



February 29, 2024

RE: Wildlife Conservation:

House Bill 43 – Wildlife is a Public Trust Resource

House Bill 300 – Hunting/Fishing License Fee Reimbursement

House Bill 731 – Prohibition on the Sale of Game Animals

House Bill 733 – Sales Tax Diversion to the MS Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund

Position: Support

Dear Lieutenant Governor Hosemann and Speaker White,

On behalf of the undersigned conservation organizations, we write to express our support for several key pieces of legislation that would further align the management of Mississippi's natural resources with the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation as well as protect and increase conservation funding in the Magnolia State.

We believe that it is critical for the Mississippi Legislature to work with the sportsmen's community to maintain science-based management of Mississippi's wildlife resources. By upholding the management ethic embodied by the North American Model and supported by the American System of Conservation Funding (ASCF), while also supplementing funding generated by the ASCF through a dedicated source of conservation funding such as the Mississippi Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund, we can safeguard opportunities for Mississippi's sportsmen and women and protect Mississippi's fish and wildlife resources, and their habitats, into the future.

House Bill 43; Wildlife is a Public Trust Resource

House Bill 43 would clarify that wildlife in Mississippi is a public trust resource and that the state has a duty to conserve the state's wildlife for the public's benefit using sound scientific principles. Wildlife being held in the public trust is the first and arguably most important component of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. To carry out these public trust management responsibilities, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) works with its Commission to regulate hunting, fishing, and trapping, and House Bill 43 would codify the MDWFP's and the Commission's responsibility to citizens of our state to defend the public's interest in the state's wildlife and make wildlife management decisions based on the best available science, rather than anecdotal evidence.

House Bill 300; Reimbursement for Free and Discounted Hunting and Fishing Licenses

House Bill 300 would require that the 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. 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 or the legislature, that were passed prior to the effective date of HB 300 would be affected.

House Bill 731; Prohibition on the Sale of Game Animals

House Bill 731 would statutorily prohibit the sale of game birds, game animals, and game fish. This would further align Mississippi state code with the tenets of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, and protect our cherished outdoor sporting traditions, the substantial annual conservation funding contributions from sportsmen and women, and the significant economic benefits that hunting and angling provide to the state.

House Bill 733; Dedicated Funding for the Mississippi Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund

House Bill 733 would allocate a portion of the existing sales tax revenue on sporting goods to the Mississippi Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund (Trust Fund). By dedicating a percentage of the existing sales tax on sporting goods to conservation funding, the Trust Fund can improve its capability to capitalize on matching private conservation dollars as well as federal funds through various fish, wildlife, and natural resource conservation programs. This added security in funding would allow the Trust Fund to continue to work towards fulfilling its mission to improve wildlife habitat, enhance access to public lands, restore wetlands and improve water quality, support fish and wildlife conservation on working forests and farms, and promote hunting, fishing, recreational shooting, and other forms of outdoor recreation without the funding uncertainty that the Trust Fund currently faces through the annual appropriation process.

Thank you for considering our comments concerning the science-based management of Mississippi's wildlife and fisheries and the continued funding for conservation efforts in our state. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have questions.

Sincerely,

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