

1 TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

2 The Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife to which was
3 referred House Bill No. 581 entitled “An act relating to the funding of the
4 Department of Fish and Wildlife” respectfully reports that it has considered the
5 same and recommends that the bill be amended by striking out all after the
6 enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

7 Sec. 1. VERMONT WORKING GROUP ON WILDLIFE FUNDING;

8 REPORT

9 (a) Findings. The General Assembly finds that:

10 (1) It is the policy of the State that the Commissioner of Fish and
11 Wildlife is required to safeguard the fish, wildlife, and fur-bearing animals of
12 the State for all of the people of the State.

13 (2) The duties and responsibilities of the Department have grown since
14 the days of focusing primarily on deer herd management and now include
15 management of all wildlife species, both game and non-game; law
16 enforcement; monitoring and restoring threatened and endangered species;
17 habitat conservation; technical assistance; regulatory review; educational
18 programs for hunters, youths, and teachers; public license sales; and
19 management of grants issued or received by the Department.

1 (3) Since 1985, resident hunting license sales have decreased by 56
2 percent, resident trapping license sales have decreased by 51 percent, and
3 resident fishing license sales have decreased by 25 percent.

4 (4) As a result of declining license and fee revenue, the General
5 Assembly has increased and may need to further increase the amount of
6 General Fund dollars annually appropriated to the Department of Fish and
7 Wildlife.

8 (5) The need for increased funding of the Department will be heightened
9 by the increased research, monitoring, and interventions required by new,
10 contemporary, and well-documented challenges to all wildlife in Vermont,
11 such as climate change, pollution, invasive species, and habitat degradation.

12 (6) To address declining license and permit fee revenue, the State must
13 find stable, long-term revenue sources to pay for the costs of the Department of
14 Fish and Wildlife conserving and managing fish, wildlife, and fur-bearing
15 animals of the State and the natural systems upon which they depend for all of
16 the people of the State.

17 (b) Creation of Working Group. Based on the findings set forth in
18 subsection (a) of this section, there is created the Vermont Working Group on
19 Wildlife Funding to identify potential sources of revenue to fund the
20 Department of Fish and Wildlife for the next 20 years.

1 (c) Membership. The Vermont Working Group on Wildlife Funding shall
2 be composed of the following members:

3 (1) three current members of the House of Representatives who shall be
4 appointed by the Speaker of the House and who shall include:

5 (A) the Chair of the Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and
6 Wildlife or designee;

7 (B) the Chair of the Committee on Appropriations or designee; and

8 (C) the Chair of the Committee on Government Operations or
9 designee; and

10 (2) three current members of the Senate, who shall be appointed by the
11 Committee on Committees and who shall include:

12 (A) the Chair of the Committee on Natural Resources and Energy or
13 designee;

14 (B) the Chair of the Committee on Appropriations or designee; and

15 (C) a member of the Senate at large.

16 (c) Powers and duties. The Vermont Working Group on Wildlife Funding
17 shall review and analyze the funding, management, and policies of the
18 Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) under statute and rule, and
19 shall:

20 (1) Assess how the principles and priorities for the conservation and
21 management of fish, wildlife, and fur-bearing animals and the natural systems

1 upon which they depend will impact sources and amounts of funding needed
2 by the Department for the next 20 years. The assessment shall:

3 (A) address the stability of all current Department funding streams
4 going forward;

5 (B) estimate revenues and identify new and existing revenue sources
6 and other resources needed for new and additional programs at the
7 Department; and

8 (C) consider equitability when evaluating potential revenue sources.

9 (2) Recommend how the Department can create and maintain stable and
10 adequate funding for the next 20 years.

11 (d) Assistance. The Vermont Working Group on Wildlife Funding shall
12 have the administrative, technical, and legal assistance of the Office of
13 Legislative Council. The Working Group shall have the assistance of the Joint
14 Fiscal Office on fiscal issues and the assistance of the Department of Fish and
15 Wildlife on issues related to the jurisdiction of the Department.

16 (e) Report. On or before January 1, 2021, the Vermont Working Group on
17 Wildlife Funding shall report to the House Committees on Natural Resources,
18 Fish, and Wildlife, on Appropriations, and on Government Operations and the
19 Senate Committees on Natural Resources and Energy, on Appropriations, and
20 on Government Operations with its findings and any recommendations for
21 legislative action.

1 State. In determining the appropriate funding levels, the Commissioner of
2 Finance and Management shall evaluate, among other funding sources, the
3 distribution of funds in the State from the U.S. Coast Guard Boat Safety Grants
4 and the associated State match for these grants in order to determine if the
5 formula for distribution of boating safety funds should be changed to include
6 boating safety enforcement and related activities performed by the Department
7 of Fish and Wildlife. The recommendations of the Commissioner of Finance
8 and Management shall be in the form of a draft memorandum of understanding
9 between the Department of Finance and Management, the Department of
10 Public Safety, and the Department of Fish and Wildlife that shall be submitted
11 on or before January 15, 2021 to the House Committees on Government
12 Operation, on Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife, and on Appropriations and
13 to the Senate Committees on Government Operations, on Natural Resources
14 and Energy, and on Appropriations.

15 Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

16 This act shall take effect on passage.

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2 (Committee vote: _____)

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Representative _____

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FOR THE COMMITTEE