



To: Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy
115 State Street
Room 8
Montpelier, VT 05633

Re: Senate Bill 258 – An Act Relating to the Management of Fish and Wildlife

Position: Oppose

Date: 2/21/2024

Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy,

My name is Fred Bird, and I am the Northeastern States Assistant Manager for the Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation (CSF), Vermont hunting license holder, and prior New Hampshire Fish and Game Commissioner for Strafford County representing over 137,000 constituents. I write to you today in opposition to Senate Bill 258 (SB 258). Of concern, are the proposed significant changes to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board, the nomination process, and the proposal allocating the legislature four Board members from both the Senate and the House of Representatives (8 total), and only allowing the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Commissioner four seats to fill. Additionally, the proposal to add “nonconsumptive” Board members is also problematic. Section 5 of SB 258 defines nonconsumptive use of wildlife as, “watching, photographing, listening to wildlife, and similar other activities without engaging in hunting, fishing, trapping, or any other form of extraction.” This change would open the Board to obstructionist individuals and organizations, who would qualify under the proposed language, but are hostile to the mission of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department.

Founded in 1989, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF) is the informed authority across outdoor issues and serves as the primary conduit for influencing public policy. Working with the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus (CSC), the Governors Sportsmen's Caucus (GSC), and the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses (NASC), CSF gives a voice to hunters, anglers, recreational shooters, and trappers on Capitol Hill and throughout state capitols advocating on vital outdoor issues that are the backbone of our nation's conservation legacy.

Established with the dedicated purpose of protecting and conserving wildlife, game commissions and boards have been understandably comprised of individuals with demonstrated knowledge of conservation principles, including experience with hunting and fishing as the primary drivers of

state-level conservation in this nation. The ability of boards and commissions to make responsible and effective decisions regarding wildlife management has become contested through non-sportsmen and women pushing for seats on game commissions. Having Board members that are neutral on the matter, or are even directly opposed to hunting, trapping, and fishing leads to obstructionism which, in turn, will potentially restrict access and opportunity for sportsmen and women. The pressure for “nonconsumptive” seats on game commissions and boards directly threatens the future of conservation. One only needs to look west to states like Oregon and Washington to observe examples of why such changes to commissions and boards become more than problematic. In those states, recent commission decisions have become outright hostile to sound wildlife management, turned conservation doctrine into preservationist goal setting, and, in some cases, commissions have sought to ban the very systems and traditions that fund, maintain, and conserve balanced and healthy habitats.

Finally, SB 258 seeks to address and prohibit longstanding practices and traditions as it concerns the taking of coyotes with the aid of trained hounds and baiting practices. Both effective and ethical means of assisting take, prohibitions of such methods would disrupt the management practices of this predatory species. With no natural predators on the landscape, coyote management is left to sportsmen and women who elect to pursue such quarry at the direction of, and prescribed methodology from the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, which includes both of the approved aforementioned means of assisting take.

I respectfully request that the members of this Committee oppose the passage of Senate Bill 258 and protect the authority and integrity of the rules and season setting of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department Board. I appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments and welcome any questions that you may have. Should you require additional information on this, or other sportsmen-related topics, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,



Fred Bird
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