

SUPPORT S.2248 to deter illegal hunting, trapping, and fishing activity

An Act further regulating the enforcement of illegal hunting practices

Sponsors: Senator Michael Moore, Representatives Ann-Margaret Ferrante and Lori Ehrlich, and Cory Atkins

Status: Passed the Senate unanimously on January 18, 2018, after being reported out favorably by the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture as well as Senate Ways and Means. Currently in House Ways and Means.

Summary: This bill would modernize penalties for illegal hunting and enter Massachusetts into a nationwide law enforcement network already benefitting 48 member states. It would protect wildlife, tourism, and business. Some of Massachusetts' illegal hunting penalties haven't been updated in nearly a century, this legislation aligns our penalties with other states, making them sufficient to deter would-be wildlife violators. Joining the nationwide law enforcement network will end our status as a safe-haven for those whose hunting, trapping, or fishing licenses have been suspended in any of the 48 member states. It also prevents resident violators from evading punishment by applying for a hunting, trapping, or fishing license in a state other than where that violator lives. The threat of not being able to hunt or fish in the entire continental United States and Alaska would serve as a powerful deterrent to would-be wildlife violators in Massachusetts.

Background: Illegal hunting, trapping, and fishing activity is a serious problem across the country and here in Massachusetts. Wildlife violators take animals over the allowable limit, kill protected species, and kill animals out of season, often orphaning dependent young. Additionally, the New England Wildlife Center in Weymouth reports that illegal hunting victims, often injured or orphaned, are turning up with ever-greater frequency at wildlife rehabilitation centers.



Particularly, the illegal taking of sea life along our coastlines is rampant, raising issues of sustainability and threatening the livelihood of local fishermen. Illegally selling and transporting prohibited fish can wreak havoc on natural systems. For example, Environmental Police officers have found fish markets in Chinatown selling Grass Carp—a prohibited, highly invasive species that can cause serious damage to freshwater ecosystems.

Modernize penalties to deter wildlife criminals: Many of our illegal hunting penalties are about a century out of date, and the minimal fines that amount to little more than a slap on the wrist are seen as the cost of doing business by these wildlife violators. This bill brings our penalties in line with other states, elevating fines, jail time, and hunting and fishing license suspensions for certain crimes, including the commercialization of fish and wildlife. It targets the most egregious offenders—those who wantonly and repeatedly violate the law or kill multiple animals at once for thrills.

Join the interstate law enforcement compact: Massachusetts is one of only 2 non-member states of the nationwide law enforcement network, along with Hawaii. As a non-member, Massachusetts does not benefit from the network that has



Photo by Massachusetts Environmental Police

been helping wildlife agencies increase compliance with wildlife laws for 25 years. Joining the compact would prevent wildlife violators who have lost their hunting, trapping, or fishing privileges in member states from coming to Massachusetts to circumvent their license revocations. It would give our wildlife agency access to a database of wildlife violators, allowing us to choose to enforce a reciprocal license suspension or revocation, if we have a similar law and penalty (i.e. if the wildlife violation they were convicted of warranted a license revocation in their home state is also a license-revocable offense in Massachusetts).

Protect tourism and local business: Illegal hunting, trapping, and fishing jeopardizes the livelihood of people and businesses that rely on a thriving ecosystem. When wildlife violators illegally fish in our lakes, rivers, and streams, taking fish out of season or over the legal limit, they exploit the Commonwealth's natural resources and steal revenue from constituents who make a living off the water. These wildlife violators threaten the welfare and conservation of native species important to our ecosystems and economy and steal from lawful fishing businesses, recreational sportsmen, and wildlife watchers.



The Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact has been assisting state agencies for 25 years. The concept was first advanced in the early 1980s by states in the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.



MEMBERSHIP

May 2018

