



To: **Assembly Agriculture Committee**
State House Annex
P.O. Box 068
Trenton, NJ

Re: **Assembly Bill 1365 – An Act Concerning the Harassing or Taking of Certain
Wildlife at Competitive Events, and Supplementing Title 23 of the Revised
Statutes**

Position: **Oppose**

Date: **June 11, 2021**

Honorable Members of the Assembly Agriculture Committee:

My name is Nick Lewis and I am the Mid-Atlantic States Coordinator for the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF). I respectfully urge you to oppose Assembly Bill 1365 (AB 1365) – legislation that would usurp the Division of Fish and Wildlife's (DFW) authority by prohibiting hunting contests and thereby reduce opportunities for New Jersey's sportsmen and women. Hunting tournaments are a well-regulated practice that requires participants to abide by hunting laws enforced by the DFW, provide additional opportunity for sportsmen and women, and are a potentially useful management tool to deal with localized issues of overabundance and resulting human-wildlife conflict.

Since 1989, CSF has dedicated itself to the mission of working with Congress, governors, and state legislatures to protect and advance hunting, angling, recreational shooting and trapping. The unique and collective force of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus, the Governors Sportsmen's Caucus, and the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses, working closely with CSF, and with the support of major hunting, recreational fishing and shooting, and trapping organizations, serves as an unprecedented network of pro-sportsmen elected officials that advance the conservation interests of America's hunters and anglers.

For more than 80 years, sportsmen and women have been the primary funders of state-level conservation efforts and are thus an important constituency that provides benefits for all New Jersey residents. In 2019 alone, New Jersey's sportsmen and women generated over \$23 million

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dollars for conservation through the American System of Conservation Funding – a “*user pays – public benefits*” approach, to support the conservation efforts of the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife. A portion of this population includes sportsmen and women who participated in hunting tournaments. Contrary to the misinformed narrative that often circles the topic of hunting contests, parties to these tournaments are not exempted from following the same wildlife laws and regulations as other regulated hunting activities – especially in regards to methods of take, hunting hours, the requirement for a New Jersey hunting license, and any rules pertaining to the tagging/use of the animal after the harvest.

Participation in hunting has been on a declining trend across the nation for the past 30 years. In 1991, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported a total of 728,217 certified paid license holders¹; by 2020, that number had decreased to 556,897.² Because the DFW heavily relies nearly entirely on funding generated by the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, the decline of hunters in New Jersey poses a threat to the future ability of the Division to effectively carry out its mission. Although this trend has been present for the past few decades, states across the nation – New Jersey included – saw increased license sales during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.³ Sportsmen and women took to their favorite woods, fields, and waterbodies in the pursuit of game. With the recent increased interest in hunting as a result of the pandemic, legislation such as AB 1365 would be a drastic step in the wrong direction. I encourage the Committee to explore ways to expand hunting opportunities throughout New Jersey, not limit them as would be done through the passage of this legislation.

Additionally, AB 1365 poses to eliminate a potential management tool for dealing with localized issues of wildlife overabundance and human-wildlife conflict, and it is therefore not in the best interest of the Division, or public safety. Numerous accounts of conflicts between wildlife, humans, and their pets have been well-documented in the media, and it stands to reason that the frequency of these occurrences is likely to increase if hunting opportunities are limited.

For the past century, the DFW and its predecessor, has successfully managed wildlife populations in the state and is the recognized expert on fish, wildlife and ecosystem health within the state government. This bill seeks to legislatively manage wildlife, thereby circumventing DFW’s science-driven regulatory processes. Should there be a need to augment the current practices regarding hunting tournaments, the DFW is the appropriate entity to do so. Utilizing the best biological and sociological data available the DFW would be able to determine what regulations would be appropriate to pursue, then vet them through their existing rulemaking process, inclusive of public input and comments. Such potential regulations might include: requiring event organizers to contract with a tannery or furrier to ensure harvested animals are utilized appropriately, limiting the number of contests held through permitting, limiting the number of participants in each contest,

¹ *National Hunting License Report*. US Fish and Wildlife Service, 2003. Available online at: <https://www.fws.gov/wsfrprograms/subpages/licenseinfo/HuntingLicCertHistory.pdf>.

² *National Hunting License Report*. US Fish and Wildlife Service, 2015. Available online at: <https://www.fws.gov/wsfrprograms/subpages/licenseinfo/Natl%20Hunting%20License%20Report%202020.pdf>.

³ *COVID-19 and Hunting License Sales*. Council on Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports, 2020. Available online at: <https://cahss.org/covid-19-and-hunting/>

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limiting the number of animals harvested in each contest, and/or placing sideboards on the amount and types of prizes offered to the winners – all of which could be tailored appropriately to local conditions through rulemaking rather than implementing a statewide ban through legislation.

For the reasons detailed above I respectfully urge the members of the Assembly Agriculture Committee to oppose AB 1365. I appreciate your time and consideration on this issue. Should you require any additional information on this, or any other sportsmen-related topic, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

Nicholas H. Lewis

Nick Lewis
Mid-Atlantic States Coordinator | Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
110 North Carolina Ave., SE | Washington, DC 20003
Nlewis@congressionalsportsmen.org | 202-568-1587

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