

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy  
Testimony for S.258- An act relating to the management of fish and wildlife

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Rod Coronado and I am a resident of the Town of Orange where I have lived for the past five years and work as the wildlife programs director for the 600-acre Sage Mountain Botanical Sanctuary. I am also the state director of the newly registered non-profit advocacy group, Vermont Wildlife Patrol, which succeeded Wolf Patrol, a non-profit I started in Wisconsin in 2015 to investigate and monitor the growing conflict between hound hunters and gray wolves. A large part of my monitoring in Wisconsin related to coyote hunting with dogs.

Since 2015, I have published over 250 videos on the Wolf Patrol YouTube channel intended to raise awareness and encourage citizen engagement on controversial hunting and trapping practices such as hunting coyotes with dogs. My crew and I adhere to all local, state, tribal and federal laws and I have personally reported suspected violations of hunting and trapping rules that I have documented to wildlife agencies in eight different states, including Vermont.

I did not move to Vermont with the intention of continuing my citizen monitoring of hound hunting and trapping practices. I moved here because my partner, Emily Ruff purchased the 600-acres we live and work on and I was more than happy to become the caretaker for an important wildlife corridor in Orange County. Within a year of moving here, we had our first case of trespassing hounds on our botanical and wildlife preserve. A year later, the same individual again came onto our lands asking to retrieve his loose hounds from our legally enclosed (posted) lands. The following year, I discovered hound hunters again on neighboring property that we manage for our non-resident neighbors.

Before the pandemic, I testified once to this committee on legislation related to hunting bears with hounds, but it was the introduction of legislation that led to Acts 159 & 165 related to coyote hunting with dogs and trapping, that compelled me to investigate these practices in Vermont, in part to determine whether the conflicts I've witnessed in Wisconsin, also were occurring in my new home state.

In January 2022, I met a resident of Shoreham, Vermont who was having conflicts with coyote hound hunters. I told him I wanted to document such activities as evidence to provide to the public and the legislature about these practices in the state. The resident told me every Saturday early morning in winter, "like clockwork" coyote hound hunters would loose their hunting dogs in the area in pursuit of coyote, sometimes trespassing onto their posted private property. The very next Saturday morning, as I was driving

through the area the resident told me about, a loose hunting hound crossed so close in front of me that I had to slam on my brakes to avoid hitting the animal. That same day I witnessed as a coyote hound hunter stood on the road with a loaded rifle waiting for his dogs to push a coyote onto the road where he could take a shot.

I've provided the Committee members with a much more recent report on my monitoring of coyote hound hunters in Vermont and how I believe it is possible to control loose hounds when kept within sight and/or audio range, only the Fish & Wildlife Board refuses to set the bar that high for hound hunters. There are good and bad hound hunters. Some can control their dogs and some cannot. The current rules support and enable those who cannot.

In regards to baiting for coyotes, in both Shoreham in 2022 and more recently Caledonia County earlier this month, I documented hound hunters using bait to intentionally attract coyotes. Let me say this about my work monitoring the conflicts with hound hunters in Wisconsin. The number one cause of those conflicts related to the intentionally baiting for bears because it also attracted other animals such as wolves which will kill hunting dogs, on average about a dozen annually.

Like Wisconsin, as wolves successfully recolonize former habitat where they were previously hunted to extinction, they will often have conflicts with hound hunters who have grown accustomed to running their dogs in areas previously free from such dangers. In Wisconsin, I have personally discovered fish hooks wrapped in meat and hung in the forest with fishing line so wolves and other predators would eat them, in order to cause a slow and inhumane death. Poisoning is another ongoing problem, especially in the areas where hound hunters have suffered depredations from wolves.

These are the kinds of conflicts with coyote and bear hound hunters I fear will occur in Vermont as wolves and other extirpated predators return to our landscape. Either through natural recolonization or human-assisted reintroduction efforts. Eliminating baiting for coyotes AND hunting coyotes with dogs is a positive step towards avoiding such unfortunate conflicts with people and wildlife.

