



April 1, 2020

The Honorable Jay Inslee  
Governor of Washington  
P.O. Box 40002  
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Governor Inslee,

Thank you for your leadership as you respond to the evolving challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. With public safety being the utmost priority, and in keeping with the guidelines outlined through both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and your Emergency Orders, we would like to encourage you to retain to the greatest extent possible the opportunities for people to responsibly enjoy the outdoors during these trying times. The positive physical and mental attributes associated with hunting, fishing, recreational shooting, and being outside will allow people to better cope with the significant restrictions to our daily lives as a result of the pandemic response.

Outdoor sporting traditions are cherished activities of the people of Washington and the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation appreciates all that you are doing to safeguard these traditions during this unprecedented time. To this end, we would like to offer the following suggestions that can be taken with regards to hunting (safeguarding hunting seasons), fishing (withholding trout stocking lists, and/or early season openings), and recreational shooting (scheduling shooting range times by appointment).

### **Hunting**

The spring turkey season is quickly approaching, and the hunting community is eagerly anticipating its arrival. I encourage you to keep hunting seasons open as scheduled, continue to allow access to your state's vast array of wildlife management areas and other public lands, and to encourage sportsmen and women to be afield. In general, turkey hunters typically distance themselves from one another significantly more than the 6-foot recommendations from the CDC (often miles, if possible) while in pursuit of their game. Interactions with one another should be nearly non-existent, meaning that by principle, hunting is able to be practiced in a manner that is wholly consistent with CDC guidelines.

## **Fishing**

As Washington reconsiders the re-opening of recreational fishing on April 6<sup>th</sup>, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation respectfully requests that you keep the following information in mind. Recreational fishing provides an excellent opportunity for people to practice social distancing while procuring meals for their families and enjoying the associated mental and physical health benefits. For this reason, fishing tackle retailers and manufacturers should be considered essential businesses in order to ensure people have access to the necessary equipment to participate. In addition, the following examples illustrate additional steps that states can take to promote recreational angling.

Several states (including Maine, Missouri, and West Virginia, to name a few) have now temporarily waived fishing license requirements (while maintaining regulations related to seasons, catch limits, and methods of take). By temporarily waiving fishing license requirements, anglers are granted the opportunity to practice their sporting pursuits without the economic pressure of purchasing a license. While a fishing license waiver will reduce license revenue for state fish and wildlife agencies in the short-term, this situation provides the perfect opportunity to recruit new anglers and increase angler participation throughout the remainder of the year, which would have long-term economic and conservation-funding benefits.

Another measure to promote fishing while also preventing crowds from congregating at popular fishing locations is the withholding of trout stocking announcements. Virginia and several other states have now withheld their stocking schedule, while simultaneously assuring their sporting constituency that the stocking is in fact occurring. Without having this knowledge ahead of time, sportsmen and women will be less-inclined to gather in crowds along specific sites, thus practicing their pursuit in a way that is consistent with CDC guidelines.

Finally, some states are choosing to open some seasons (such as trout, in Connecticut and New Jersey) earlier to spread out the crowds that typically form in popular locations on opening day, while providing additional opportunities for sportsmen and women to get outdoors. While sportsmen and women would still be required to purchase and possess the necessary licenses and stamps, this will allow them to head to the waters at an earlier date. Increasing the time in which anglers may take to the waters could result in dispersing the crowds that might be more inclined to fishing elbow-to-elbow with others.

## **Recreational Shooting**

Firearms shooting ranges have a long tradition of service to a wide array of recreational citizen groups in this country. It is well-recognized that recreational shooters are the financial backbone for the American System of Conservation Funding (ASCF), a "user-pays, public-benefits" structure, in which those that consumptively use public resources pay for the privilege, and in some cases the right, to do so. While under normal circumstances, shooting ranges invite and encourage personal interactions, when handled appropriately and in accordance with social distancing principles, these ranges should be able to continue operating.

Private shooting ranges that are deemed essential businesses are already adhering to the social distancing guidelines put forth by the CDC. We encourage you to also keep public shooting ranges that are owned and/or operated by the state open for business during this time. Allowing sportsmen

and women access to these facilities is essential to the funding of our nation's conservation efforts, and is also necessary to allow the recent influx of new firearms owners an opportunity to train with their firearms. According to a National Shooting Sports Foundation estimate, "80 percent of Pittman-Robertson excise tax contributions are generated by sales attributed to recreational shooting"<sup>[1]</sup>. Permitting shooting ranges to remain operational will allow the sporting community, who is already itching to get outside, time to follow their pursuits in a controlled manner, while also contributing to the ASCF. Should you feel that additional safeguards to encourage social distancing are necessary, we encourage you to consider implementing a reservation system wherein sportsmen and women can sign up for a designated time slot to ensure that crowds do not congregate at these facilities.

During particularly difficult and stressful times, many sportsmen and women turn to some of America's most time-honored traditions as an avenue of escape. We hope you will consider taking steps to promote hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting, and encourage your sportsmen and women constituents to enjoy the outdoors in a safe and healthy manner that is consistent with the safe distancing guideline put forth by the CDC. Thank you for your time and consideration on this critical matter. Should you require additional information on this, or other sportsmen-related topics, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,



Aoibheann Cline | Western States Coordinator | Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation  
(Pronounced "A-veen")  
110 North Carolina Ave, SE | Washington, DC 20003  
Direct: 202-543-6850 ex: 19 | Cell: 916-633-3664 | Fax: 202-543-6853  
[www.congressionalsportsmen.org](http://www.congressionalsportsmen.org)

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[1] National Shooting Sports Foundation. "NSSF Commends Congress's Passage of 'Range Bill.'" Accessed on March 31, 2020. <https://www.nssf.org/nssf-commends-congresss-passage-of-range-bill/>.