

Dear Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy,

I sent my thoughts on the As-Introduced version of S.258 to Senator Bray on 1/23. After hearing the testimony this week, I think my initial thoughts were pretty well represented by those who testified from the hunting community. I have not had a chance to review the revised bill.

That said, I have a few more thoughts to offer that do not come directly from my initial frustration. In watching recordings of testimony, I heard some experiences from fellow Vermonters that I would never want anyone to have to go through. I understand that there are Vermonters who are not opposed to all forms of hunting who support this bill.

While very difficult, I am going to set aside my judgment on the motivations of supporters of this bill. I understand that among supporters of S.258 there is a wide spectrum of support for hunting, fishing, and trapping, and that there are legitimate grievances in certain instances. Please understand that there are a spectrum of us hunters too who do not support this bill and stand united to protect our heritage from the threat of those who wish to end all forms of hunting, fishing, and trapping. Again, I am not saying that is the intent here, but it is the stated goal of at least one entity that provided testimony to support the bill. Additionally, the bill cracks open the door for this potential in the future, and that is why many of us are concerned.

I have identified below what I heard the primary injurious grievances to be, and what I think are alternative solutions that do not require the drastic measures contained in S.258.

1. Attacks on or pursuit of humans and dogs by hunting dogs
2. Dogs mistakenly shot by hunters
3. Dogs "trespassing" on private property (I use quotations not in a pejorative sense, but because this term has a meaning which cannot apply to dogs but for which I don't have a better word)
4. Concerns of non-hunters not being incorporated by the Fish & Wildlife Board into rules and regulations

Dogs that attack humans and other dogs are not trained dogs. We have a separate trappers safety course required to obtain a trapping license. The legislature could require the Department to adopt rules for a hound hunters safety course that includes proper training of dogs. Maybe it could also be a requirement that new houndsmen must apprentice first with a permitted houndsman before being eligible to obtain a permit themselves.

Additionally, hunters that mistake dogs for coyotes and kill them are already subject to criminal and civil penalties depending on the circumstances. We can minimize bad actors with penalties for wrongdoing, but we will never eliminate them in any realm of life. We do not need to eliminate the activity simply because we cannot control everyone's actions who participates in that activity. We should also refrain from moral judgement of those abiding by the law and not harming individuals. Again, my heart goes out to those affected by these bad actors. I would never wish that on anyone. I just do not agree with taking the activity away from everyone because of a select few.

Regarding trespass, many houndsmen have been running dogs for generations. Vermont land used to comprise large tracts, but has shifted to a fragmentation of parcels as the state has

grown in population. I do not want to get into native vs non-native Vermonters and who has more right to be here and what they do here. I myself am a transplant from New Hampshire (sorry I brought my conservatism with me). However, we should be understanding that houndsmen are simply continuing to express their culture on lands once open to all in a time of changing private property culture. I don't think it is fair to take that from them simply because our population continues to grow. We need to learn to live with and have tolerance for each other. While I do not have a great solution for the issue of dogs entering other people's property, maybe there are certain zones that are too densely populated that need to be excluded from hound hunting, or maybe a working group can be required to develop best management practices for running hounds. Something that attempts to remedy/limit conflict but still allows the activity. Again, I don't know the answer, but it does not have to be S.258.

I understand the need for acting on concerns of non-hunters as they relate to Items 1-3 above. However, I believe that can be done with targeted legislation rather than with S.258. Regarding non-hunter concerns about method of take and which species should or should not be hunted, their concerns should be voiced to and heard by the F&W Board, but the biological science and tools (methods of take) necessary to manage wildlife populations should drive the decision making. I know that this argument has been made to this Committee before in regard to bear hounding, but I will state it again as an example. If we decide that bears are acceptable to hunt, which I know some Vermonters wish they were not, then we need to have the right tools to allow bears to be taken in a responsible manner. Treeing a bear with hounds is the best way outside of baiting to ensure you are killing a mature boar and not a sow with cubs. Hounding for bears is an important tool that seems cruel on the surface to some, but that is very effective for achieving a desired management goal of healthy bear populations.

Regarding requiring a certain makeup of the board, what about the Committee you serve on? Where are the hunters, climate scientists, wildlife biologists/ecologists, energy professionals, geologists, foresters, heck where are the Republicans? Your own committee could be seen as a monolith of political/cultural perspective, and yet I bet you do not see it that way. Similarly, we hunters do not view the current F&W Board as a monolith either.

Finally I would like to make a clarification regarding a testimonial statement on the F&W Board meeting on 2/21 in which declining mallard populations were discussed. This is not an issue of over harvest by hunters but a product of low productivity among wild mallards due to cross breeding with pen raised mallards. The following article has more information on this topic: <https://www.utep.edu/newsfeed/campus/utep-professor-smithsonian-researchers-make-genetic-discoveries-related-to-north-american-ducks.html>

Thank you for listening and for allowing more time to discuss this bill. I urge you to consider more targeted legislation as I have suggested above. I agree with Senator Bray that we can work together to get this right. Similar to past legislation, not everyone is going to be happy with the result, but that probably means we are doing it right.

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