



» management decision-making. The Wildlife Coalition believes that F&G should manage wildlife with the goals of conservation and sustainability rather than just to maximize trapping and hunting opportunities. We believe that greater consideration should be placed on the ecological role wildlife plays in our ecosystem. For example, in finalizing trapping rules in 2018, there was little or no consideration given to the influence that predators, like foxes, fisher and coyotes have on the health of other species' populations or on ecosystem health.

The Role of Predators in the Environment

Research over the last 50 years has demonstrated many ecological values of predators. As top-down regulators of ecosystems, furbearing predators like foxes, bobcats, fishers and coyotes help to reduce populations of herbivores and rodents. The environment, including humans, benefits from this in the following ways:

- slowing or reducing over-browsing or overgrazing of plant communities,
- increasing prey species' population health by eliminating weak or sick individuals, and
- decreasing rodent populations, thus reducing potential hosts of Lyme Disease.

» Several species of furbearers are trapped or hunted in New Hampshire, including the lynx, bobcat, red fox, gray fox, coyote, fisher and marten. Of these, the populations of lynx, bobcat and marten have been overexploited and their seasons are now closed. The fisher season, closed for three decades in 30's, 40's and 50's and again during the late '70s, has since reopened, but the fisher population is once again threatened.

Furbearers that still have open seasons include the red fox, gray fox, fisher, and coyote. The red and gray foxes and fisher have been overexploited as evidenced by trappers' catch records compiled by F&G. Their populations have decreased over 60% in the last two decades. The State's coyote population, destabilized by trapping, overhunting and killing contests, may actually be increasing in response to ill-conceived management strategies.

New Hampshire Wildlife Coalition

We are a group of New Hampshire natural resource professionals, hunters, wildlife advocates and other outdoor-oriented people who have come together with a singular vision to form the New Hampshire Wildlife Coalition. We will work to:

- Strengthen the Fish and Game Department by broadening its governance and financial base,
- Advocate for the responsible conservation of predator species,
- End wildlife killing contests, and
- Promote an ethos of "Fair Chase" sporting practices.



New Hampshire
Wildlife Coalition

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NEW HAMPSHIRE'S WILDLIFE

A Public Trust Resource



New Hampshire
Wildlife Coalition



Supporting New Hampshire's Wildlife

Who Makes Decisions About NH's Wildlife?

New Hampshire Fish and Game **Department (F&G)** biologists make recommendations on how wildlife should be managed using data from past seasons which they believe reflect the health of wildlife populations. The F&G **Commission**, which has executive authority over all Department decisions, can accept these recommendations, modify them or overrule them. In the spring of 2018, for instance, the Commission overruled its own Department biologists on their proposal for reduced bag limits on the red and gray fox. The Commission consists of hunters, trappers and anglers, one from each county and one from the seacoast. They represent the interests of their groups, primarily "sporting clubs," as defined in RSA 206:2.

While the present system for selecting Commissioners facilitates geographic representation of hunters and trappers, it limits opportunities for most other wildlife stakeholders to provide input into Department management or rules. Although the F&G holds public hearings on biennial rule changes that affect wildlife and welcomes input from the

public, there is no equitable means for the weight of many citizens' suggestions to influence decision making. As a result, approximately 95% of residents are denied any substantive voice in how their public trust wildlife resources are managed.



Changing Paradigm for Wildlife Management

Traditionally biologists and decision-makers have managed wildlife as a harvestable crop and that philosophy largely continues today in New Hampshire. However, this concept is inconsistent with the modern understanding of wildlife conservation and ecosystem integrity and it ignores the reality that for most citizens, wildlife is valued for other reasons such as:

- the crucial role predators play in the environment,
- observation and photography, and,
- more importantly perhaps, just knowing a healthy, diverse wildlife community lives around us.

NH's population numbers about 1.4 million. Fewer than 5% (around 70,000) of us purchase hunting and fishing licenses and fewer than 600 purchase trapping licenses.

Although hunters, trappers and anglers provide 28 – 40% (depending upon contributions from other sources) of the F&G budget through license sales and indirectly through federal excise taxes, the majority of funding comes from a broad array of recreational groups who don't hunt or fish (e.g., federal excise taxes paid by gun owners who don't hunt, residents who register boats but don't fish, etc.).

To meet their obligations, the F&G now uses money from the General Fund (\$500,000 to

\$1,000,000 per year), without providing the public a voice in managing wildlife. Thus, 5% of the public dictate wildlife management decisions, leaving 95% of the public without representation. Under this system, the rest of the state's residents have little incentive to support the Department.

Without broadening the representation on the Commission there is little incentive for residents who don't hunt or trap to support initiatives to find more reliable funding sources for the Department. We believe that adding commissioners who represent a greater diversity of wildlife interests would be a first step in building support from a wider portion of the state's population. Just as importantly, it would help transform the agency into one that serves all the citizens of New Hampshire.

Wildlife: A Public Trust Resource

Wildlife is held in the public trust. This legal doctrine requires government stewardship of the state's natural resources in a manner that benefits all of the public. The Legislature has charged the Fish and Game Commission with the duties "as the citizens' representatives, to be the stewards of the state of New Hampshire." Furthermore, the Commission is charged with fulfilling those duties through conservation, protection, and management of

wildlife populations and habitats, the collection of necessary scientific information, and the

enforcement of fish and game laws for the purpose of sustaining healthy populations of fish, wildlife, and marine resources [RSA 206:4-a(1)].

As such, the legislature expects the Department and Commission to represent the interests of all citizens in wildlife >>

