



RHODE ISLAND
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

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April 4, 2024

The Honorable David A. Bennett
Chairman
House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: H 7562 An Act Relating to Fish and Wildlife – Furbearing Animals

Dear Chairman Bennett,

Thank you for providing the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) the opportunity to comment on H 7562, which would repeal the list of protected furbearers in R.I. Gen. Laws § 20-16-1 and provide DEM with the authority to develop a furbearer list by regulation. DEM supports this legislation.

R.I. Gen. Laws 20-16-1 provides that protected furbearers shall not be hunted, pursued, shot, or trapped except in accordance with rules and regulations promulgated by DEM. Additionally, R.I. Gen. Laws § 20-16-2 specifies that protected furbearers may be taken if they are harming domestic animals or livestock, destroying or mutilating agricultural crops or fruit trees, causing clear-and-immediate economic damage to property, or creating a potential health hazard. Removing the list of protected furbearers from statute and providing DEM with the regulatory authority to determine which species are listed will provide flexibility to ensure that the list reflects the best available science and changing circumstances on the ground. For example, black bears are in the process of reestablishing a population in Rhode Island but cannot be legally taken if they are destroying crops or harming livestock because they are not among the species listed in statute.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on this legislation and would be pleased to make ourselves available as needed. Please feel free to contact Phillip Edwards, Chief of the DEM Division of Fish and Wildlife, at phillip.edwards@dem.ri.gov or Ken Ayars, Chief of the DEM Division of Agriculture and Forest Environment, at ken.ayars@dem.ri.gov should you have any additional questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

Terrence Gray, P.E.
Director

cc: Members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
The Honorable Thomas Noret
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Lynne Urbani, House Policy Director