

To all Vermont hunting and fishing enthusiasts: A bill was recently voted out of the Vermont Senate called S.258 and was put before the Vermont House of Representatives.

This bill would effectively change the way the Fish & Wildlife Board is made up. Currently one member from each county is appointed by the Governor. Generally these have been individuals who are knowledgeable about hunting, fishing, and the outdoors. Regulations are brought to the Board by the Department and after public hearings and with the advice of the Department experts, they decide on the proposed regulations. This Board has worked successfully in this manner for many years. It has been part of the success story of the wild turkey, black bear, and moose population rebound, a healthy deer herd and most every species of animal in our Vermont woods. They've also been involved with many land acquisitions by the Department that are used by both hunters and non-hunters.

I have some concerns with proposed changes to the makeup of the board to include both non hunters and fisherman but I can live with those changes. I'll trust the legislators to make informed decisions about who they appoint. The biggest problem I see is the proposal to turn this Board into a strictly advisory role and give all the power to make regulatory changes to the Commissioner of the F&G Department...an appointed political position. We currently have a sort of checks and balances system. The Board would now have no final veto power over the Commissioner. It would be strictly advisory. We've had this system working well for many years...why change it now?

The second big part of this bill is an attempt to ban all coyote hunting with dogs. In spite of the hunting with dogs, both coyote and bear populations have grown. That Board we just talked about has successfully managed the seasons. I'm afraid a ban on coyote hunting will lead to a ban on bear and other outdoor sports that use dogs. These hunters serve as an integral part of the management of these populations. In any case, this part of the proposed legislation should be dumped into the lap of that same Board we've been talking about. It has no place in this legislation. If changes need to be made to current regulations, let the experts on the Board and the Department make them.

If you are still reading this long- winded explanation of my opposition to this piece of legislation, I thank you. For those that don't know me well or at all, a little on my background. I'm a native Vermonter and a 1974 graduate of the University of Vermont with a degree in forest management. I took many wildlife management classes in the pursuit of my degree. I've lived in Shaftsbury and worked as a forester in Vermont continuously since my graduation. I spent 10 years working for the Vermont Fish and Game Department as a Deputy Warden and consequently have a good working knowledge of their job and the workings of the Department. I feel I have the expertise and experience to speak on this

subject and intend to testify before the House given the chance. My Shaftsbury Representative has promised me this opportunity.

Friends and neighbors, please take a minute to reach out to your local Representative to express your opinion. Feel free to express your questions or opinions to me and I'll do my best to answer questions you may have.

Thank you again.

Sincerely

William Sargent

sargentw@myfairpoint.net