



NSSF[®]
*The Firearm Industry
Trade Association*



January 24, 2022

Representative David R. Hiott
Chairman, House Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee

Re: House Bill 4614; Sunday Hunting on Wildlife Management Areas

Position: Support

Dear Chairman Hiott and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we respectfully encourage you to pass House Bill 4614 out of your Committee. The legislation would increase opportunities for South Carolina's hunters, including youth, families, and hardworking adults, with limited access to private property by allowing seven-day hunting on Wildlife Management Areas.

Sunday hunting is legal on private lands statewide, and we ask that you consider expanding Sunday hunting opportunities for South Carolinians that may not have access to private property. Access is a major factor hindering participation in hunting, and owning, leasing, or otherwise obtaining access to private property for hunting can be difficult to secure and is cost prohibitive for many families. We encourage you to support House Bill 4614 to afford all families seven-day hunting opportunities regardless of whether they have access to private property.

Hunting is the only otherwise authorized recreational activity prohibited on Wildlife Management Areas on Sunday. Allowing Sunday hunting on Wildlife Management Areas would provide access parity with other user-groups as hunters are the only constituency barred from using Wildlife Management Areas on Sundays even though Wildlife Management Areas are funded with dollars generated by sportsmen and women. In addition to being state taxpayers, hunters contribute financially to the acquisition and management costs of Wildlife Management Areas by purchasing licenses and paying excise taxes on hunting-related equipment through the Wildlife Restoration

Program (Pittman-Robertson Act). Beyond their hunting license fees, hunters utilizing Wildlife Management Areas must also purchase an additional permit to use these public lands, unlike any other constituency.

Sunday hunting has a successful track record in South Carolina and in every state across the country where Sunday hunting is permitted. South Carolina's sportsmen and women hunt on Wildlife Management Areas six days of the week without issue and allowing Sunday hunting on Wildlife Management Areas would not significantly increase conflict among user-groups. Public land Sunday hunting is legal in some capacity in 47 states. Georgia has no restrictions on Sunday hunting on Wildlife Management Areas, and North Carolina opened Sunday hunting on 1.6 million acres of its public lands in 2021. South Carolina is the only Southern state with an absolute ban on public land Sunday hunting, and the only two other states in the country with an outright prohibition against public land Sunday hunting are Maine and Massachusetts.

In 2021, Clemson University, in conjunction with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, conducted a web-based questionnaire and held five in-person listening sessions across the state to gauge public opinion about Sunday hunting on Wildlife Management Areas. ***The report stated, "responses were approximately 2:1 in favor of Sunday hunting on SCDNR WMAs," and "across listening sessions, approximately 75% of participants were in favor of hunting on Sunday."***

With over one million acres in the Wildlife Management Area system, this legislation would significantly improve access and opportunity for South Carolina's hunters and support hunter recruitment, retention, and reactivation (R3) efforts by removing a barrier that is well-documented to have a negative impact on participation rates. Like other user-groups that depend on access to public lands to engage in their recreational pursuits, many hunters in South Carolina would not have a place to hunt but for the Wildlife Management Area system. Allowing Sunday hunting would double the number of hunting days for youth during the school year and provide additional flexibility for hardworking adults with limited opportunities to hunt on the weekend.

Allowing seven-day hunting on Wildlife Management Areas would also significantly benefit South Carolina's economy. An additional day to hunt on Wildlife Management Areas across the state would result in more dollars spent by hunters in restaurants, hotels, and businesses throughout the state. South Carolina's sportsmen and women are a significant economic force – spending more than \$1.5 billion, supporting more than 40,000 jobs, supporting more than \$733 million in salaries and wages, and generating \$124 million in state and local taxes. Allowing Sunday hunting on Wildlife Management Areas would help retain in-state hunters and attract out-of-state public land hunters that are currently disincentived from planning a weekend hunting trip to South Carolina. Creating additional hunting opportunities will encourage hunting-related tourism and further bolster local economies throughout the state.

As you consider this legislation, we hope you will also consider the importance of sportsmen and women to the DNR. In 2020 alone, South Carolina's sportsmen and women contributed \$32.09

million to conservation funding for the DNR generated through licenses and excise taxes on sporting-related goods. This “user pays – public benefits” American System of Conservation Funding depends on South Carolina’s license-buying constituency, and opening Sunday hunting on Wildlife Management Areas would support funding for the DNR.

In closing, we respectfully ask you to support the legislation to eliminate the access disparity between hunters and other user-groups to publicly owned Wildlife Management Areas and to increase access and opportunity for South Carolina’s families that depend on public access for hunting. Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,

American Woodcock Society
Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation
Delta Waterfowl
National Deer Association
National Rifle Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
Pheasants Forever
Quail Forever
Ruffed Grouse Society
South Carolina Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
Safari Club International

Enclosure: *Exploring the Modification of Sunday Hunting Restrictions on Wildlife Management Areas in South Carolina*. Clemson University, Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management. September 2021.

Cc: South Carolina Legislative Sportsmen’s Caucus
South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
Governor Henry McMaster