



NEW ENGLAND BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS AND ANGLERS

February 20, 2019

To Chairman McNamara and the members of the House Committee on Health, Education and Welfare

Re: Rhode Island 2019 – H5130, Amendment to RI General Laws Chapter 20-19 “Canned Hunting Prohibited”

As the fastest growing organization of hunters and anglers in the nation, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA) seeks to ensure North America's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing in a natural setting. Our members recognize the need to protect and enhance opportunities in the few open spaces we have remaining. BHA supports the North American Wildlife Conservation Model, which asserts that wildlife held in public trust as a scientifically managed natural resource that can be enjoyed by all Americans. BHA also maintains that hunting should involve an element of skill, woodsmanship and challenge and promotes Fair Chase principals.

The position of the New England Chapter of BHA is that the hunting of members of the deer family, wild pig/boar, and other big game animals on shooting preserves or game ranches that are designed such that they cannot or is extremely unlikely that they escape during the hunt is in direct conflict with Fair Chase principals, and therefore we support the prohibition of “canned hunting.”

Importing wild animals would create serious threats to Rhode Island’s native ecosystems and wildlife. Chronic Wasting Disease, a deadly, untreatable, transmissible spongiform encephalopathy similar to Mad Cow Disease that affects all members of the deer family has been introduced to many states when deer, elk, and other species have been imported for the purposes of canned hunting and captive breeding operations. There is currently no method to reliably test for the disease in live animals, so screening and/or quarantine prior to or following importation is not an effective method to prevent the importation of Chronic Wasting Disease. Once introduced, Chronic Wasting Disease is long-lived in soils and water, and virtually impossible to eliminate from the ecosystem. If introduced, it is likely that a significant increase in management resources would be required to monitor the disease immediately and perpetually, and the long-term negative affect would be damaging to Rhode island’s native deer population and the state’s ability manage it.

The importing and/or keeping of wild hogs for canned hunting, including varieties descended from domestic pigs but now wild in many states, represent a second major threat to Rhode Island’s native ecosystem and wildlife. Wild hogs are notoriously difficult to contain in fenced enclosures and nearly impossible to eradicate if they escape and become established on the landscape. Wild hogs breed rapidly and are very destructive to commercial farms, residential neighborhoods and native ecosystems. If established, wild hogs would likely out-compete native wildlife such as whitetail deer, wild turkeys, and coyotes for resources due to their aggressive nature and would require significant resources to manage or eliminate from the ecosystem.

Changes to H5130 are needed to ensure the bill adequately addresses the tradition of Fair Chase, Chronic Wasting Disease, and risks of escaped hogs from confined animal hunting operations and importation of wildlife. Focusing on these threats will help ensure the sporting community’s support of the bill and addresses clear biological threats to Rhode Island’s wildlife and native ecosystems. In the context of these positions, New England BHA urges the House Committee on Health, Education and Welfare to make the following modifications to H5130:

- Modify the definition of “canned hunt” in paragraph (a) to focus on the taking of or attempting to take confined animals within an enclosure created by the deliberate use of fences, man-made structures, and natural barriers. Remove the terminology “trophy” and the language “*increasing the hunter’s chances of success*” and “*the animal is hunted primarily for the purposes of entertainment or the collection of all or part of the animal as a trophy.*” New England BHA supports hunters and anglers who legally pursue mature game animals that could be considered trophies using fair chase methods, and a successful hunt is often contingent on employing a strategy that has a high chance of success. It is likely impossible to prove one’s intention or motive to engage in the practice of hunting, and we believe that this language unnecessarily reaches beyond the purpose of the bill.
- Expand “(b) *No wild animal that is not native or domestic to this state may be imported into the state for purposes of conducting canned hunting*” to prohibit the importation of any animal for the purposes of conducting a canned hunt.
- Expand “(c) *No animal which has been genetically altered or cloned...*” to also prohibit artificial breeding of animals for the purposes of conducting a canned hunt.
- Add a statement to prohibit the confinement of native wildlife or use of domestic animals from within the state for the purpose of conducting a canned hunt, including but not limited to native wildlife such as whitetail deer and animals related to domestic livestock such as wild hogs, and to prohibit any animal that is imported as livestock or that animal’s offspring or descendants from ultimately being used for the purpose of conducting a canned hunt.

If adopted, these changes would protect the tradition of Fair Chase hunting in Rhode Island while minimizing threats to native ecosystems and wildlife from the importation and breeding of animals for use in canned hunts. Thank you for your consideration of our position.

Sincerely,

Michael Woods
Rhode Island State Leadership Team Chair
New England Chapter Board
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers