

February 5, 2024

Rhode Island House Environment and Natural Resources Committee

RE: SUPPORT House Bill 7294 to prohibit unsporting captive hunts

Dear Chair Benett and Honorable Members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

The captive, or *canned* “hunts” at issue in this bill are macabre setups in confined spaces wherein paying customers are guaranteed kills of trophy-worthy species under conditions that offer no chance of survival for the targeted animals. Confinement can be as restrictive as tethering, caging, or penning an animal to offering free range on a pseudo-preserve or game farm, but even free ranging animals follow habitual daily patterns, ensuring they will wander predictably into the crosshairs of anyone waiting patiently at the food and water stations.

Most animals in captive hunts have been captive bred—even bottle-fed by humans—or recycled from roadside zoos and circuses. Some have been genetically engineered with traits that make them more desirable as trophies. They typically have no fear of humans. In a recent blog post by the Humane Society of the United States, the authors testified, “The animals are so tame that when we conducted an undercover investigation into canned hunting ranches a few years back, the investigators could walk up to them and hug them. One Texas canned hunt operator even admitted to tranquilizing his animals when people paid him to (Amundson & Block, 2021).

Unfortunately for the victims in these organized hits, marksmanship and skill are not priorities of the “hunters,” who may not even be licensed. Captive hunting facilities cater to rich businessmen with resort-style amenities and taxidermy services. Rather than dispatch their victims mercifully, the shooters are more concerned with taking shots that won’t damage the heads and necks they intend to mount on their office walls. Animals consequently suffer multiple shots to the abdomen and non-vital organs and die agonizing, drawn out deaths.

Species including giraffes, lions, zebras, rhinoceros, kangaroos, oryx, bears, bison, and others—many endangered—are typically targets in canned hunts. Loopholes in federal law allow for the slaughter of privately-owned endangered species, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service permits hunting protected species under weak justifications that the revenue generated from the hunts contributes to conservation efforts.

In fact, canned hunting presents a much higher threat to the environment than it claims to remedy. The importation and confinement of exotic and nonnative species presents a significant threat of diseases, such as chronic wasting disease, tuberculosis, and brucellosis. The National Deer Association spoke out against canned hunting in Rhode Island last year when this legislation was proposed, citing the threat of disease and genetic defects, as well as issues of fair chase.

I respectfully ask you to prevent the barbaric practice of captive hunting in Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

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Duignan, B. (2017, May 16). *Fish in a Barrel, Lions in a Cage: Canned Hunting in the U.S. and South Africa*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/story/fish-in-a-barrel-lions-in-a-cage-canned-hunting-in-the-us-and-south-africa>

Kornak, A. (2023). *Action Alert: Oppose Captive Big Game Hunting in Rhode Island*. <https://deerassociation.com/action-alert-oppose-captive-big-game-hunting-in-rhode-island/>

Amundson, S. & Block, K. (2021). *Shooting Fish in a Barrel: U.S. Canned hunting Industry Offers 'Menus' of Rare Animals for a Thrill Kill*. [blog] <https://hslf.org/blog/2021/01/shooting-fish-barrel-us-canned-hunting-industry-offers-menus-rare-animals-thrill-kill>