



Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs

2426 North Second St. • Harrisburg, PA 17110

Phone: 717-232-3480 • Fax: 717-231-3524

info@pfsc.org • www.pfsc.org

Providing leadership and advocacy for the enhancement of our fish and wildlife resources for the benefit of all hunters, anglers and conservationists. Protecting our 2nd Amendment Rights.

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING

April 29th, 2008

House Bill 1676

Good morning Chairman Levdansky, Chairman Nickol, members of the Committee. My name is Melody Zullinger and I am Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs (PFSC). We currently represent approximately 95,000 sportsmen, women & conservationists. We also have 7 other statewide sportsmen's organizations affiliated with us.

Pennsylvania's wildlife and aquatics are managed by the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) and the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC), for the interest and benefit of all Pennsylvanians, not just those who hunt and fish; and there's a substantial cost associated with this management. Currently, neither agency receives any general fund revenue to perform their legislatively mandated missions. Most of their income comes from selling hunting, trapping and fishing licenses to sportsmen. The remainder comes from sources such as boat registrations, federal conservation programs and the sale of oil, natural gas and timber on agency-owned land.

License fees are set by the General Assembly, and it typically takes legislators several years to adopt fee increases even after the commissions and sportsmen request them and show substantial need. This creates constant headaches for the agencies because costs continue to rise every year even though license revenue remains flat or falls as license sales drop as hunter and angler numbers decline due to population demographics. In 2005, the PFCB received its first fishing license increase in nine years and first boat registration increase in 12 years. The PGC hasn't had a license fee increase since 1999. Due to rising operating expenses, like salaries and benefits negotiated by the Governor's office, and rising gas prices, the agency has had to cut or drastically curtail many programs and not fill vacant positions. Increasing license fees can also be a deterrent to the recruitment and retention efforts of both agencies. HB 1676 would help alleviate the obstacle of needing a large license increase.

We have been discussing and advocating for the concept of HB 1676 for several years, not only with you and your colleagues, but also among our members and other sportsmen's groups. The majority of the other statewide sportsmen's groups, like the PA Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, also support this concept; as well as non-traditional user groups like Audubon. (Please see their attached letter of support.)

Yes, there are concerns about the PGC and the PFBC receiving "general fund allocations". There are those who wish to continue to make the claim that "hunters and anglers have paid their own way;" and those who worry about non hunters and anglers having more control over resource management and our outdoor traditions. There are also concerns stemming from the fear of more interference by legislators in the ability of each agency to achieve its mandated objectives – namely, sound resource management based on science and not public opinion or emotion. However, with the agencies mandates increasing, specifically for non-game species, and costs increasing everywhere we turn – not only for us, but for our resource agencies; we realize the rising costs of resource management is far outpacing what license buyers alone can afford to pay for, and some type of dedicated alternative funding must be provided if we hope to keep our agencies fiscally sound and independent.

House Bill 1676 is based on a percentage of the sales tax and would dedicate less than two thousandths of 1 percent of the state sales tax to the wildlife agencies. Under the proposal, the Game Commission would receive roughly \$10 million a year and the Fish & Boat Commission would receive roughly \$5 million a year. This can be justified because sportsmen's purchases help generate those funds; so in essence, it is still our money coming back to support the agencies.

Sportsmen contribute over \$300 million each year in state and local taxes, pumping over \$3 billion a year into the states economy, resulting in a large economic impact in the commonwealth. It only makes sense to return a small portion of that revenue on an annual basis to help fund the programs contributing to that impact. Transferring these funds automatically annually to the respective Game and Fish funds will also help alleviate some of the fears of the agencies being held hostage by future legislators and/or administrations. With both agencies essentially operating on a tourist type business, with seasonal highs which must carry them through the seasonally low revenue period, perhaps it would be more prudent to make quarterly payments to both funds instead of a once a year payment.

Missouri has a similar law which allocates 1/8 of 1% of sales tax revenues and has served its resource agency extremely well; several other states are considering or have implemented similar options. Our resource agencies have more and more challenges to deal with on a daily basis – challenges that provide benefits for not just hunters and anglers, but that benefit all of the Commonwealth's citizens. Pressures on our natural resources from users who don't traditionally purchase a hunting or fishing license, whether they are birdwatchers, hikers, geo cachers or boaters, continue to increase as the number of "wildlife watchers" increases. As sportsmen, we have always welcomed these "non-traditional" users, and we certainly welcome any financial contribution they would make towards our continued conservation efforts.

It is our hope that the percentages proposed in HB 1676 would eventually be increased to sufficiently sustain the agencies, alleviating the need for future sizeable license increase; however we believe this legislative proposal will be a good start in the process of securing long-term financial stability for our agencies serving PA's wildlife and aquatic resources.

Thank you for recognizing the important benefits provided to all Commonwealth residents by our resource agencies. We are happy to support HB 1676 and offer our assistance to you in securing its passage and we look forward to a continued working relationship with you for the betterment of all our outdoor traditions and resources.