



February 12, 2024

Speaker Jason White
Mississippi House of Representatives
400 High Street
Jackson, MS 39201

Re: HB 300; Reimbursement for Free and Discounted Hunting and Fishing Licenses

Position: Support

Dear Speaker White and Honorable Members of the Mississippi House of Representatives,

We respectfully encourage you to support HB 300, which would require that the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) be reimbursed for any lost revenue resulting from the issuance of free or discounted hunting and fishing licenses, admission to state parks, and other fees provided by the MDWFP through the State General Fund.

Founded in 1989, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (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.

Through the "user pay – public benefits" structure of the American System of Conservation Funding (ASCF), which includes revenue generated from sporting licenses sold and excise tax revenue from the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR), hunters and anglers in Mississippi generate over \$30 million annually for state-based conservation.¹ This funding is critical to the success of MDWFP's mission to conserve and enhance Mississippi's wildlife, fisheries, and parks, provide quality outdoor recreation, and engage the public in natural resource conservation.

¹ https://s3.amazonaws.com/cdn.congressionalsportsmen.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/17201333/Mississippi_ASCF_Fact_Sheet_2021.pdf

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While some free or discounted licenses result in what could be considered a minor impact on license revenue, the state loses out on additional funds that would have been apportioned through WSFR. To determine Mississippi's apportionment through this federal program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) uses a formula that, in part, considers the number of certified hunting and fishing licenses sold in the state. To be certified, each license sale must generate a net revenue of \$2.00 otherwise the state receives no federal funds for that license sale. Free and discounted hunting and fishing licenses that do not meet the USFWS guidelines costs MDWFP not only the direct revenue from the free or discount license but also the 3:1 federal match from WSFR.

Since 2019, there have been no fewer than nine bills introduced intended to provide certain groups with free or heavily discounted hunting and fishing licenses in Mississippi. While certain groups absolutely deserve recognition for their contributions to society, there are alternate methods of recognizing them without negatively impacting the entity charged with conserving resources held in the public trust. If passed, this legislation would bring Mississippi alongside Michigan, New Jersey, and Tennessee where state fish and wildlife agency funding is protected from impacts resulting from the passage of free or discounted licenses. It is also important to note that the legislation is not retroactive. No free or discounted hunting and fishing licenses, or other discounted fees provided by MDWFP, that were passed prior to the effective date of HB 300 would be affected.

In closing, CSF strongly supports HB 300 to protect conservation funding in the Magnolia State, and we ask that you join us in protecting fish and wildlife conservation funding into the future. Thank you for considering our comments, and please let us know if you would like any additional information.

Sincerely,



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