



To: **House Fish and Game and Marine Resources Committee**
Legislative Office Building, Room 210-211
107 N Main St.
Concord, NH 03301

Re: **HB 1571 – An Act Relative to the Qualifications for the Members of the Fish and Game Commission.**

Position: **Oppose**

Date: **February 4, 2020**

Honorable Members of the House Fish and Game and Marine Resources Committee:

My name is Joseph Mullin and I am the New England States Coordinator for the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF). I respectfully urge you to oppose House Bill 1571 (HB 1571) – legislation that would frustrate the purpose of the New Hampshire Fish and Game (NHFG) Commission's composition, calling into question the legitimacy and integrity of its membership base. New Hampshire's sportsmen and women are the primary source of funding for the NHFG Department through a "user-pays, public-benefits" system, and therefore are in the best position to provide direction to the Department. As New Hampshire's preeminent conservationists, sportsmen and women are in the best possible position to utilize their sound understanding, judgment, and experiences to serve New Hampshire's fish and wildlife populations. The Granite State's hunters, anglers, and trappers also provide the State with a significant source of economic stimulation, and attempts by anti-hunters and other non-consumptive users to curb their practices have the high likelihood of hindering these benefits.

Sportsmen and Women's Historical Role as Champions of Conservation

America's sportsmen and women led the vanguard that resulted in the formation and organization of state-level fish and wildlife regulations and departments. During the 19th and early years of the 20th century, the United States experienced a period that saw an exploitation of various wildlife species to meet increasing commercial needs. Recognizing the undoubtedly perilous situation, our nation's early hunters banded together to enact laws governing the harvest of wildlife. These early conservationists recognized that unregulated market hunting, coupled with an increasingly urban, non-agrarian society largely out of touch with wildlife in wild places, would ultimately result in negative consequences for much of the country's wildlife, and therefore implemented self-imposed regulations for the betterment of this nation's fish and wildlife. Building off of that, professional wildlife managers continued to work to ensure that healthy and sustainable populations of wildlife would continue in perpetuity. Conservationists like Aldo Leopold developed game laws and worked to restore and conserve imperiled wildlife populations and their respective habitats. At the core of all these efforts was an insistence that science serve as the guiding force in wildlife management decisions and regulations. Wildlife managers, employed by state and federal agencies, would be trained in fields such as biology, ecology, and law enforcement to fulfill this charge. To this day, sportsmen and women continue to work alongside their

respective fish and wildlife departments towards furthering conservation efforts that benefit all wildlife species and all residents of the state.

Sportsmen and Women Provide the Vast Majority of Conservation Funding in the United States

For more than 80 years, sportsmen and women have held the role as the primary funders of state-level conservation efforts in the United States and are thus an important constituency that provides benefits for all Granite State residents. This funding mechanism, the American System of Conservation Funding (ASCF), is a “user-pays, public-benefits” structure, in which those who *consumptively use* public resources pay for the privilege, and in some cases the right, to do so. There are three pillars to the ASCF: revenue from sporting licenses, and excise tax revenue from both the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (Pittman-Robertson Act) and the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act (Dingell-Johnson Act). The resulting funds collected through this program are the lifeblood of the NHFG Department; less than 3% of the Department’s budget is from general funds, as the remainder is met by revenue generated through license fees.¹ Similarly, the Pittman-Robertson Act and the Dingell-Johnson Act set up a System in which excise taxes collected from sporting goods purchases are funneled back into conservation. These excise taxes are used to fund a wide variety of activities including: fish and wildlife research, private and public habitat conservation, hunter education, shooting range development, land acquisition and easements, wetlands restoration, and angler access area construction. Since 1939, state fish and wildlife agencies across the nation have received over \$65 billion from sportsmen and women through this funding structure. The NHFG Department states the following: “Your purchase of fishing tackle, firearms, ammunition, archery equipment and motorboat fuels, along with license sales, helps fund sport fish and wildlife restoration in New Hampshire. This provides opportunities for hunting, fishing and other wildlife-associated recreation.”²

In 2019 alone, New Hampshire’s sportsmen and women generated over \$19 million dollars for conservation through revenue derived from license sales and excise taxes on sporting-related goods through the ASCF. These contributions include: \$4.87 million through hunting licenses; \$6.52 million through fishing licenses; \$4.05 million through the Pittman-Robertson Act; and \$3.70 million through the Dingell-Johnson/Wallop-Breaux Acts. It is indisputable that sportsmen and women are the driving force behind funding for the NHFG Department, and thus deserve each seat at the NHFG Commission’s table.

