Vermont Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs
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When I was last before this committee, I was asked to comment on the concept of "cruelty". After further reflection I'd like to provide a different answer by saying: Any successful hunt results in the life of an animal being taken. The fact that a human is responsible for that taking, is, in and of itself, upsetting to many who will label it cruel or inhumane or even immoral. Add to that the fact that there are numerous methods that can be legally used to end an animal's life – and those negative feelings multiply: For some.

Regulated trapping of fur-bearing wildlife has played and continues to play an integral role in modern conservation. Whether for self-reliance, understanding, education, or conflict abatement for the protection of health & safety, the activity of regulated trapping continues to play an extremely important role in conservation biology, funding and advocacy for fur-bearing species across Vermont and throughout North America.

The modern activity of trapping in today's world is engaged in by thousands, for any number of reasons, the most basic of which is to live closely with the land, very close to nature. For a time, it was a way to augment one's income; in addition to providing a sustainable and nutritious source of food. For many, it's an activity built from heritage; a skill passed down from generation to generation. Our most skilled fur-bearing biologists obtain their knowledge firsthand by working with trappers, and many also trapping themselves so as to assist with study, and better understand furbearer characteristics.

Whatever one's reason for engaging in regulated trapping today, the vast, vast majority of the individuals that participate in trapping tend to be passionate conservationists; deeply steeped in knowledge, rationale, and respect for both land and wildlife populations as a whole.

While the above-mentioned reasons alone should suffice to defend those engaging in the activity of trapping, these may not be reason enough for those not acquainted with the need for trapping to support appropriate and effective management of game species today. Fur trapping does have a troubled past, back when animal fur was procured in an unregulated fashion with little regard for animal welfare or wildlife balance. While that no longer occurs due to regluation, the question then becomes: What examples and facts would allow someone who doesn't trap or hunt to not be against it?

The fact is that modern trapping is a highly regulated activity in which a relatively small number of people participate. Skilled trappers provide ecological data, helping to manage abundant furbearer populations at no cost to taxpayers. This demonstrated expertise remains relevant and necessary, not only for rural environments, but urban ones as well. For example, regulated fur trapping activities have been scientifically proven to provide reductions in flooding damage by beavers, minimizing disease risks in animal species, and provide critical tools for wildlife conservation and management.

The real test of trapping's relevance is the fact that it aligns with science. If humans were not present, perhaps the argument of *managing* wildlife populations wouldn't have as much bearing. However, we humans are not going away – in fact we push further into, and thereby disrupt, natural habitats. For years humans negatively impacted wild species of plants and animals through urban sprawl and unregulated activities. That changed when we began to focus on conserving, rather than mis-using, our wild natural resources.

With the implementation of hunting regulations, all regulated games species in Vermont now meet or exceed target goals of healthy abundance. So much so that abundant species must be managed through a controlled take to ensure supportable levels of carrying capacity, depredation on vulnerable prey species, and reducing human conflict.

Trappers today, as well as hunters and anglers, is where the rubber meets the road with regard to wildlife monitoring. Licensed trappers in Vermont supply yearly harvest reports which help biologists track individual species and identify population trends. Simply put: Trappers provide invaluable data to Vermont Fish & Wildlife about the overall health and abundance of Vermont's fur bearing species, and not only do they do this for free, they actually have to pay for the privilege to do so by buying a License.

Another important nexus of support for modern trapping is our own growing population and the resulting conflicts between humans and wildlife. As mentioned above, one of the modern aspects of managing wildlife is to ensure acceptable levels of carrying capacity; with one measure being tolerance by humans.

Many people look at hunting and fur trapping as negative impacts to wild species, when in reality, the irrefutable fact is that loss of habitat is the **biggest** detriment to wildlife today. Human intrusion into existing wildlife habitat shows little sign of slowing down, and as a result, we are guaranteed a future that will contend with displaced wildlife and human conflicts.

It's very easy to point blame and resentment at the licensed hunter or trapper for their utilization of abundant wildlife resources, but every home, every developed property, and general human activity accounts for more wildlife deaths annually than hunting and trapping combined. When conflicts with wildlife inevitably arise, it is typically a licensed trapper or hunter who is called.

Whether its flooding damage to roads, septic systems, or property from beavers; livestock or domestic pet depredation from predators; rabies, or furbearers making residence in and around our homes - licensed trappers handle the demand – usually performing this necessarry work at no cost to the landowner or taxpayers. States that have greatly reduced or restricted trapping activities through political debates have born witness to unforeseen financial costs that were born by taxpayers when commercially-driven tactics had to be employed to reduce overabundant furbearer populations. On this note, it is worthy to read the story of Chelmsford Massachusetts, and the overall negative effects of banning trapping in Massachusetts.

For years, trapping critics have asserted that trapping somehow *negatively* impacts endangered species. On the contrary, regulated trapping activities have been integral components of endangered species recovery programs around the world.

In Missouri for example, after River Otters was extirpated in certain parts of their traditional home ranges throughout the state, licensed trappers came in and used their skills to assist with trapping and relocation from areas where the animal had established itself.

In that case, the very same live-catch foothold traps utilized by trappers were used in the reintroduction process. These types of traps were also used for endangered species research with Canadian Lynx in Maine.

Licensed trappers have also lent their time and expertise to Fisher reintroduction in West Virginia and Pennsylvania, as well as studies on bobcat population health in New Hampshire. These examples and many like them would fail to be as successful without regulated trapping taking place.

There are thousands of ways for one to experience nature in Vermont. While most of us know the names of fur-bearers, and perhaps something about them, a trapper understands their quarry intimately. Out of

thousands of acres of land, a trapper must convince a wary and cautious creature to pass through a specifc path, or step in a specific area.

This doesn't happen by luck. A trapper must fully and completely understand the habits of the animal he/she seeks to catch, and this can only be accomplished through years of close observation and study of that animal's traits, characteristics and behaviors. Trappers *know* the traits of animals they seek to catch; perhaps better than anyone else.

With parameters in place to *regulate* trapping, abundant wildlife populations are more strictly managed. For some species, such as coyotes or skunks, meat isn't all that palatable, but management practices *still need* to take place to ensure a healthy environmental balance. Rather than utilizing as a food source, these creatures can instead be used for other purposes.

Additionally, animals targeted by licensed trappers during regulated trapping seasons are utilized for more than just their pelts. For example, meat can often be used for meals. The pelt is used, as are the animal's scent glands for an array of purposes. The tail can be used as leather and there is some use for skulls and bones in educational or artistic markets. Essentially every part of the animal has a use and a purpose for the trapper. The same cannot be said for overabundant nuisance wildlife culled outside regulated seasons, or animals that are killed on roadways, expire from disease, or become displaced from habitat loss.

Trapping also provides financial support for conservation and wildlife. Since the inception of the Pittman-Robertson & Dingell-Johnson Acts, sportspeople have paved the way for a "pay to play" concept of ensuring conservation is always funded. Both acts utilize taxes on hunting and fishing equipment with the intent of assisting funding for state wildlife agencies and conservation-related programs. Hunters, Anglers and Trappers directly support conservation through these acts every time they purchase specific equipment pertaining to their outdoor activities.

Education programs, outreach events, educational specimens, and other forms of volunteered support are also furnished by hunters and trappers – without any demand for reimbursement other than the opportunity to share their immersion in the wild landscape with others.

The fact that there are not huge numbers of people that take part in this activity earns them the label of "minority" by some – but we have all learned that minorities are important - and their stature and relative importance should not be diminished on that basis.