

December 9, 2018

Dear Governor Scott:

Our organizations met with you in August concerning challenges we've experienced with the current model for the management of Vermont's fish and wildlife. Our hope is that we can work towards including individuals on the Fish & Wildlife Board who represent a broader range of interests and expertise. Our organizations collectively represent citizens who are farmers, wildlife biologists and photographers, anglers, outdoor enthusiasts, veterinarians, lawyers, and many others.

One of our ongoing concerns is the current make-up of the Fish & Wildlife Board (FWB) that is comprised solely of hunters, trappers, and a taxidermist who are tasked with essentially making public policy decisions while representing only a very narrow range of interests and expertise. For example, only 0.15% of Vermonters trap, yet there are two trappers, possibly more, who sit on the Board. Three counties are up for appointment of Board members in February: Washington, Orange and Franklin counties. **It is our hope that you will consider appointing Board members who are more representative of the state's population with regard to how wildlife and its management are viewed, and who could bring to the table relevant and diverse expertise that is lacking on the current Board.**

If the Fish & Wildlife Department (FWD) and Board are to reach a broad range of Vermonters to support their future efforts then the general public needs to feel represented. While the FWB holds mandatory hearings for all rulemaking, non-consumptive members of the public too often walk away with the impression that the hearings are nothing more than a formality.

We urge you to appoint non-hunting/trapping members to the FWB and pave the way for a model that offers more democracy in the process. We appreciate that the FWB is responsible for the regulation of “fish and wild game and the taking thereof”, but that duty must be exercised with the understanding that the fish and wildlife of Vermont are held in trust by the State for the benefit of all citizens of Vermont.

Non-hunters/trappers can bring a wealth of expertise to the Board, but have yet to be given that opportunity. We believe that a more diverse Board will offer better representation and diverse views and expertise, with the end goals of instilling trust in the general public and bringing wildlife management into the 21st Century. Without representation from non-consumptive Vermonters, the public will continue to feel disenfranchised and less likely to support the Department and the Board, whether it be by donating to the non-game fund or allowing hunting on their land.

The disenfranchisement of the public at large from the Board and from the leadership at the Department is creating an atmosphere of growing antagonism that is impacting Department staff, FWB members, and the public. This open wound in Vermont’s governance is simply not healthy, nor reflective of responsible leadership. Ignoring this deep rift will only exacerbate the problem.

We look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance.

Green Mountain Animal Defenders
Humane Society of the United States, Vermont
Protect Our Wildlife
Vermont Coyote Coexistence Coalition
Vermont Humane Federation
Vermont Wildlife Coalition