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Massachusetts 1996 Question One:

*Learning from the past for a **brighter future***

The 1996 Question One “Wildlife Protection Act”, as the title implies, proclaimed the intended goal was to protect wildlife. However, the [implications and consequences of the resulting trapping law](#) tell a different story that repeatedly contradicts its original, written intent. The referendum also [contradicted well established conservation practices and values](#) held by trusted wildlife management sources throughout North America. These are the [same conservation practices and values](#) that our Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) public servants continue to passionately invest their professional careers in today. However, in a twist of fate dating back to the time the referendum was being debated; expressing those passions continue to remain muted by a bitter and devastating decision made by the Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF). At the time, DFW released a press statement opposing the ballot question, expressing that it was simply based on bad science, would not be supported and listed the reasons why. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) claimed foul, stating that government agencies cannot use state funds for partisan or political gain... and the OCPF agreed, effectively gagging Massachusetts wildlife professionals from further expressing their opinion on the matter. That single, controversial OCPF decision suppressing the most trusted and persuasive conservation voice opposing the referendum arguably sealed its fate at the ballot box. The ballot question simply went against the conservation fiber woven into every wildlife professional’s experience, knowledge and understanding they obtained through their careers. It is however, the law in which they are bound to uphold through regulations they develop and implement. Not only did the OCPF decision render them powerless to express their professional opinions publically; the entire ordeal eliminated the implementation of proven, successful conservation practices and drove a wedge between legitimate conservation partners still felt to this day.

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