



House Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Testimony in opposition of HB 1411

North Dakota Game and Fish Department
Stephanie Tucker, Game Management Section Leader and Furbearer Biologist
January 28, 2021

Chairman Porter and members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, my name is Stephanie Tucker and I am the Game Management Section Leader and Furbearer Biologist with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

We have several concerns with this bill, but first I wanted to give you some background information. Night hunting of raccoons has long been allowed in North Dakota because of the tradition of baying them in trees with specially trained dogs at night. And we have had a night hunting season for coyotes and fox since 1991. More recently in 2011, the legislature expanded night hunting to include beavers due to conflicts with landowners.

By and large, the majority of night hunting activity in North Dakota is for coyotes. We have always limited the night hunting season for coyotes to the time of year when their fur is prime and there are no conflicts with other popular hunting activities, such as deer gun season. This night hunting season has always started in late-November or early-December and closed in mid-March, so on average it is open for 111 days.

Beginning in 2016, we began allowing the use of new technologies like night vision and thermal imaging equipment during the night hunting season for coyotes and fox. Then, with the passing of HB 1412 during the last legislative session, opportunity was also expanded to allow the use of artificial lights, such as red or green spotlights.

But these changes have not come without controversy, as we have received public comments from many individuals who were opposed to expanding night hunting by allowing these new technologies because they believe it goes beyond fair chase. Other hunters are concerned that the addition of night hunting equipment increases pressure and further educates the animals, reducing overall hunting success.

Now please allow me to briefly discuss our concerns. First, if a person has concerns about depredation to livestock or pets, the legislature has already given people flexibility with NDCC 20.1-07-04 to shoot those depredating furbearers at night, any time of the year. If the legislature feels that there needs to be some clarifying language added to reaffirm this, the Department would support those adjustments.

Secondly, shooting a coyote outside of the prime fur season is a waste of the fur resource that could otherwise be harvested during the time of year when they have some value. Over the past 3 years, fur buyers have spent an average of over \$1 million annually purchasing prime coyote pelts from North Dakota. Therefore, the value of this fur resource to our state's fur harvesters is significant. Admittedly, day hunting of coyote, fox, raccoon, and beaver is allowed year-round because of their traditionally abundant populations and high probability of conflict with livestock producers and homeowners. But expanding recreational night shooting of coyotes outside the prime fur season comes with additional conflicts that the day season does not have. For example, livestock are distributed across the landscape at a much higher rate during the summer and fall months compared to December through March. The ability to see beyond your target at night is severely limited so the odds of injury or mortality to livestock does increase. Also, many recreationalists spend a significant amount of time recreating on our state's public lands during the spring, summer, and fall months and this could add concerns for those individuals and their overall quality of experience.

And finally, we are concerned about the overlap of night hunting of coyotes or fox and our big game hunting seasons. To avoid conflicts and enforcement challenges, we have not allowed night hunting of coyote and fox until after deer gun season closes and most other big game hunters of elk, moose, and pronghorn, are no longer afield. And while night hunters may be missing out on a few weeks of prime fur during late-October and early-November, we feel it is a reasonable compromise to postpone the opening of night hunting until afterwards.

In summary, this bill proposes expanding night hunting from just the prime fur season, to any time of the year which is a waste of valuable fur resources while also increasing potential conflict with other groups. Not to mention it would create a significant enforcement burden to our game wardens who would have to increase patrols to 24-7, 365 days a year.

For these reasons Chairman Porter, the Department respectfully requests a DO NOT PASS on HB 1411.