



To: House Committee on Fish and Game and Marine Resources
107 N Main St
LOB Room 305-307
Concord, NH 03301

Re: House Bill 1024 – An Act Relative to the use of Air Rifles for Hunting Game

Position: Recommend Amendments

Date: January 29, 2024

Honorable Members of the House Committee on Fish and Game and Marine Resources,

My name is Fred Bird, and I am the Northeastern States Assistant Manager for the Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation (CSF) and a New Hampshire resident sportsman. I write to you today to recommend that House Bill 1042 (HB 1042) be amended to include language that creates and requires a conservation stamp to hunt with an airguns in New Hampshire. Doing so will protect the integrity of sportsmen- and women-generated conservation dollars that are the critical for the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department in the execution of its mission for our fish and wildlife resources, and their habitats.

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.

For more than 85 years, sportsmen and women have been the primary funders of state-level conservation efforts in New Hampshire and are thus an important constituency that provide benefits for all New Hampshire residents. Enacted in 1937, the Pittman-Robertson Act redirected previously existing excise taxes on firearms and ammunition to a dedicated fund to be used specifically for wildlife conservation purposes. Once collected, the taxes are deposited into the Wildlife Restoration Account administered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), who then apportions funds to all state fish and wildlife agencies for conservation purposes. Under the Pittman-Robertson Act and per the Firearms and Ammunition Excise Tax, firearms and ammunition are subjected to a 10-11% excise tax. Ultimately, it was sportsmen and women who decided to avail themselves to this manufacturer-level excise tax – a choice prompted in sole consideration of the interest and betterment of the nation’s fish and wildlife, and the habitats that they rely on.

The Pittman-Robertson Act is a key component of the unique “user pays – public benefits” structure known as the American System of Conservation Funding (ASCF). The critical conservation dollars collected

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through this System 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. Last year alone, the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department received \$24.5 million of sportsmen-generated funds through the ASCF.

In recent years, airguns have gained popularity thanks to the increased hunting and recreational shooting opportunities that they offer. However, unlike traditional firearms and other methods of take used by hunters and shooting sports participants, airguns do not contribute to the ASCF. Across the country the ASCF continues to be the primary funding mechanism of state fish and wildlife agencies, including the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department. Recognizing this, I respectfully urge that with the passage of legislation that expands airgun hunting opportunities, you also require that hunters purchase either an annual or a one-time conservation stamp to allow airguns to contribute to conservation funding in a manner that is consistent with all other methods of take, at least until such a time that the Pittman-Robertson Act is amended by Congress to include airguns.

CSF has worked closely in other states to expand the use of airguns and airbows, most recently in Oklahoma and Utah. In both instances, legislators included a funding mechanism that allows airguns to contribute to state conservation funding. CSF cannot support the adoption of HB 1024 in its current form without this same inclusion, and we encourage the adoption of an amendment that implements the following language:

- A. No person may hunt or take during the open season with an airgun or arrow-shooting airgun unless the person has first obtained a stamp issued by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department for a [one-time or annual fee] of [X.XX].
- B. At such time as the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act is amended to expand the excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition to include airguns and arrow-shooting airguns, the stamp pursuant to subsection A of this section shall no longer be required, and authorization for the continual use of airguns as a legal means of take shall be established by rules promulgated by the Department.

I respectfully request that you consider amending HB 1024 to require a conservation airgun stamp to hunt with an airgun while further supporting the mission of the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department. I appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments and welcome any questions that you may have. Should you require additional information on this, or other sportsmen-related topics, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,



Fred Bird
Northeastern States Assistant Manager | Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
110 North Carolina Ave, SE | Washington, DC 20003
fbird@congressionalsportsmen.org | 603-583-7454