



April 20, 2018

To: Senate Committee on Natural Resources & Energy

Re: Testimony on H.636

I'm Brenna Galdenzi, President and Co-Founder of Protect Our Wildlife, a Vermont all-volunteer, grassroots, nonprofit organization. I thank you for the opportunity to testify to your Committee regarding bill H.636. I would like to focus my testimony on three components of H.636: **the killing of wildlife for compensation performed by nuisance wildlife control operators (NWCOs); the reporting of trapped pets; and the ban on coyote killing contests.** We are only requesting an amendment on the reporting of trapped pets section.

We are grateful to the House Committee on Fish & Wildlife's Chair, and other Committee members, for including meaningful wildlife protection language in an earlier version of the bill. The bill included a section on the training and licensing of **Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators (referred to as NWCOs)** and reporting of the animals they kill. Killing wildlife for compensation is completely unregulated in Vermont. It results in unnecessary and cruel methods of killing animals, including drowning and bludgeoning, often leaving young animals orphaned since the activity mainly occurs in the spring and summer months. Some of you may have heard about a NWCO in Bennington who recently

admitted to killing opossums because he thought that they were a rabies vector species - they are not. In fact, opossums rarely contract rabies due to their low body temperature. How a person operating in this capacity doesn't know this basic information is concerning. That's like a legislator not knowing where the Statehouse is. Another NWCO trapped a blue heron in a trap he set last year to trap "nuisance" beavers. Perhaps if these NWCOs had training, including non-lethal options, these unfortunate incidents could've been avoided.

We understand that the House Committee on Fish & Wildlife felt that they did not have enough time to fully take up all of the items, so we are now left with the current version of H.636. The current version of the bill allows the Fish & Wildlife Board to promulgate rules on NWCO activities, if they choose to do so. We had hoped we could accomplish this via the legislature, mainly due to problems wildlife advocates have had in the past with the Board. We hope that the Board will realize the urgency in addressing this activity, that not only presents ethical issues, but also public safety and consumer protection concerns.

Reporting of Trapped Dogs and Cats – *this is the only section of the bill where we're seeking an amendment*

The current language on the reporting of trapped pets offers cats and dogs and pet owners very little and will result in incomplete reporting. If it cannot be amended, it should be omitted to avoid confusion.

The language currently reads:

Page 23, Sec. 10. 10 V.S.A. § 4254c

§ 4254c. NOTICE OF TRAPPING; DOMESTIC PET

*A person who incidentally traps a **domestic pet** found to be **injured or killed** shall notify a fish and wildlife warden **if the contact identification for the owner of the domestic pet is readily available.***

Problems with this are as follows: “domestic pet” does not necessarily cover cats because it is impossible for a trapper to know if a cat is domesticated or a stray or feral. Senator Rodgers asked why should trappers report if they trap a feral cat – as someone who volunteers for a nonprofit dog and cat rescue in Lamoille county, I can attest to the fact that it is impossible to determine whether a frightened cat is indeed feral or a housecat. This is why all cats (and dogs) need to be reported.

Also, the way this is written only requires a trapper to report if the trapper believes the pet to be injured or killed AND if the animal has identification. Many animals don’t wear visible ID, especially if they are microchipped and determining whether a pet is injured is difficult since injuries may not be visible. Broken toes, broken teeth, dislocated joints, and other injuries are commonly sustained by animals caught in traps.

In order to ensure full reporting, and what was originally intended, it should be amended to read: **Any person who incidentally traps a cat, dog, or domestic animal, shall notify a fish and game warden or the Department within 24 hours. The owner of the animal shall be notified as soon as possible if the identity of the owner is known or easily determined. The Department shall maintain records of all animals reported pursuant to this section and shall include the disposition of each animal.**

This language ensures that all cats and dogs who are trapped, are reported to Fish & Wildlife and the owner is notified when possible. Since trapping is inherently indiscriminate and occurs on our public lands, with no required setbacks from trails or signage, the public has a right to know when dogs (and cats) are trapped so they can take necessary precautions. Commissioner Porter testified on April 20th stating that he does not feel that his Department should be responsible for maintaining records of trapped pets – we disagree. His Department oversees and manages trapping, and an unfortunate reality of

trapping is that dogs and cats are caught. Therefore, reporting and recordkeeping of these non-target captures are indeed his responsibility.

Ban on Coyote Killing Contests

I won't spend a lot of time on this issue, since there has been a lot of media attention, emails, letters and prior testimony as to the need to ban these contests. My organization has received emails from hunters, farmers, landowners and other stakeholders who oppose this activity that casts a dark shadow on Vermont. Since last fall, we've received emails from people across the state who plan to post their land in protest if these contests aren't made illegal - we currently have a list of landowners totaling ~850 acres. They feel as though posting their land is the only way they'll be heard by Fish & Wildlife. Banning these killing contests is something we can all come together on in a bipartisan fashion and accomplish for Vermont.

In closing, we ask that the Committee move this bill out of Committee with our one requested amendment that will offer more clarity and mitigate confusion on trapped dogs and cats.

With gratitude,
Brenna Galdenzi