



April 6, 2022

**Verbal testimony re: S.281, hunting coyotes with hounds**

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy:

I am Brenna Galdenzi, President and Co-founder of Protect Our Wildlife. I am here today as an unpaid volunteer on behalf of our 3,000 Vermont supporters from every corner of the state and our 20,000 social media followers. We fully supported bill S.281 in its original draft as it was an outright ban on coyote hounding. Two of the main concerns with hounding are uncontrolled hounds that end up on private property and also chase non-targeted wildlife, including protected species and people's pets and the second concern is the gratuitous cruelty inherent with coyote hounding. I'm sure you've seen the gruesome photos and videos depicting this violent recreational activity that's enjoyed by a subset of coyote hunters.

We don't see how these concerns will be addressed through regulating coyote hounding.

Concerns over coyote hounding have gone on for years and when people would complain to Fish & Wildlife, they were often told that dogs can't read signs and that the hounders are doing nothing wrong. There's never been an interest to clean up or regulate this dangerous activity by Fish and Wildlife until the legislature took an

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interest. We are not confident that Fish & Wildlife will be able to address these concerns as required in the amended bill.

But before I get into into the details of my testimony, I'd like to ask the Committee to imagine that this activity wasn't currently legal and a citizen came to you asking to legalize the hunting of coyotes year-round, with unlimited hounds, under no control of the hunter, allowing hounders to place piles of bait— whether it's deer, livestock carcasses and other items—to lure coyotes in, and then the hounders unleash packs of hounds onto the scent resulting in hounds running into roads, through posted private property thereby placing people's property and their domestic animals in danger. I can't imagine that any legislator would say, yes, that sounds like a great piece of legislation! So, here we are with this activity that's actually legal and legislators have a chance to ban it.

When an activity, at its very foundation, is fueled by an intense hatred towards a wild animal, in this case coyotes, it can only lead to bad behavior. Would deer hunters, who generally revere and respect their prey, ever tolerate this kind of treatment towards deer? I'd suspect no.

After reading hundreds – and that's not an exaggeration – of hateful comments hurled at coyotes, I am not the least bit surprised that so many hounders appear to enjoy inflicting prolonged fear, torment and suffering on an animal that they've deemed vermin, as demonstrated almost daily on social media. The starting point for coyote hounding is hatred and seeking vengeance: that cannot be said for most other forms of hunting. That is the same kind of predator hatred that we're seeing out west with the massacre of Vermont's eastern coyote's cousin, the wolf.

I'd like to highlight three reasons why coyote hounding should be banned:

**#1** It is exceptionally cruel. The coyote is always at a disadvantage. Coyotes are run for miles over large tracts of land, both private and public, until the animal is no longer able to run due to exhaustion. The coyote can't climb a tree, so the animal is left with biting hounds surrounding it until the hounder finally shows up. Before shooting the coyote, photos and videos are often taken of the attack – not dissimilar from dog fighting – and the coyote is shot. Photos depicting the activity aren't hard to find. There's a photo that shows a lone coyote in Vermont who had been chased onto ice and fell through shallow water with only his head surfacing – the hounds surrounded the coyote while the hounder photographed the melee. I could provide countless more examples like this or you can visit our website to see for yourself.

Chair Sheldon is aware that I'm sharing this quote from Kerry Edmunds from Craftsbury, VT. Ms. Edmunds granted me permission to share this with the Committee I quote her, "We had a coyote attacked on our front lawn. The coyote tried to hide under our shed and the hounds pulled him out and mauled him over and over. He got loose and they mauled him again against our cat fence," end quote. It's bad enough for people who are opposed to the cruelty of coyote hounding to have it happen elsewhere, but to have it happen on their own property is unacceptable. This leads me to my next point.

**#2** Hounds are under no control of the hunter. Hounds violate private property owner rights and diminish people's quality of life. People can spend days posting their land, only to have the hounds trespass. The hounds not only violate private property owner rights, but they endanger people on public land. A woman was riding her bike with her dog by her side last year in Fairlee when a pack of coyote hounds chased her and her dog for 2 miles, violently attacking her dog. She thought her dog was going to die. Coyote hounds are used as weapons and are trained to pursue and take down coyotes, so it is no surprise that the hounds would

decide to turn their attention to a domestic dog in this frenzied state. Additionally, hounds chase non-targeted animals like deer. Hounds were witnessed chasing a moose, an animal that's already under tremendous stress.

There is no way to control a pack of frenzied hounds using a shock or tone collar when the hunter is nowhere in sight. I've always had dogs and have spent a lot of time and money with some of the best trainers to get my dogs to simply walk well on a leash and hounders expect the public to believe that they have control over a pack of dogs that are miles away? And even if the shock collars did work, how would the hunter know if the hounds were chasing a deer and not a coyote? They don't.

**#3** Coyote hounding does nothing to manage coyote populations. In fact, it may be causing increased breeding and disruptions to the pack structure.

If coyote hounding were banned, there's no shortage of ways to kill coyotes in VT — 365 days a year, night and day. It is legal to shoot them over bait piles, use thermal night scopes, high-tech game calling devices, with zero reporting and no bag limits. They are also trapped with leghold traps both during the legal season and off-season by landowners.

Hounders say they help farmers, but they bait coyotes with those very animals like cows and pigs that they don't want coyotes to eat! They lure coyotes near roads, farms and residential areas with bait piles and then hide behind livestock predation as a reason to keep killing coyotes.

This indiscriminate killing of coyotes may exacerbate risks to livestock. The reason is that killing social carnivores like coyotes can lead to the disruption of their social and foraging ecology in ways that increase the number of transient coyotes.

(Bjorge and Gunson 1985; Haber 1996; Treves and Naughton-Treves 2005; Brainerd et al. 2008).

In closing, like dog fighting, coyote hounding is a recreational activity enjoyed by a subset of Vermont hunters. The activity is antithetical to science, to hunting ethics and violates property owner rights. I'd like to quickly review our suggested amendments to the bill.

I also want to praise the Vermonters, like Ms. Borni, who is testifying. Vermonters have told us that they are too afraid to speak up for fear of retaliation. Please know that when you hear Ms. Borni, that she speaks for untold numbers of people.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brenna Galdenzi".

Brenna Galdenzi  
President  
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Citations:

Bjorge, R. R., and J. R. Gunson. (1985). Evaluation of wolf control to reduce cattle predation in Alberta. *Journal of Range Management* 38:483-486.

Brainerd, S. M., Andr n, H., Bangs, E. E., Bradley, E. H., Fontaine, J. A., Hall, W. & Wydeven, A. P. (2008). The effects of breeder loss on wolves. *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, 72(1), 89-98.

Haber, G. C. (1996). Biological, conservation, and ethical implications of exploiting and controlling wolves. *Conservation Biology* 10:1068-1081.

Treves A., Naughton-Treves L. (2005). Evaluating lethal control in the management of human-wildlife conflict. pp. 86-106 in R. Woodroffe, S. Thirgood, A. Rabinowitz editors. *People and Wildlife, Conflict or Coexistence*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.