

Emailed Testimony from John Aberth, January 28, 2025

Dear Representative Sheldon:

I was interested to see that the House Environment and Energy Committee is holding a session on beavers on Wednesday at 9:00 am. I'm planning on attending, but I wanted to respectfully offer some testimony/thoughts for you to consider when hearing the testimony of the four experts listed: Brehan Furfey, Furbearer Project Leader, Department of Fish and Wildlife; Will Duane, Land Acquisition Coordinator, Department of Fish and Wildlife; Ben Goldfarb, Environmental Journalist and Author; Shane Jaquith, Watershed Restoration Manager, The Nature Conservatory.

Here's my testimony:

I am a licensed volunteer wildlife rehabilitator, who has successfully rehabbed orphaned beaver kits (a 2-year process!) and who specializes in beaver rehab. I have spoken about my rehab experiences at BeaverCon, a biennial international conference on beavers that was held on Oct. 19-24, 2024 at the campus of the University of Colorado-Boulder. I am also publishing a book on my beaver rehab, *Bringing Up Beaver*, which is coming out with Pegasus Books/Simon and Schuster in August.

As I'm sure you will hear on Wednesday, beavers on the landscape bring a host of benefits to humans and to other species of wildlife. This includes creating wetland habitats that have been compared to rainforests and coral reefs in terms of the biodiversity they support. Beaver Ponds also stabilize watersheds, act as water purifiers, aid in trout/salmon recovery efforts, replenish aquifers and store water in time of droughts; act as catchment areas to minimize flooding damage; act as wildfire breaks; and act as carbon sinks to fight climate change and global warming. All these benefits have been trumpeted by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife in their presentations on beavers.

However, there is a massive disconnect between celebrating these benefits, and the Fish and Wildlife Department's management policy towards beavers--namely, their licensing and promotion of the virtually unrestricted recreational trapping and killing of these animals. The trapping season for beavers--from the fourth Saturday of October until the end of March--runs for nearly half a year and is one of the longest seasons in the country. There are currently no restrictions on how many people can obtain a license to trap beavers, nor on how many traps individual trappers can set to trap beavers. There is currently no bag limit on how many beavers a trapper can trap and kill.

Based on the most current, ten-year average for trapping seasons between 2013-14 and 2023-24, an average of 1174 beavers are trapped every year in Vermont (*Vermont Furbearer Newsletter*, volume 20, p. 6). This underestimates the true number of beavers killed, since hundreds more are trapped every year as "nuisance" animals by VTrans, town road crews, and by private landowners under Vermont statute title 10 §4828. It is also likely that many young beavers die long-slow deaths from exposure/starvation in the lodge when their parents or adults are trapped. Even though the trapping season is meant to avoid orphaning beavers born in the spring, trapping inevitably orphans beavers born the previous year who are less than a

year old and are still being raised by their parents. (Beaver kits stay with their parents for two years before dispersal.)

Furfey and Duane should be questioned as to why the Department still aggressively promotes and supports trapping of beavers when this deprives all Vermonters of the many benefits that beavers bring when alive, and working for us, on the landscape. According to the Department, there are only 279 active trappers, representing just .04 percent of Vermont's overall population, yet these trappers have an outsized impact upon Vermont's beaver population. The trapping of 1174 beavers every year means that hundreds of acres of beaver-managed wetlands are lost every year, without the beavers alive to maintain them. This then means that 99.96 percent of Vermonters are deprived of any benefits from beavers, whether this be mitigating climate change, minimizing the risk of flooding, creating habitats for viewing other wildlife, etc. It is not fair that an elite group of people--trappers--hoard this precious natural resource for their own private use at the expense of the overall public good. Beavers are far more valuable alive and working for us on the landscape, than hanging up dead in a trapper's shed.

I respectfully suggest that, in consideration of all the valuable and urgently needed benefits beavers bring to Vermonters, that legislators consider the banning of the recreational trapping of beavers. Ideally, we should ban the recreational trapping of all furbearers, since predators like coyotes, foxes, bobcats, fishers, etc. are our front-line defense against Lyme Disease, through their hunting of mice, a key host of *Borrelium burgdorferi*, the bacterium that causes Lyme.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

John Aberth
Flint Brook Wildlife Rescue
Roxbury, VT
(802) 485-8876