



**To:           Honorable Members of the Missouri Legislative Sportsmen’s Caucus**

**Re:           SB 661 – Prescribed Burn Act**

**Position:    Support**

**Date:        March 2, 2020**

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Honorable Members of the Missouri Legislative Sportsmen’s Caucus:

On behalf of the Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation (CSF), we ask that you support Senate Bill 661 (SB 661), a bill that would define liability standards for landowners and certified prescribed burn managers seeking to utilize prescribed burn practices on private property.

Since 1989, CSF has maintained a singleness of purpose that has guided the organization to become 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. 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 interests of America's hunters and anglers.

Prescribed burning is an important land management practice that serves a variety of purposes on Missouri’s diverse and often fire adapted ecosystems. Prescribed burning reduces understory fuel loading by consuming leaf litter and other fuels that, when accumulated at large levels, could help carry a damaging wildfire across the landscape. Prescribed burning is also an important management tool used to help improve forest composition and structure and increase the regeneration of economically and ecologically important trees in Missouri’s forests (e.g., oak species). Finally, prescribed burning, when applied properly, is one of the most cost-effective and efficient tools for improving wildlife habitat for species that rely on fire adapted and maintained plant communities, including important game species like quail, turkey, and deer.

Missouri lands are primarily privately owned, and it is therefore important for Missouri's wildlife, and in turn Missouri's sportsmen and women, that private landowners are conducting land management practices that benefit wildlife. While prescribed burning was once common in Missouri, today many landowners do not conduct prescribed burns for fear of facing liability lawsuits. While prescribed fire does carry inherent risks, extensive research and decades of on-the-ground experience allows professionals to safely use prescribed burns. Missouri, however, lacks a legal definition of the liability standards that landowners and certified prescribed burn managers must meet.

Fortunately, SB 661 would address the ambiguity that limits the use of prescribed fire by defining Missouri's prescribed burn liability standard in a manner similar to neighboring states like Arkansas, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. By defining simple negligence standards for both landowners and certified prescribed burn managers, SB 661 affords landowners the confidence to employ this beneficial land management technique while encouraging them to do so with proper planning and care to mitigate the potential risks associated with its use.

To facilitate the use of prescribed fire to improve wildlife habitat and support Missouri's hunting heritage, we urge the Missouri Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus to support SB 661.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kent Keene", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kent Keene  
Lower Midwestern States Coordinator  
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation