



**HUMANE SOCIETY
VETERINARY MEDICAL
ASSOCIATION.**

April 14, 2021

Vermont House Natural Resources, Fish and Game Committee

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Re: Veterinary Support for H.172: A Bill Prohibiting Recreational and Commercial Trapping and the Hound Hunting of Bears

Dear Chairwoman Sheldon and members of the committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (HSVMA) to convey our support for H.172, a bill that would prohibit recreational and commercial trapping and the use of hounds to pursue bears (“hounding”) in Vermont.

HSVMA represents over 9,000 veterinary professionals nationwide, with a focus on the health and welfare of all animals. As veterinary professionals, we strongly agree with the central premise of this bill—that trapping and hounding should be banned because they are inhumane and not “fair chase” forms of hunting.

By design, traps are indiscriminate and don’t distinguish between target and non-target animals such as companion pets or Vermont-protected species like pine martens, bald eagles or lynx.

Traps cause serious injuries and suffering to animals as they fight to free themselves, including broken legs, dislocated shoulders, lacerations, torn muscles, cuts to mouths and gums, broken teeth, fractures, amputations of digits, and even death. An animal trapped on land may suffer from psychological stress and/or pain, starvation, dehydration or predation. When caught in aquatic traps, animals adapted to swimming and diving for long periods, such as beavers and river otters, can slowly suffer from hypoxia if they struggle before drowning.

Body-crushing (or “Conibear”™) traps are designed to kill animals instantly by snapping the spinal column at the base of the neck, but frequently misstrike and inflict agonizing injuries. Studies show that Conibear™ traps generally kill less than 15% of trapped animals instantly; rather, more than 40% of trapped animals die slow, painful deaths as unintended body parts such as abdomens, heads or limbs are squeezed between the trap bars. Trappers are concerned about undamaged pelts, but not about ensuring quick and/or humane deaths.

Vermont permits houndsmen to chase bears from June 1-November 30, nearly the entire period that bears are not in their dens. When bears are awake,



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they should spend their time raising their young, mating and foraging for food to survive hibernation, not burning their energy stores escaping from packs of radio-collared dogs.

Houndsmen typically use packs of dogs to pursue their prey. Sometimes, bears are bayed on the ground, resulting in injuries or deaths to bears, especially small bears and cubs, or deaths to dogs. Bears can break dogs' bones, puncture their lungs or lacerate dogs' skin. A bear may escape to a tree and is then shot down and viciously attacked by the dog pack. Bears may be the targets, but packs of dogs can act unpredictably. Hounds often chase and kill *other* wildlife, as well as farm animals and family pets. In Vermont, a pack of unattended hounds attacked a couple and their leashed small dog for 30 minutes before the houndsmen arrived at the scene. Clearly, hounding is unsafe.

Not only are we disturbed by the inhumane treatment of the hounded bears; we are equally concerned about the dogs themselves. Because these dogs are typically treated as investments, rather than beloved companion animals, injured ones may receive inadequate—if any—veterinary medical care. If deemed substandard performers, injured hunting dogs may be abandoned. They may also run off, get lost during the chase, and become wandering strays.

Hounding dogs are frequent victims of neglect. They may be kenneled or tied outdoors for their entire lives, without much attention or exercise between hunts. Animal shelters, particularly in rural areas, can become overburdened with abandoned hounds. Many of them enter shelters in poor condition, emaciated and parasitized by fleas, ticks and heartworms. Medically, behaviorally and financially, these dogs are more challenging for shelters to re-home.

H.172 is a common-sense measure that will ensure Vermont wildlife, including its small bear population, are treated humanely, while providing a modicum of protection for the dogs used to pursue them. We ask for your support of this important animal welfare legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Barbara Hodges'.

Barbara Hodges, DVM, MBA
Director, Advocacy and Outreach