



September 16, 2020

Senator George E. Campsen, III  
Chairman - Senate Fish, Game and Forestry Committee  
305 Gressette Building  
Columbia, SC 29201

**RE: House Bill 3800; Apprentice Hunting Licenses**

**Position: Support**

Dear Chairman Campsen and Members of the Senate Fish, Game and Forestry Committee,

On behalf of the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF), I respectfully encourage you to support House Bill 3800. South Carolina's sporting heritage depends on the recruitment of new hunters, and this legislation would strengthen hunter recruitment efforts by expanding the state's existing apprentice hunting license program to allow new hunters to more easily participate in this time-honored tradition that provides multiple benefits for the public at large.

Since 1989, CSF has maintained a singleness of purpose that has guided the organization to become one of the most respected and trusted sportsmen's organization in the political arena. CSF's mission is to work with Congress, governors, and state legislatures to protect and advance hunting, angling, recreational shooting and trapping. CSF has a strong track record in South Carolina, working with the South Carolina Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus and conservation partners to protect and advance South Carolina's sporting heritage by supporting pro-sportsmen legislation and state fish and wildlife management objectives.

As the number of hunters in the United States has decreased (14.1 million in 1991 to 11.5 million in 2016), the sportsmen's community has increased its investment in programs to arrest the decline in hunting participation. To that end, CSF is a member of the Families Afield coalition that aims to expand hunting opportunities and increase the number of hunters by removing barriers to participation in hunting. Apprentice hunting licenses, the hallmark of Families Afield, help prospective hunters overcome one of the initial hurdles to becoming a hunter – the hunter education course requirement, while maintaining a safe and responsible experience through requiring direct mentorship afield.

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Also known as mentored hunting licenses, apprentice hunting licenses are an important tool for recruiting new hunters because they allow prospective hunters to “try it before they buy it” which provides the opportunity to experience hunting under the supervision of a licensed, adult hunter before completing a hunter education course. By removing a barrier that may prevent an individual from trying hunting, apprentice hunting licenses are effective at recruiting new hunters. Once their interest has been realized and the apprentice period has concluded, new hunters then move on to complete hunter education and purchase a regular hunting license.

According to the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, the number of apprentice hunting licenses sold in South Carolina declined annually from 2014 to 2020. In 2014, 2,850 apprentice hunting licenses were sold. In 2020, only 726 apprentice hunting licenses were sold. As is often the case with trying new experiences, new hunters successfully transition to being a fully licensed hunter with more time and experience in the field. By removing the current one-year limitation on apprentice hunting licenses, we would submit that more South Carolinians would ultimately become fully licensed hunters.

Recruiting new hunters is important not only for passing sporting traditions on to the next generation but also because sportsmen and women are the primary funders of state-based conservation and contribute significantly to the economy. In 2019 alone, South Carolina’s sportsmen and women contributed \$29.21 million to conservation funding generated through hunting and fishing licenses and excise taxes on sporting-related goods, the “user-pays, public-benefits” structure known as the American System of Conservation Funding. Additionally, South Carolina’s 847,000 sportsmen and women have a significant economic impact spending more than \$1.5 billion, supporting more than 40,00 jobs, and generating more than \$124 million and state and local taxes in the state. Expanding the apprentice hunting license program to support the recruitment of hunters would benefit both the conservation work of the Department of Natural Resources, as well as the broader economy of South Carolina – benefits that would be felt by all residents of the state, regardless of whether they are themselves hunters.

In closing, HB 3800 would support South Carolina’s sporting heritage by expanding an important tool for recruiting new hunters, and we respectfully urge you to support the legislation.

Sincerely,



John Culclasure  
Southeastern States Assistant Director  
Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation  
[jculclasure@congressionalsportsmen.org](mailto:jculclasure@congressionalsportsmen.org)

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