This leads me to Fish & Wildlife Board reform. For over a year I have regularly attended board meetings to speak on a variety of topics, which I've included links to with this testimony. Much of my testimony has related to my support for the restoration of extirpated species. So when I heard the Commissioner and others testifying to the "abundance and flourishing of Vermont's wildlife" I think of the American marten, Canada lynx, eastern cougar, gray wolf, elk and caribou that until recently roamed the Green Mountains. Those species are not flourishing and abundant.

At a recent Board meeting I listened to the Dept's moose and deer biologist, Nick Fortin speak of our need to manage our deer herd and that "we needed another lever to pull" to bring numbers within management goals because the Dept is simply not selling enough hunting licenses to meet those goals. Where is the consideration for native predators like the wolf and cougar who once helped maintain the ecological balance in this state?

We need a board that recognizes the role native predators fulfill in helping maintain a healthy deer population. Did you know that next week two board terms expire? I am watching closely to see if our Governor is listening to this discussion or whether he will simply appoint two more outspoken advocates of trapping and hound hunting as he has with the most recent appointment of two trappers to the board in 2023.

We can't only protect the parts of an eco-system that serve humans. The mission of the board and the Dept is to protect all wildlife. The board's role has been to protect game animals and furbearers, but we need a new board that recognizes the interconnectedness of all beings. Especially as we increasingly address the impacts of climate change on our wildlife.

Did you know that the eastern mallard population in Vermont and other New England states has declined 38% since 1998? You'd think the board would be restricting the bag limit for the species, but when they tried that before, it negatively impacted hunting opportunities. It wasn't worth hunting a duck you could only kill two a day. The current proposed daily bag limit is 4 with a total possession limit of 18 mallards.

We need a board that acts in the best interests of the species before the the interests of hunters, trappers and fisherfolk. That is the challenge and mission we face today and why I support S.258. I learned about the mallard decline at the board meeting last night and from conversations with a board member. By the way, it took me just over a year of attending board meetings before any member spoke to me at a meeting. Last night, I told the board that my representative for Orange County has never reached out to speak to me, despite my having been his only constituent to regularly attend so many board meetings in person and speak to important wildlife issues. During a break in the meeting last night, he finally came over to me and thanked me for calling him out on this and agreed that it was time for a discussion.

It shouldn't take any Vermonter who is informed and passionate about wildlife a year before their voice is heard by their representative. We need a board that can work with a variety of constituents who recreate and enjoy being outdoors in nature, not only trappers, hunters and fisherfolk.

In closing I'd like to say that because of my views on wildlife, I do not want to be seen as an enemy of the board and Dept, but as an ally. I am guardedly optimistic and even excited at the possibility of being equally represented by my fish & wildlife board, not only as someone who enjoys trout fishing every Spring from my kayak in Rood Pond, or as a lover of all things wild, but possibly most importantly, as an indigenous person with my own traditional worldview. That kind of representation and recognition helps end literally centuries of mis-representation and oppression by our dominant society. How cool is that?

#### Rod Coronado's Testimonies at Vermont Fish & Wildlife Board Meetings 2023-24

[February 15, 2023 6:45 Wolf restoration](#)

[March 15, 2023 15:10 BMPs for body-gripping traps](#)

[May 25, 2023 5:05 Trapping/ Trapper surveys](#)

[July 26, 2023 9:40 BMPs for body-gripping traps](#)

[September 20, 2023 9:00 Sale of bear gallbladders](#)

[October 18, 2023 8:30 Petition to prohibit shooting sows with cubs](#)

[November 30, 2023 4:05 Indigenous perspective/Response to LCAR hearing](#)

[December 14, 2024 10:00 No public process for use of gas chambers/ BMPs for body-gripping traps](#)

[January 17, 2024 10:30 Coyote hunting with dogs](#)



Over 500 year old Pawtucket bear effigy discovered in present-day Massachusetts.