

## **Testimony on Senate Bill 249**

### **Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Mining, and Forestry**

**June 1, 2017**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to testify in favor of Senate Bill 249 this morning.

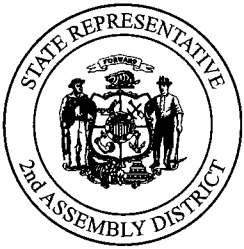
Citizens from all parts of our state have shared similar stories of their personal gardens, flowerbeds, and yards being completely destroyed by woodchucks. These “ferocious herbivores”, as said by UW-Madison Forest and Wildlife Ecology professor emeritus Scott Craven, have the ability to ruin entire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

Tom Tiffany  
Wisconsin State Senate  
12<sup>th</sup> Senate District



# ANDRÉ JACQUE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 2<sup>nd</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

(608) 266-9870  
Fax: (608) 282-3602  
Toll-Free: (888) 534-0002  
Rep.Jacque@legis.wi.gov

P.O. Box 8952  
Madison, WI 53708-8952

TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Mining & Forestry

FROM: Rep. André Jacque

DATE: June 1, 2017

RE: Senate Bill 249

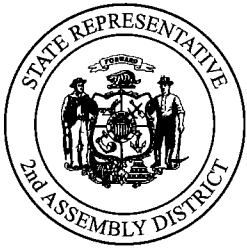
Members of the Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Mining & Forestry:

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 249 and the opportunity to appear before you in support of properly classifying 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 entire rest of the 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.

SB 249 will bring Wisconsin in line with the rest of the Midwest and Northeast US, 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



# ANDRÉ JACQUE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 2<sup>nd</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

(608) 266-9870  
Fax: (608) 282-3602  
Toll-Free: (888) 534-0002  
Rep.Jacque@legis.wi.gov

P.O. Box 8952  
Madison, WI 53708-8952

license and trap woodchucks under a trapping license. Also under this bill, the DNR is required to establish an open season for woodchucks without a bag or possession limit.

In media coverage of this legislation when it was previously introduced, your Senate 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 Senate Bill 249.

On Tue, May 30, 2017 at 7:33 AM, Matt Smits  
<[m-smits@manitowoc.org](mailto:m-smits@manitowoc.org)> wrote:

The city of Manitowoc is concerned about the woodchucks and the difficulty involved with their removal. The woodchuck digs large holes around our stormwater ponds which can cause slumping of the banks, weakening of Clay berms, and can be damaging to grass mowing equipment. These holes are also a major concern in our city parks where they are unsightly and can be a trip hazards for pedestrians. Woodchucks have also caused damage to flower beds and landscaped areas. I would like to see the woodchuck removed from the protected status list in Wisconsin.

Thank you!

**Matt Smits**

Engineering/Stormwater Technician

900 Quay Street City of Manitowoc

920-686-6907 Office 920-374-0088 Cell



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

**Wisconsin Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Mining, and Forestry  
Testimony on SB 249 - Woodchucks**

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June 1, 2017

Good morning, Chairman Tiffany and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you. My name is Melissa Tedrowe and I am the Wisconsin state director for The Humane Society of the United States.

I wasn't able to attend the public hearing for SB 249's Assembly companion bill, but I did watch the recorded discussion. What I heard loud and clear is a concern about the damage that woodchucks cause. Those problems are real and deserve to be remedied.

But I also was struck by how much was missing from that hearing, and so I'd like to address a few key points:

**First and most importantly, this legislation proposes a hunting season on woodchucks with the stated goal of reducing conflicts -- yet the bill's author has not provided sound scientific evidence to support that a statewide hunt will achieve that goal.** This information is crucial in demonstrating that the decision to open a woodchuck hunting season is based on the best available science.

In fact, researchers increasingly find that generalized sport hunting is *not* effective at controlling "nuisance" animals. The more effective approach is one that targets specific problem animals in their specific location, using lethal or non-lethal strategies, or a mix of both. And lethal options are already afforded to homeowners or their agents under Section 29.337 of our administrative code. Managers of public- or civic-owned areas can seek a special permit from the DNR.

**An additional point that went unaddressed in the Assembly committee hearing is that woodchucks occupy an important ecological niche, and rushing into hunting them could have secondary consequences.** We have yet to hear from the Wisconsin DNR about woodchuck population numbers in our state, their reproductive cycles, the potential impact of an open season on them – in fact, we've learned almost nothing about woodchucks except that some people consider them tasty. This does not indicate that sound, scientific wildlife management principles are being considered in this process.


Consider, too, that while woodchucks may not appear useful to some humans, they provide food for coyotes, foxes, weasels, badgers, hawks, and eagles. The vast majority of Wisconsin hunters continue to use lead ammunition, which is environmentally toxic and

fatal to secondary wildlife. The use of lead ammunition to shoot woodchucks, and its subsequent effect on non-target species, is another aspect of this bill that merits more study and consideration.

**Finally, supporters of this bill have talked repeatedly about preserving the “integrity of Wisconsin’s protected species list.” Instead of removing woodchucks from that list and immediately subjecting them to a year-round, limitless hunt, consider simply removing woodchucks from the list.** Immediate delisting and hunting is the kind of 0 to 70 mph maneuver that flies in the face of what the majority of Wisconsinites want from our lawmakers: cautious, thoughtful, and patient stewardship of wildlife who belong to ALL citizens, not just the relative handful of people who participate in, let alone know about, the Conservation Congress.

There are better ways to manage conflicts with Wisconsin’s woodchucks than a statewide hunt. I sincerely hope you will oppose SB 249, and pursue a more reasonable, and ultimately more effective, science-based approach.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melissa Tedrowe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Melissa Tedrowe  
Wisconsin State Director  
[mtedrowe@humansociety.org](mailto:mtedrowe@humansociety.org)  
608-572-3122

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Thank you!

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