



May 8, 2024

Senator Bob Hensgens
Chairman, Senate Natural Resources Committee
900 North 3rd Street
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

RE: HB 795 – Reimbursement for Free and Discounted Hunting and Fishing Licenses

Position: Support

Dear Chairman Hensgens and Honorable Members of the Senate Natural Resources Committee,

On behalf of the undersigned conservation organizations, we respectfully encourage you to pass HB 795 out of your committee. This legislation would require that the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) be reimbursed from the state general fund for any lost revenue resulting from the issuance of free or discounted hunting and fishing licenses provided by the legislature enacted on or after July 1, 2024. As you know, the House Natural Resources and Environment Committee passed HB 795 unanimously, and the House of Representatives subsequently passed the bill 97-3, highlighting its strong, bipartisan support.

Through the “user pay – public benefits” structure of the American System of Conservation Funding (ASCF), which includes revenue generated from sporting licenses sold and manufacturer-level excise tax revenue from the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR), hunting and angling in Louisiana generate over \$40 million annually for state-based conservation.¹ This funding is critical to the success of LDWF’s mission to conserve and enhance Louisiana's fish and wildlife resources. In addition to conservation funding, Louisiana’s hunters spent \$985 million on hunting related purchases in 2020. This significant economic driver supports over 10,000 jobs and generates \$70 million in state and local taxes.²

¹ https://s3.amazonaws.com/cdn.congressionalsportsmen.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/17201227/Louisiana_ASCF_Fact_Sheet_2021.pdf

² <https://sportsmensalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Louisiana-State.pdf>

While some free or discounted licenses result in what could be considered a minor impact on license revenue, the loss becomes more significant when considering the loss of additional funds that would otherwise have been apportioned through WSFR. To determine Louisiana'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 cost LDWF not only the direct revenue from the free or discount license but also the 3:1 federal match from WSFR.

While certain groups absolutely deserve recognition for their contributions to society, doing so without a reimbursement mechanism in place would negatively impact the entity charged with conserving resources held in the public trust. If passed, this legislation would bring Louisiana 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 LDWF, that were passed prior to the effective date of HB 795 would be affected.

In closing, our organizations, who collectively represent Louisiana's hunters, anglers, and other wildlife enthusiasts, support HB 795 to protect conservation funding in the Sportsman's Paradise, and we respectfully 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,

Coastal Conservation Association, Louisiana
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Dallas Safari Club
Delta Waterfowl
Ducks Unlimited
Louisiana Charter Boat Association
Louisiana Wildlife Federation
National Deer Association
The Nature Conservancy, Louisiana
Safari Club International
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership