

Chair, Representative Sheldon, et. al. :

I respectfully ask you to vote NO on S.258. There is no sound basis nor need for this bill. The Fish and Wildlife Board is charged with writing regulations for Hunting, Fishing, and Trapping. It has available to it biologists from the F&W Dept. to assist in its decision making. A model that has worked well for decades. Much of S.258 is based on personal emotions, and to be honest an effort to change the Board make-up to members who are opposed to the hunting, fishing, and trapping culture as we know it.

Book learning is not the same as people who actively participate in hunting, fishing, and trapping. That would be why the Board is primarily composed of “consumptive” users. These same individuals whose license purchases fund the department, along with an 11% excise tax on hunting and archery supplies (Pittman-Robertson) and a 10% excise tax on sport fishing equipment (Dingell-Johnson). We are not “bad” people, we have always been conservationists.

Keeping appointments to the Board, at the governor’s level minimizes partisan politics, keeping the Board as the writer of regulations, not in advisory role, keeps politics out of the rules (Commissioners are a political animal).

Statistics from the F&W Dept show that in 2023 – Vermont residents held 106,964 fishing, hunting, or combination licenses. Certainly a significant percentage (17%) of our population (2020 census). Additionally the F&W Dept estimates that 30-40% of Vermont households had a member that either purchased a license or were supportive of hunting, fishing and trapping. Think retired license holders, or family members who grew up in a household that hunted, fished , or trapped, but who don’t actively participate themselves. We are a significant component of the Vermont population.

As an aside, Vermon residents also purchased (2023) 1838 trapping licenses, 81,903 add on licenses ( archery, early bear, muzzleloader, turkey, and novice) and 49,410 out of staters purchased hunting, fishing, or combination licenses.

**Why this bill is wrong;**

**Changing the makeup of the board to add 2 non consumptive members is fine.**

**Immediately “firing” the existing Board members and starting over from scratch with all new Board members Immediately, which removes all institutional Board knowledge, is not acceptable.** Allowing the new Board members to serve up to 2 terms (12 years) creates its own issues. Board terms are currently a once in a lifetime of 6 years (full term appointment) , which keeps the board’s perspective fresh and negates forming of “cliques”. **Should this bill pass,**

**existing Board members need to be retained to serve out their terms, with new members added as existing appointments expire.**

**Banning hunting coyotes with dogs –**

The Board, at the legislature's request, created rules for this hunting activity, due to go into effect this year. A trial ruling. This bill cuts this off before even implemented. Somebody (from the anti- hunting community) didn't get their way with the Board, so a now a run around tactic. And to be sure this represents the first step in the of banning "hounding".

**Banning coyote hunting over bait.**

As there is no science behind this prohibition, it stands out as one of the first steps at tearing apart our hunting activities. To be sure, coyotes are here to stay, they are a major part of our wildlife. As such their population needs to be controlled.

You don't hunt coyotes like you do deer. They are wary of us, hesitant to come to a call, and they hunt mostly at night.

Coyotes are the apex predator in the wild. Coyotes weighing 50 – 60 pounds are not uncommon. Their predation on new fawns is legendary. They need to eat throughout the year; game species such as turkeys, rabbits, grouse, and deer. Non game species such as house cats, dogs, chickens, rubbish/garbage in the garage (new species). Hunting them not only keeps the population in check, it instills a healthy fear (respect) for humans. They need to eat to survive.

Ever been in the woods (day or night) when a pack of coyotes opens up (yipping) near you? Makes the hairs on the back of the neck stand up (very primal). Not a bad thing, just saying. More disconcerting when you have small dogs with you, and they are tracking you. A potential meal for those who are hungry and bold.

Hunting dogs (think rabbit dogs) are not uncommon targets, even while actively hunting rabbits with hunters immediately present.

In conclusion, please vote no on this bill.

Thank you

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