

Support HB 1308



SNOWSHOE FEET

Named for their large feet with toes that spread wide, snowshoe hares are designed to bound across the surface of the snow, an adaptation that is becoming less useful with shorter winters.



VARYING HARE

Also called the “varying hare,” because they change color in response to day length, shorter winters mean snowshoe hares are finding themselves conspicuously white against a snowless landscape more often.



KEYSTONE SPECIES

As a “keystone species,” snowshoe hares are vital to the survival of other species, including the Canada lynx, listed as threatened federally and endangered in New Hampshire, partly due to snowshoe hare habitat loss.

Passage of House Bill 1308 will end the practice of taking live snowshoe hares and rabbits from the wild to be held in captivity for propagation and hunting dog training as currently permitted under Fis 806.05. It will *not* prohibit the hunting of hares or rabbits in the wild nor put an end to beagle training and competition events.

Reasons to support HB 1308:

Wild animals should not be removed from the wild unless their survival is at stake.

Allowing beagle dog clubs to capture wild hares and use them for recreational purposes violates the right of wild animals to live in their natural habitat, where they were born.

“...I do not believe in taking an animal out of the wild for training purposes. A wild animal belongs in the wild.” — Chairman Eric Stohl, NH Fish and Game Commission

Hares fail to reproduce in captivity, resulting in beagle clubs trapping more each year.

When Fis 806.05 was put in place 14 years ago, it was with the expectation that the wild-caught hares would multiply in captivity. Hares, like rabbits, are naturally prolific breeders, with females producing 3-4 litters, or roughly 6-18 offspring, per year.

At the beagle clubs, however, annual reports show little change in hare count from year to year. This means the clubs are returning to the wild for new hares each year, increasing the likelihood of an adverse effect on the wild hare population and raising the risk of spreading disease.

Hares fail to thrive after relocation, raising animal welfare concerns.

Relocating wild animals is not recommended by the NH Fish and Game Department, yet Fis 806.05 allows beagle clubs to do just that. After capture, and if they survive¹, hares may be relocated hundreds of miles from home and in areas that are not only unfamiliar but likely not their ideal habitat.²

By law, wild animals held captive must be protected in the same way pets are, but the open-air pens at the beagle clubs allow hawks and other avian predators access to the hares.

The sustained flight response in a hare can result in death. When they are preyed upon, or chased by packs of beagles before becoming familiar with the terrain, snowshoe hares can literally die of fright.

Hare populations are more vulnerable than when Fis 806.05 went into effect.

In the 14 years since Fis 806.5 went into effect, threats to wild snowshoe hares have intensified. Our shorter winters mean that the hare’s natural camouflage, changing color with the seasons, no longer offers reliable protection.³ Adding to their troubles, New Hampshire lost 151,380 acres of snowshoe habitat to development from 2001–2011, a trend that continues.⁴

Any decline in the snowshoe hare population also threatens animals who depend on them, including the bobcat, red fox, marten, fisher, great-horned owl, and federally threatened Canada lynx.

Given the growing threats facing snowshoe hares, and their importance to ecosystems, allowing these animals to be used by a niche group for what amounts to recreation is insupportable.

1 From Fis 806.5: “Snowshoe hares that die during live-capture efforts shall count as part of the 20 snowshoe hares allowed per year per club.”

2 Snowshoe hares are most abundant in the northern three counties where young forests with dense understories provide the cover they need to thrive. (NH Fish and Game Department *New Hampshire Snowshoe Hare Assessment 2015*)

3 Color change is triggered by length of day, not temperature, and research shows hares are experiencing more color mismatch scenarios. (“Mad as a March Hare”, *NH Fish and Game Wildlife Journal*, March/April 2016) New Hampshire hares may adapt, staying brown all year, but if and until this happens, they are especially vulnerable.

4 NH Fish and Game Department *New Hampshire Snowshoe Hare Assessment 2015*