



## NEW ENGLAND CHAPTER BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS & ANGLERS

April 4, 2024

To Chairman Bennett and members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

Re: BHA Support for RI - 2024 – H7562 – Relating to Fish and Wildlife – Furbearing Animals

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA) seeks to ensure North America's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing in a natural setting. Our members support the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, which asserts that wildlife is held in public trust as a scientifically managed resource for the benefit of all.

With these things in mind, **BHA urges the Committee to support H7562**, which seeks to remove scientific characterizations of certain species of wildlife from § 20-16-1 and directs the RI Department of Environmental Management (DEM) to define, by rule, a list of 'furbearers' for the purpose of the Chapter.

DEM is generally charged in § 20-1-1 to manage fish and wildlife through the establishment of seasons, setting of bag limits, and regulation of methods of take, and is more broadly tasked with establishing conservation policies utilizing best available science to conserve and perpetuate all species in the state. The agency carries out this duty primarily through its Fish & Wildlife Division, which is staffed with biologists, scientists, technicians, and other wildlife management professionals who are well equipped to handle this responsibility.

While we recognize that the General Assembly is the body empowered by RI's Constitution "*to provide for the conservation of the air, land, water, plant, animal, mineral and other natural resources of the state*", BHA generally supports assigning responsibility over wildlife to agencies, like DEM, so that the experts who are most familiar with resources can manage them. Specific to H7562, the characterization of wildlife in scientific terms such as order, family, genus, and species, which tends to change over time as our understanding of the natural world advances, is more appropriately handled by agency regulation, rather than State law.

Updating RI's General Laws to remove scientific characterizations of wildlife, and subsequently tasking DEM to promulgating rules that fulfill the purpose of § 20-16, is aligned with BHA's preferences for wildlife management. As a result, **BHA urges the Committee, and ultimately the entire RI General Assembly, to support H7562.**

Thank you for your consideration,

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