



April 24, 2017

The Honorable Michael Dembrow, Chairman
Oregon Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: HB 2566A – Expands participation eligibility in Oregon’s youth mentored hunting program

Position: Support

On behalf of the Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation, I write today to express our support for House Bill 2566A, legislation that would raise the maximum age at which a first-time hunter is able to participate in the state’s mentored hunting program from 13 years of age to 16 years of age.

Since 1989 the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation has maintained a singleness of purpose that has guided the organization to become the most respected and trusted sportsmen's organization in the political arena. CSF's mission is to work with Congress, governors, and state legislatures to protect and advance hunting, angling, recreational shooting, and trapping. The unique and collective force of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus (CSC), the Governors Sportsmen's Caucus (GSC), and the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses (NASC), working closely with CSF, and with the support of major hunting, recreational fishing & shooting, and trapping organizations, serves as an unprecedented network of pro-sportsmen elected officials that advance the interests of America's hunters and anglers.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, there are approximately 94,000 fewer Oregonians participating in the sport now than there were in 1996, despite the fact that the state’s population had increased by nearly 621,000 residents during this same period. This trend is concerning for several reasons. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (ODFW) operating budget is derived largely from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and dedicated federal funds through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (WSFR) Programs. With WSFR revenue being generated through excise taxes on firearms, ammunition, archery equipment, fishing tackle, and motor boat fuel, in addition to license dollars being provided directly by hunters and anglers, sportsmen and women proudly shoulder the burden of providing the resources necessary for the ODFW to carry out its mission.

However, the availability of these state and federal funding sources is directly tied to participation in hunting, fishing and the shooting sports. Should declining participation trends continue, the long-term viability of managing the state’s fish and wildlife resources for the benefit of all Oregonians would be in jeopardy. Furthermore, a decline in hunting participation is a threat to Oregon’s rich outdoor heritage, a cultural resource that has benefited the state since its founding.

House Bill 2566A seeks to address these concerns by expanding the eligibility for youth to participate in the state's mentored hunting program. This effort, known nationally as Families Afield, seeks to expand hunting opportunities to ensure the next generation of American hunters joins our ranks. Primarily, HB 2566A would expand the maximum age for a youth to be able to participate in the state's mentored hunting program (without first taking the state's hunter education course) from age 13 to age 16. Under the current mentored hunting program administered by ODFW, youth ages 9 through 13 years may hunt without first passing an approved hunter education program, so long as the youth in question is accompanied by a supervising hunter who is 21 years of age or older and who has a valid license and tag(s) for the dates, area, and species being hunted. As ODFW has noted, the program "gives unlicensed youngsters the opportunity to receive mentored, one-on-one field experience and training on the ethics, safety, responsibility, and enjoyment of hunting while closely supervised by a licensed adult." This "Try Before You Buy" approach is the hallmark of Families Afield and has been adopted in 39 states throughout the nation. Apprentice hunting allows outdoor mentors to instill safety, ethics, and their passion for hunting in new hunters without requiring them to spend significant time in a hunter education course before a prospective hunter has had a chance to try the sport.

While apprentice hunting programs have proven to be extremely successful in recruiting new hunters, the sportsmen's community occasionally hears concerns about safety. Fortunately, with 39 states now featuring apprentice hunting programs, and more than 1.7 million participants, the data is clear—apprentice hunting is extremely safe. In fact, apprentice hunters are more than five times safer than the general hunting population. Simply stated, since the adoption of the Families Afield programs, apprentice hunters have proven to be the safest hunters in the field.

Oregon's mentored hunting program and the improvements proposed in HB 2566A represent a holistic approach to expanding opportunities for ODFW to reach new constituencies in a way that benefits Oregon's public wildlife resources, local communities and cultural heritage. These activities keep public fish and wildlife populations healthy, facilitate habitat management and conservation, generate revenue for public agencies and private businesses, and support jobs.

With these factors in mind, we urge the Oregon Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources to send House Bill 2566A to the Senate Floor with a "do pass" recommendation.

Sincerely,



Zach Widner
Northwest States Manager
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

CC: Senator Alan Olsen
Senator Dennis Linthicum
Senator Floyd Prozanski
Senator Arnie Roblan