

Testimony on HB 2331 regarding Transferable Deer Permits

To

The Kansas House Committee on Agriculture

22 February 2021

The members of the Kansas Chapter of The Wildlife Society respectfully urge you to oppose HB-2331 Relating to the Transferability of Deer Permits. This bill undermines science-based wildlife management, violates the incredibly successful North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, transfers ownership of a natural resource from the citizens of Kansas to a few private individuals whose goal is financial exploitation, and would reward a few non-resident hunters at the expense of many Kansas residents who wish to conserve Kansas' natural resources.

The Wildlife Society supports regulated hunting based on biological information to maintain wildlife populations in a scientific, sustainable, and socially acceptable manner. HB-2331 undermines these principles by affecting the ability of professional biologists to make sound science-based decisions for populations, adding unnecessary risk of altering the healthy structure of the population that makes deer hunting in Kansas nationally renowned, and finally upsetting the social acceptability of the hunt permitting program by creating the opportunity for additional non-resident permits to be added to the number annually issued, incentivizing landowners and tenants who do not currently hunt to purchase permits for the sole intention of transference.

HB-2331 treats deer as an unlimited resource; however, deer are limited in both the number of harvestable deer in any year and the length of time necessary for bucks to reach the desirable mature ages that deer hunters prize. Basic biological population principles dictate that the older, mature bucks that make Kansas a premier hunting destination for non-residents are only a small portion of a deer population and take several years to mature. Excessive harvest of these mature, "trophy" bucks would be possible under this bill. The loss of a greater proportion of mature bucks would require several years for recovery of the resource. Kansas would likely lose many benefits of a healthy deer herd and also incur economic loss as non-residents seek mature deer in other states. It is also possible that in order to maintain the health of the deer herd in response to the impacts from HB 2331, more restrictive harvest regulations will be required in the future, which would likely impact mostly resident deer hunters.

The Wildlife Society supports and participates in the national effort to counter the decline of the number of people who participate in hunting (known as the R3 initiative – Recruit, Reactivate, Retain). This effort intends to bolster the decline in Pittman-Robertson dollars allocated to the state as well as the tradition of sustainable, ethical hunting in younger generations who are not so inclined to participate in outdoor activities. Maintaining adequate hunter numbers is vital to managing deer populations through hunting. Loss of access to places to hunt is a key factor in why fewer Kansans participate in hunting. Approximately 2% of Kansas is publicly owned land. So, R3 initiative efforts, and public hunting by and large depends on the interaction between landowners and hunters who are granted permission to hunt. This bill would not support comradery between landowners and local hunters.

In addition to science-based resource management, the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation relies upon public ownership of wildlife and the democracy of hunting. This bill transfers the ownership of deer from all the citizens of Kansas to a few private individuals and limits purchase of these additional deer permits to the relatively few that can pay the fees. The Wildlife Society recognizes that diversity in natural resources is important and that includes the diversity of people that value and utilize natural resources. Most people do not hunt and do not support “trophy” hunting, but they do strongly support hunting for meat. This support is key to utilizing hunting to maintain deer herds and allows wildlife professionals to sustainably maintain diverse opportunities that encompass hunting for meat, population control, and mature “trophy” deer. HB-2331 risks eroding that support by placing more value on short-term financial gain from wildlife than on scientific, sustainable, and socially acceptable wildlife management.

The success of wildlife management, our government, and our society relies on checks and balances. Landowners and tenants already control access to their properties and many choose, as is their right, to require compensation for use of their property. The balance to this is that the citizens of Kansas own the deer resources and control permits through the public trust agency, KDWPT.

Guidance and oversight by elected state representatives is an important part of wildlife management and we believe that oversight can be more effectively accomplished without the additional complications this bill presents, making it unnecessary. **For all these reasons, the Kansas Chapter of The Wildlife Society respectfully requests you decline support for HB 2331.**

Sincerely,

J.R. Glenn
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