



AN OPEN LETTER TO MARYLAND FUR TRAPPERS

It is certainly good news to the Maryland Fur Trappers that the Montgomery County anti-trapping legislation was blocked in the General Assembly – this time.

But, before you raise your glasses to celebrate, I think it's important to temper the celebration with a big dose of reality.

The fact is, the members and officers of the MFTI were less engaged in the legislative *process* to save their own interests and allowed other groups and individuals – namely Montgomery County farmers and DNR wildlife officials to make their case in front of the lawmakers.

Truth be told, as an eyewitness stated, "If the session had lasted another six minutes and the animal activists had been paying attention, this bill would have become law." You see it was only in the final minutes of the General Assembly when victory was pried from the jaws of defeat by someone in the Wildlife & Heritage Service who was paying attention. Unfortunately, no members of the MFTI were on hand to notice.

It's sad to learn that hearing after hearing was held without trappers representing themselves, leaving others to carry the baggage. It's not just sad but reprehensible to think that trappers, who pride themselves on being self-reliant rugged individualists couldn't take the time to stand up for their vocation when it counted the most.

Here's an even harsher reality... Now we learn that the anti-trapping, anti-hunting animal activists have formed a new Political Action Committee called Maryland Votes for Animals. This group puts their abundant time and even more abundant money where their mouth is. Word is that they are seeking a communications professional and an attorney to work to craft legislation. As many of you know, the activists have the ear of any number of Maryland lawmakers. And, guess what group *did* testify in Annapolis against several bills near and dear to our hunting and trapping heritage?

So, before the back slapping begins, a moment should be spent thinking about how fortunate the MFTI is to have dodged the bullet in this legislative session and to start planning now for time off and a cohesive, coherent offense for next session. The skirmish for now has been won, but the war is far from over. The enemy has all year to plan their next offensive which they *will* launch. Money will be raised; meetings will be attended; alliances will be forged; politicians will be coddled and informed. The questions remain... will the MFTI put as much effort into saving trapping as its opponents will spend trying to destroy trapping? Will the MFTI rise to face the challenge or again let others stand in for them? Will the trappers in Maryland become proactive or reactive - on the offense or on the defense? It's your decision.

Who Stands in the Gap for Maryland Sportsmen?

Some would answer that the Legislative Sportsmen Caucus works for sportsmen. Really? If the caucus is so powerful why was their signature legislation, “The Conservation Law Enforcement Act of 2010” gutted and defanged before its final passage? How did the anti-trapping bill get so far? Why did legislation to bring all the local Sunday hunting bills under the regulatory process rather than local legislation fail? Why did Sunday hunting in Baltimore County fail? It might be a bitter pill to swallow, but the ‘membership’ of the caucus boils down to a select, albeit powerful few delegates, senators and lobbyists that trade support for bills for favors like we traded baseball cards when we were kids. The caucus will take credit for its accomplishments and sportsmen will swoon and think it wonderful. Meanwhile the enemy camp is crafting its strategy and drafting legislation for the next assault. It will never end and sportsmen are lulled into thinking that their interests are taken care of. Why bother to attend a hearing, go to a public meeting or express their opinions and concerns to their representatives? Someone else is doing that, right? No.

Others would argue that the national conservation organizations (DU, RMEF, NWTF) and specialized hobbyist (MBS, MDWFA) groups are working for us. Hardly.

You see, we as sportsmen stand idly by and think that others are fighting for us. In the meantime, it seems to be good sport to fight among ourselves. Trappers aren’t concerned about bowhunters; bowhunters couldn’t care less about waterfowlers, waterfowlers are apathetic towards muzzleloader hunters; muzzleloaders don’t give a hoot about trappers. All the separatist factions and self-centered groups who participate in the bloodsports seem to have marked their own territories and dare others to intrude. When an overture is made by one group to seek the support of another, all hell breaks loose and the name calling begins. The disarray and splintering of groups that should have each other’s backs is difficult to observe. We *all* stand to lose, bigtime.

Maryland, with its rich traditions of fishing and hunting is among the very few states where sportsmen have no cohesive group to speak for outdoorsmen. There is no coalition of sportsmen’s clubs; no alliance of the various groups; no overarching umbrella group with grassroots individual memberships; no organization of hunting and fishing retailers – nothing. In the past, some have tried and for their efforts were rewarded with apathy – so why even try?

Doesn’t it make sense for Maryland’s 520,000 hunters and fishermen (that spend \$900-million dollars a year and are responsible for 14,000 jobs) to have real representation in the form of an organization with real political clout? Is it time to try again or is it time to roll over and give up? For hunting, fishing and trapping, our destiny is in our own hands.

Share your thoughts and ideas.

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