

## **Testimony on Assembly Bill 323**

### **Assembly Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage**

**May 24, 2017**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to testify in favor of Assembly Bill 323 this morning.

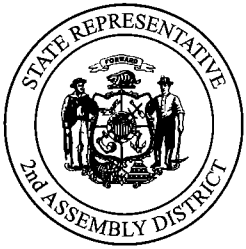
Citizens from all parts of our state have shared similar stories of their personal gardens, flowerbeds, and yards being completely destroyed by woodchucks. These “ferocious herbivores”, as said by UW-Madison Forest and Wildlife Ecology professor emeritus Scott Craven, have the ability to ruin entire yards in a relatively short period of time.

Woodchucks, also known as groundhogs or whistle pigs, pose an equally large threat to our local community spaces. They frequently burrow to create their nests. These burrows are frequently along sidewalks, driveways, and buildings posing structural threats to our park infrastructure and even our own homes.

The Wisconsin Conservation Congress, in 2009, put forward a question at their DNR Spring Rule hearings to remove the woodchuck from the Wisconsin Protected Species list. All 72 counties in our state affirmed this change, and it’s important to mention it was in an incredible 7-to-1 margin. This proposal is modeled after recommendations from the Wisconsin Conservation Congress and the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation to define the woodchuck as a “game animal”. As such, woodchucks would be able to be hunted under the authority of a small game hunting license. Trapping of the animal would be permitted with a trapping license.

Frankly, the combination of its prevalence and its nuisance to communities and homes alike, merits the removal of the woodchuck from the Wisconsin Protected Species list. The designation of “game animal” simply provides for the most efficient way to control the population. I encourage your support for this proposal.

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12<sup>th</sup> Senate District



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TO: Members of the Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage Committee  
FROM: Rep. André Jacque  
DATE: May 24, 2017  
RE: Assembly Bill 323

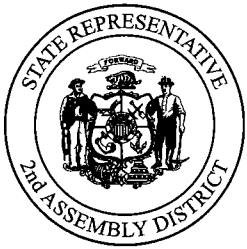
Chairman Kleefisch and Members of the Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage Committee:

Thank you for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 323 and the opportunity to appear before you as the Assembly author of this legislation to properly classify woodchucks (also known as groundhogs), which are quite abundant in Wisconsin, by removing them from the list of protected species – a present status without biological or resource management justification which places Wisconsin out of step with the rest of states in the woodchuck's natural range. This proposed change was overwhelmingly recommended by the Wisconsin Conservation Congress when put forward as a question in the 2009 DNR Spring Rule Hearings, passing in all 72 counties by a vote of 5532 to 760, a more than 7 to 1 margin.

AB 323 will bring Wisconsin in line with the rest of the Midwest and Northeast U.S., including Minnesota, Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania (home of Punxsatawney Phil, where Groundhog Day was established by a hunting club and an average of 800,000 woodchucks are harvested annually, according to the Pennsylvania state game commission), Missouri (whose state website notes "medium-sized, properly prepared groundhog makes excellent table fare), Kentucky (whose state website notes they "provide a tasty meal when boiled or fried"), Virginia, West Virginia, New York, Vermont and Massachusetts, where they are labeled "pests," "nuisance species," and "varmints" on official websites, among other things.

Farmers and gardeners fear groundhogs because the animals eat up their crops and dig holes in fields that may damage plows or trip up livestock. UW-Madison Forest and Wildlife Ecology professor emeritus Scott Craven has called them "ferocious herbivores," and the Minnesota DNR warns that they "have the ability to destroy an entire garden or flowerbed in a relatively short time. In addition to plant damage, burrowing along sidewalks, driveways and building foundations can lead to serious damage to structures." I have heard these complaints from many constituents, as well as citizens statewide.

Under this bill, a woodchuck is defined as a "game animal" and as a "fur-bearing animal." As a result, a person would be able to hunt woodchucks under the authority of a small game hunting license and trap woodchucks under a trapping license. Also under this bill, the DNR is required to establish an open season for woodchucks from the beginning of July to the end of December without a bag or possession limit.



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In media coverage of this legislation when it was previously introduced, our colleague Senator Vinehout offered some helpful perspective from the agricultural community: “We have a lot of problems with woodchucks that are very fat and eat a lot of our grain. I look out my bedroom window every morning and see those guys running around. They’re very fat and very happy. This bill would allow the neighbor boy to come over and shoot them and solve a small problem on the farm.” Another farmer writes “When baling hay, the piles of dirt (from excavation of burrows) gets spread into the hay and the animals won’t eat it. Sometimes tractors will hit the holes, caving them in and over goes your wagon-load of hay. The dirt also dulls the cutting knives and sometimes breaks them.” I have heard of many situations regarding woodchucks’ propensity to endanger structures with their tunneling. There is a value to woodchuck pelts that has been noted as well.

The fact remains that there is no question of woodchucks’ abundance or their destructive capability, and it lessens the credibility of Wisconsin’s protected species list to list animals that don’t need to be specially protected. Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 323.