

February 4, 2024

Rhode Island House Environment and Natural Resources Committee

RE: SUPPORT House Bill 7294 to prohibit unsporting captive hunts

Dear Chair Benett and Honorable Members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

On behalf of the Humane Society of the United States and our Rhode Island-based supporters, please accept this testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 7294, to prohibit captive, or “canned,” hunting in the state. We thank the sponsors of this bill and applaud their efforts to fight the cruel and unsportsmanlike practice of captive hunting.

Captive hunting, also called canned hunting, bears no resemblance to traditional hunting. Animals on canned hunts are bred for the bullet, and stocked and shot within fenced enclosures for guaranteed trophies. Deer, elk and other cervids are bred for abnormally large antlers to decorate someone’s wall. Animals on these ranches are typically bred through invasive and unnatural methods, including artificial insemination and electro-ejaculation, to create what some refer to as “Frankendeer” – deer with antlers so large and grotesque they can barely lift their heads. There’s no chance of escape and absolutely no sportsmanship involved on these ranches.

Captive hunts are nothing more than pay-to-play operations for shooters who don’t want to get their boots scuffed by putting in the time, skill, and effort that fair chase hunting requires. “Fair chase,” a concept central to the philosophy of many in the hunting community, simply does not exist within the fences.

The size of the hunting area doesn’t matter in captive hunts. In larger enclosures, the animals are often accustomed to eating at feeding stations at regular intervals – and the shooter will be there waiting. It is not uncommon for a captive hunt with thousands of fenced acres to still offer a “100% success” guarantee to shoot an animal, or offer a “no kill, no pay” policy on the animals, because these are a set-up from start to finish. Animals on captive hunts often come from private breeders, animal dealers, and even roadside zoos and circuses. The animals have frequently been hand-raised and bottle fed, so they have lost their natural fear of people.

More than half of U.S. states currently ban or restrict canned hunts. These prohibitions have been largely driven by hunters concerned that these facilities erode fair chase ethics and spread disease to native wildlife. Multiple hunting organizations, including the Boone & Crockett Club, the Izaak Walton League, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, and the Pope & Young Club have vocally opposed canned hunting.

Canned hunts are also directly responsible for the spread of diseases like chronic wasting disease (CWD), an incurable, fatal condition that afflicts deer and other cervids. The unnatural densities that characterize canned hunts, plus the constant movement of live animals to stock these facilities, creates a breeding ground for the spread of CWD. Canned hunts, through escaped animals, fence-line transmission or environmental contamination, can also spread CWD to wild herds.¹ There is no vaccine or reliable live test for CWD. Therefore, no canned hunting ranch can ever guarantee that their farm is disease-free unless

¹ VerCauteren, Kurt C.; Lavelle, Michael J.; Seward, Nathan W.; Fischer, Justin W.; and Phillips, Gregory E., “Fence-Line Contact Between Wild and Farmed White-Tailed Deer in Michigan: Potential for Disease Transmission” (2007). *USDA National Wildlife Research Center - Staff Publications*. Paper 721.



they have killed and tested 100% of the animals. CWD has been found in 32 states, and new cases are found every year – often at captive facilities.²

Prohibiting canned hunting is one of the most important steps Rhode Island can take to protect its wild herds from CWD. States where the disease has spread, such as Wisconsin, have spent tens of millions of taxpayer dollars fighting CWD.³

Thank you for your time and consideration of our support for this bill. If passed, this will be a huge step in the right direction for Rhode Island's wildlife and ethical hunting heritage.

Sincerely,

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² <http://cwd-info.org/map-chronic-wasting-disease-in-north-america/>

³ Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, "More than 300 deer will be killed at a Wisconsin farm found to have chronic wasting disease," Aug. 3, 2022. Accessed at <https://www.jsonline.com/story/sports/outdoors/2022/07/23/more-than-300-captive-deer-cwd-infected-wisconsin-farm-killed/10121883002/>.