

March 31, 2015

To: 189th General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Subject: *Challenging the myth: Making the case for modifications to the existing Massachusetts trapping law House Bill 709 "An act conserving our natural resources"* – Rep. Stephen Kulik

Evidence is mounting in the public view that the foothold restraint, or the so-called "*steel-jawed leghold trap*" as opponents like to refer to them, are not the cruel and inhumane devices they have been portrayed to be. This is a fact that wildlife researchers, biologists, and informed citizens have known for years. As facts come to light, it is increasingly apparent that the real issue is not the tool itself but rather the purpose behind the animal's capture and what happens to it afterward. As the trapping controversy continues, professional wildlife managers *outside of Massachusetts* continue to successfully use foothold restraints over and over again in non-lethal studies. Animals trapped are generally examined, fitted with radio or GPS collars, and then released unharmed and tracked for months or years. Thanks to recent stories like the one [broadcast by National Public Radio \(NPR\)](#) the public is hearing and seeing, without a lot of fanfare or celebration, how extremely valuable the foothold restraint is for gaining crucial information on species like the coyote – while maintaining the welfare of the animal as a high priority. Additional capture methods using devices such as the "[live restraint cable device](#)" or live restraint "[foot encapsulation device](#)" meet or [exceed high national](#) and international animal welfare standards as well. Prior to 1996, live restraint cable devices were used almost exclusively by the MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) for their black bear research activities. The successful 1996 ballot referendum effectively banning these devices has impeded the DFW's ability to help us understand these animals and gain knowledge on how we can better co-exist with them. With the more recent surge in coyote populations around the state, it has become even more urgent to put the right tools in the hands of our experienced biologists and wildlife managers. The unscientific trap ban in Massachusetts has critically undermined our professional state wildlife biologists ability to make informed, intelligent, and reasonable management decisions that have the best interests of the coyote and people in mind in addition to other wildlife. The trap ban has effectively cut our wildlife professionals out of this important conversation, preventing them from collecting timely information on coyotes and other species. We are unfortunately left to listen to and be swayed by, organizations and self-proclaimed "experts" driven by narrow agendas, claiming their approach is the only viable one to peacefully coexist with wildlife. **Taking limited legislative corrective action would accomplish a number of important statewide objectives and allow our DFW to carry out its constitutional mandates to the best of their ability. Limited corrective modifications to the existing trapping law would:**

- Allow our Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife to resume essential research on wildlife such as coyote and black bear that has been non-existent or unreasonably inhibited after the 1996 trap ban.
- Provide both wildlife managers and the public essential information on how best to move forward and co-exist with resident wildlife using factual, reliable information from trusted "in-state" sources.
- Give our the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife the authority to *authorize for use, in a highly regulated and monitored manner*, devices that are being successfully used to capture animals such as coyotes (as well as many other species) around the country - that have animal welfare as a high priority.

[Massachusetts House Bill 709](#) is the vehicle to move us forward in the right direction, away from where we are today in terms of reoccurring wildlife conflicts. It provides a regulated approach to working with and allowing for use restraints that have the welfare of the animal as a top priority. A high degree of regulation as to what, where, when, how, why and by whom these devices are deployed make them very safe for people, pets, and domestic animals, as well as to the actual wildlife they are intended to capture.