24
Total Outdoor Recreation	1,758,619	100.00

According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis-Dept. of Commerce, outdoor recreation in Vermont generated \$1.7 billion for the state’s economy in 2019. Fig. 2. Of that figure, hunting and trapping generated \$29,693,000 (\$29 million), which equals about two percent (1.69%) of the total outdoor recreation dollars spent in Vermont. Skiing and

¹²Dietsch, A.M., Don Carlos, A.W., Manfredo, M. J., Teel, T. L., & Sullivan, L. (2018). State report for Vermont from the research project entitled “America’s Wildlife Values.” Fort Collins, CO: Colorado State University, Department of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ National Park Service, “2019 National Park Service Visitor Spending Effects Report,” <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm> (2021).

snowboarding generated \$198,149,000—seven times more than hunting and trapping. And people spent 28 times more on travel and tourism in Vermont than on hunting and trapping.¹⁶ Fig. 2.

In a study that measured the monetary worth of bobcats, authors calculated that a single bobcat in one year's time in Yellowstone National Park was valued at \$308,105, a figure 1,000 times greater than that bobcat's pelt price of \$315.¹⁷ That one bobcat enabled wildlife-watching guides and photographers to sell their prints and generated other employment, including hospitality services.¹⁸ We are unaware of a similar valuation of bears, but their constituency would be much larger than bobcat photographers—because bears are much more visible in national parks.

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¹⁶ Dept. of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis, "Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. And Prototype for States, 2019," <https://www.bea.gov/news/2019/outdoor-recreation-satellite-account-us-and-prototype-states-2017> (2019).

¹⁷ L. Mark Elbroch et al., "Contrasting Bobcat Values," *Biodiversity and Conservation* (2017).

¹⁸ L. M. Elbroch et al., "Contrasting Bobcat Values," *Biological Conservation* <https://www.springerprofessional.de/contrasting-bobcat-values/13278284> (2017).