

American Sportfishing Association, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, Boone and Crockett Club Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation, Dallas Safari Club, Delta Waterfowl, Fur Takers of America, National Deer Association, National Shooting Sports Foundation, National Wild Turkey Federation, Oklahoma Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Quail Forever, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Safari Club International, Trout Unlimited
Chapter 420

Date: February 15, 2022

To: Honorable Members of the Oklahoma Legislative Sportsmen’s Caucus
2300 N Lincoln Blvd.,
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Re: SB 1709 & HB 4086 – Game and fish; commercial licenses; hunting licenses; fishing licenses; expiration dates; fees; Wildlife Land Acquisition Fund; Wildlife Heritage Fund; Oklahoma Wildlife Land Fund; effective dates.

Position: Support

Honorable Members of the Oklahoma Legislative Sportsmen’s Caucus:

The undersigned organizations ask that you support House Bill 4086 (HB 4086) and Senate Bill 1709 (SB 1709), bills that grant the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission authority over Oklahoma’s hunting and fishing licenses, permits, stamps and their associated fees. In doing so, HB 4086 and SB 1709 would allow the Commission to make necessary adjustments to Oklahoma’s hunting and fishing license framework, which will benefit both their conservation efforts and improve the license buying experience of sportsmen and women who choose to pursue our time-honored outdoor traditions in the Sooner State without requiring these changes to go through the full legislative process.

Currently, authority over the creation of, or amendments to, Oklahoma’s hunting and fishing licenses is vested in the state legislature. While the Oklahoma Legislature is comprised of several engaged sportsmen who have helped create a system that is largely supported by the sportsmen’s community, amending hunting and fishing license requirements and fees through the legislative process has also created a complex system that has, at times, led to confusion among license buyers. Oklahoma’s current licensing system consists of over 150 separate licenses, permits, and stamps that hunters and anglers must understand in order to ensure that they are legally licensed to participate in their outdoor pursuits. HB 4086 and SB 1709 would allow the Commission to overhaul and simplify this licensing system without needing to amend each individual statute. Such authority will ease the burden currently placed on the legislature and allow the Commission to efficiently address the concerns and confusion often experienced by Oklahoma’s hunters and anglers.

While considering this bill, it is also important to understand how the conservation efforts of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) are funded. Like many state fish and

wildlife agencies, ODWC is solely funded through the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and federal excise tax revenue generated through the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson Acts. Collectively, these funding mechanisms are referred to as the American System of Conservation Funding (for more information on the ASCF, please refer to the attached issue brief document). With the agency's funding relying so heavily on this sportsmen-funded System, it is critical that the Commission is able to enact necessary license and fee changes to best serve the sportsmen and women who ultimately support the agency through the purchase of these licenses.

While the ASCF is an important consideration, it should be noted that the sporting-conservation community does not support overly costly licenses that may create a barrier to participation. Fortunately, the system proposed by HB 4086 and SB 1709 would grant ODWC the ability to nimbly implement innovative license structures for specific programs and purposes that could result in reduced fees for many individuals while increasing revenue for the agency. For example, simplifying the current youth license options – currently consisting of 14 separate options – into a single license package could increase opportunities for youth hunters and anglers while reducing the overall costs of the licenses needed to participate in such activities. This, in turn, would protect the ASCF while supporting the state's existing hunter and angler recruitment, retention, and reactivation (collectively referred to as R3) efforts.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the provisions of both HB 4086 and SB 1709 do not completely remove the legislature from the approval process regarding any changes to Oklahoma's hunting or fishing license structure. All license and fee changes approved by the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission, as is the case with all rule changes approved by the Commission, would still be subject to approval by the Oklahoma Legislature. As such, members of the legislature would still have an opportunity to weigh in on any license or fee changes without compromising the efficiency of this process. In fact, this system would actually increase public engagement, empowering the citizens of Oklahoma to join members of the legislature in voicing concerns/comments during the public comment opportunities that the Commission must provide in order to consider any administrative changes. Such stakeholder involvement would ensure that all affected individuals have a seat at the table to provide their thoughts on whether the license, permit, and fee proposals are in the best interest of Oklahoma's public trust fish and wildlife resources and the citizens for whom ODWC manages them.

In conclusion, the undersigned organizations ask the Members of the Oklahoma Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus to support HB 4086 and SB 1709 and help grant the authority over Oklahoma's hunting and fishing licenses to the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. Doing so will eliminate this administrative burden that is currently placed on the Oklahoma Legislature while equipping the Commission, who is best informed and equipped to make such administrative decisions, with the ability to efficiently address the needs of the hunting and angling conservation community.

Sincerely,

American Sportfishing Association
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
Boone and Crockett Club

Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Dallas Safari Club
Delta Waterfowl
Fur Takers of America
National Deer Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
National Wild Turkey Federation
Oklahoma Ducks Unlimited
Pheasants Forever
Quail Forever
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Safari Club International
Trout Unlimited Chapter 420

Attachment:

Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, 2022, American System of Conservation Funding.
<http://congressionalsportsmen.org/policies/state/ascf>.