



To: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Senate Bill 327 – Hunting, Wildlife Conservation, and Outdoor Recreation

Position: Support

Date: February 15, 2023

Honorable Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

My name is Joseph Mullin, and I am the Northeastern States Manager for the Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation (CSF). **I respectfully urge you to support Senate Bill 327 (S. 327)** – a pro-sportsmen’s package that offers to increase access and opportunities for resident and non-resident sportsmen and women alike, securing the longevity of the state’s time-honored traditions while also bolstering conservation funding for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR). While CSF supports this bill as a whole, there are three areas for which we would like to draw special attention: increasing the fees for certain hunting and trapping licenses; offering non-resident students the ability to purchase resident hunting licenses; and the authorization of hunting migratory birds on Sundays.

Founded in 1989, CSF is the informed authority across outdoor issues and serves as the primary conduit for influencing public policy. Working with the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus (CSC), the Governors Sportsmen's Caucus (GSC), and the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses (NASC), CSF gives a voice to hunters, anglers, recreational shooters, and trappers on Capitol Hill and throughout state capitols advocating on vital outdoor issues that are the backbone of our nation's conservation legacy.

Increasing Fees for Certain Hunting and Trapping Licenses

For more than 85 years, sportsmen and women have been the primary funders of state-level conservation efforts in the United States and are thus an important constituency that provides benefits for all Marylanders. 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 foot the bill for conservation efforts that benefit all residents. In 2021 alone, Maryland’s sportsmen and women generated more than \$25 million dollars for conservation through revenue derived from license sales and excise taxes on sporting-related goods through the ASCF. The funds collected through this program are the lifeblood of state fish and wildlife agencies (including the DNR) – the primary managers of our nation’s fish and wildlife resources. These critical conservation dollars fund a variety of efforts including: enhanced fish and wildlife habitat and populations, recreational access to public and private lands, shooting ranges and boat access facilities, wetlands protection and its associated water filtration and flood retention functions, and improved soil and water conservation – all which benefit the public at large, not just sportsmen and women.

In Maryland, an opportunity has presented itself for the sporting community to step up and pay license fees that are reflective of current and realistic prices. For the past 34 years, hunting and trapping license fees have gone unadjusted, despite the DNR taking on new and increasing responsibilities that provide additional access and opportunities for all sportsmen and women, raising the need for the increases provided within S. 327.

There is precedent for this within the northeast. In 2019, Vermont Governor Phil Scott's budget called for the defunding of the Salisbury Fish Culture Station – a “broodstock station” that produces “approximately nine million trout eggs annually for other state and federal fish hatcheries.”¹ Through an outpouring of leadership and support by the Vermont Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus and the state's sporting community, legislation to increase the fishing and hunting licenses was passed, thus keeping the hatchery alive and well. In 2021, Massachusetts' sportsmen and women rallied behind an incremental license fee increase in order to keep the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife solvent after 26 years without license fee increases. These examples reflect what sportsmen and women can accomplish for their state agencies, and natural resources, when they are willing to assist by increasing their financial contributions. Therefore, CSF encourages you to support S. 327 which will increase conservation funding for the DNR.

Offering Non-Resident Student Resident Hunting Licenses

In an increasingly urbanized society, college students have emerged as a key demographic for recruiting life-long hunters.² Maryland's college students are tomorrow's wildlife managers, political and business leaders, and members of conservation organizations. Despite spending nine months out of the year, or more, in the state, non-resident college students are often priced out of formative outdoor experiences due to the high costs of hunting licenses. Recognizing the need to foster the next generation of sportsmen and women, Maryland Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus Co-Chair and National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucus Executive Council Member Senator Jack Bailey introduced this provision to address the cost prohibitive nature of non-resident college student hunting license fees.

S. 327 would allow non-resident college students to purchase hunting licenses at resident rates, so long as they can provide the DNR with proof that they are enrolled at a college or university within the state. Taking it a step further, should S. 327 pass, Maryland residents attending colleges and universities in other states, such as Montana, would be able to purchase hunting and angling licenses in those states at resident rates, meaning the longevity of those individuals as sportsmen and women is supported. For this reason, CSF encourages you to support S. 327 and afford America's future generations of conservationists the opportunity to overcome the higher costs associated with pursuing game while studying in the Old Line State.

Authorizing the Hunting of Migratory Birds on Sundays

S. 327 addresses a critical issue that is largely only a concern in a handful of states – prohibiting hunting on Sundays. While this bill seeks to authorize the hunting of migratory birds on Sundays, it sets a course of increasing access for the state's bird hunting community. Access is a major limiting factor hindering participation in hunting, and restrictions on Sunday hunting provide a temporal-access barrier to youth and others that work or attend school throughout the week and are often involved in extra-curricular activities on Saturdays. The hunting conservation community strongly supports measures that increase access and opportunity for sportsmen and women, and I encourage you to support S. 327 to afford families seven-day migratory bird hunting opportunities. This legislation would significantly improve access and opportunity for Maryland's bird hunters and would likely result in increased

¹ *Salisbury Fish Culture Station*. Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department. Accessed on June 24, 2021. Available at: <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/fish/fish-stocking/salisbury-fish-culture-station>.

² *Turning College Students on to Hunting: Why Campuses are Ideal Targets for R3 Efforts*. The Wildlife Professional.

Accessed on February 13, 2023. Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318531917_Turning_college_students_on_to_hunting_Why_campuses_are_ideal_targets_for_R3_efforts.

hunting participation. A lack of access is regularly cited as the number one reason (over which policy makers have any control) that lapsed hunters give when asked why they decided to stop hunting, and S. 327 poses to take a step in the right direction.³

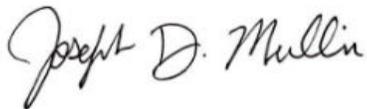
Expanding Sunday hunting opportunities in Maryland to include migratory birds would also benefit the state's economy, particularly in rural areas, by increasing economic output and job creation. An additional day to hunt would mean more dollars spent by hunters in restaurants, gas stations and stores throughout the state. Maryland's sportsmen and women are a significant economic force – spending more than \$815 million, supporting more than 10,707 jobs, and generating \$84 million in state and local taxes.⁴ Creating additional opportunities will also encourage out-of-state hunting-related tourism and further bolster rural economies throughout the state.

The desire to remove and/or lessen Sunday hunting restrictions has been a growing theme across the nation. Most states with Sunday hunting restrictions have been actively working to lessen or eliminate said prohibitions over the past decade. These states include Connecticut, Delaware, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia – all of whom have made significant positive changes to their Sunday hunting laws, or (in the case of West Virginia) have eliminated all restrictions on hunting on Sundays. In all instances where restrictions have been lessened or eliminated states have not seen an increase in enforcement concerns or conflicts between user groups and there have not been any reported negative impacts on wildlife populations. Letters from several state fish and wildlife agencies detailing their positive experiences following these policy changes are attached for your consideration.

Conclusion

For the reasons stated above, I respectfully urge the members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to support S. 327. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this legislation. Should you require any additional information on this, or any other sportsmen-related topic, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,



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³ Duda, M. D., Jones, M. F., & Criscione, A. (2010). Page 207. *The Sportsman's Voice: Hunting and Fishing in America*. State College: Venture Publishing Inc. ISBN-10: 1-892132-90-7.

⁴ *Maryland's Sportsmen and Women*. Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation. Available online at: <https://congressionalsportsmen.org/uploads/page/Maryland-Factsheet.pdf>.