The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

The members of the Hunting and Shooting Sports Conservation Council (Council) are honored to have been selected by you and Secretary Ryan Zinke to provide recommendations regarding policies that benefit hunting, shooting, and wildlife conservation efforts across the Nation. At its October 2, 2018, meeting, the Council discussed a matter effecting Sunday hunting on National Forest lands in the State of North Carolina. We, therefore, respectfully encourage you to direct the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to provide for Sunday hunting on all National Forest System (NFS) lands in North Carolina, in accordance with state law, to increase access and hunting opportunities for America’s sportsmen and women.

In July 2017, the North Carolina General Assembly repealed the prohibition against hunting with a firearm on Sunday on public lands of the state managed for hunting.¹ Regulatory authority to determine which days hunting is allowed on public lands of the state managed for hunting is vested in the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC). The NCWRC is currently evaluating which lands it will propose for Sunday hunting in future rulemaking cycles.

The NCWRC and the USFS have a cooperative agreement under which NFS lands in North Carolina are jointly managed through the NCWRC’s Game Lands program. The NCWRC has determined that “public lands of the State managed for hunting” include all lands enrolled in the Game Lands program. Before initiating rulemaking to allow Sunday hunting on lands enrolled in the Game Lands program, the NCWRC is consulting with landowners (e.g., the USFS), to determine if they are supportive of allowing Sunday hunting on their land.

National Forests in North Carolina have never been open for Sunday hunting. The state law prohibiting Sunday hunting predated the establishment of the USFS. It is important to note that there are no USFS regulations prohibiting Sunday hunting on NFS lands in North Carolina. With the repeal of the state law prohibiting Sunday hunting on public lands of the state managed for hunting, there is an opportunity for the

¹ N.C.G.S. § 103-2(a1)
USFS to recommend that the NCWRC allow Sunday hunting on NFS lands in North Carolina.

Sunday hunting occurs on NFS lands throughout the country, including the adjacent states of Georgia and Tennessee. Forty states have no restrictions on Sunday hunting, and 46 states allow Sunday hunting in some capacity on public land. Sunday hunting bans have no basis in science-based wildlife management and restrict hunter access. Access is a major factor limiting participation in hunting, and sportsmen and women’s conservation organizations have worked for years to rollback Sunday hunting restrictions as a means of increasing access for hunters. Similarly, we strongly support expanding Sunday hunting opportunities on NFS lands to increase access and opportunity for sportsmen and women.

NFS lands on the more than 1.2 million acres of the Croatan, Uwharrie, Nantahala, and Pisgah National Forests in North Carolina provide immense recreational opportunities for sportsmen and women. To ensure consistency with other NFS lands in states where Sunday hunting is not prohibited, we encourage the USFS to express its support for Sunday hunting on NFS lands in North Carolina to the NCWRC. This support will help advance the goal of providing the sportsmen and women of North Carolina with an additional day to enjoy hunting on the public lands that are funded and managed on their behalf.

North Carolina hunters generate significant funding for conservation and contribute significantly to the state’s economy. In 2017, North Carolina’s hunters contributed more than $31.28 million dollars to conservation through the purchase of hunting licenses and hunting-related equipment. Many of these hunter-generated dollars support the NCWRC’s wildlife management programs and habitat improvement work on the NFS lands in North Carolina. Additionally, the more than 335,000 hunters in North Carolina are a significant economic force spending more than $650 million annually and supporting more than 9,370 jobs across the state. Allowing Sunday hunting on NFS lands in North Carolina will facilitate increased economic output benefitting local economies near national forests and the state’s economy, as a whole.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter. We look forward to working with you and the USFS to increase access for sportsmen and women in North Carolina by expanding Sunday hunting opportunities. If you need additional information or have any questions, please contact Council Designated Federal Officer Doug Hobbs at doug_hobbs@fws, or on (703) 358-2336.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey S. Crane
Chairman
Cc:

The Honorable Ryan Zinke, Secretary of the Interior
Vicki Christiansen, Interim Chief, U.S. Forest Service
Lillie Brady, Associate Director, Office of External and Intergovernmental Affairs,
Department of Agriculture
Todd Willens, Assistant Deputy Secretary, Department of the Interior
Andrea Travnicek, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science
Exercising the Authority of the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks
Jim Kurth, Deputy Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
HSSCC members