Counterintuitively, HB 1571 would provide for “non-consumptive recreational clubs” – entities that have not availed themselves to required contributions towards the ASCF – to sit on the Commission and shape the future landscape for New Hampshire’s hunting, fishing, and trapping community. It would be a disservice to the Department as a whole to have an individual occupy a NHFG Commission membership without being an active participant in the field which he/she seeks to oversee.

The True Intent of Fish and Wildlife Conservation is Served Through Sustainable Use

Under New Hampshire’s RSA 206:4-a, the NHFG Commission is tasked with setting policies related to the “*Conservation, protection, and management of wildlife populations and habitats, the collection of necessary scientific information, and the enforcement of fish and game laws for the purpose of sustaining healthy populations of fish, wildlife, and marine resources.*”³ Conservation, according to the first Chief of the U.S. Forest Service Gifford Pinchot, is the “wise use of the Earth and its resources for the lasting good of men.”⁴ Arguably, there is no more observant and conscious community that takes action to the benefit and sustainability of fish and wildlife resources than sportsmen. Through the sustainable use of fish and wildlife

¹ *Funding the NH Fish and Game Department*. Accessed January 29, 2020. <https://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/funding/index.html>.

² *Federal Aid in Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program*. Accessed on January 15, 2020. <https://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/funding/wsfr.html>.

³ RSA 206:4-a, Duties.

⁴ *Gifford Pinchot: A Legacy of Conservation*. Accessed January 31, 2020. <https://www.doi.gov/blog/gifford-pinchot-legacy-conservation>.

resources by hunters, anglers, and trappers, these sportsmen and women embody Pinchot's definition of conservation, and as a result of their active participation, the longevity of both game and non-game species alike is assured.

By allowing non-consumptive users to become members of the NHFG Commission, HB 1571 presents the real possibility that members of the anti-sportsmen's community will enter into the Commission, to actively work against the statutory charge to work towards conservation by inserting their preservationist ideals. The NHFG Commission is tasked with the dedicated purpose of conserving and protecting wildlife populations, and it has understandably been staffed by those with on-the-ground experience in hunting, fishing, and trapping. Having board members that directly oppose hunting, trapping, and fishing will lead to obstructionism, which in turn will reduce the efficiency of the Commission's regulatory process and will potentially limit access and opportunity for sportsmen and women.

Conclusion

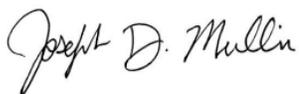
Those who actively participate in hunting, angling, and trapping have a just cause for concern if the continuation of their time-honored traditions hinges on the views of anti-sportsmen's interests who would ultimately like to see hunting significantly curtailed, if not eliminated.

Apart from being the backbone of funding for the NHFG Department, sportsmen and women are also a driving economic force for the State. In 2011, sportsmen and women spent \$271 million on hunting and fishing within the state; this amount is more than the receipts for all agricultural commodities in the state that year (\$271 million vs. \$190 million).⁵ New Hampshire's sporting community also generated \$31 million in state and local taxes in 2011, which would support the average salaries of 720 firefighters.⁶

The economic benefits that sportsmen and women bring to the Granite State represent yet another facet of the numerous benefits the sporting community provides to all New Hampshire citizens. If non-consumptive users are able to become NHFG Commission members, it's highly likely that attempts will be made to curb their practices, resulting in a loss of economic activity, conservation funding, and a significant piece of the cultural fabric of New Hampshire that has been present since prior to the formation of the state itself.

In recognition of the negative bearings that HB 1571 would have on New Hampshire's sportsmen and women, conservation efforts through sustainable use, and the State's economy, CSF strongly encourages you to oppose this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this issue. Should you require additional information on this, or other sportsmen-related topics, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,



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Enclosed: Fact Sheet on the American System of Conservation Funding for New Hampshire.
New Hampshire Economic Impact Report.

⁵ *New Hampshire Sportsmen & Women*. Accessed January 30, 2020.

http://congressionalsportsmen.org/uploads/page/EIR_New_Hampshire_final_low.pdf.

⁶ IBID.