



SENATOR JANET BEWLEY
WISCONSIN STATE SENATE

Chairman Stroebel and Fellow Committee Members

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today in support of Senate Bill 21. This is a bill that would make the Ruffed Grouse the “State Small Game Bird” here in the State of Wisconsin. I was pleased to introduce this bill alongside my colleague Representative Beth Meyers following a conversation we had with some students from the Class Act Charter School in Park Falls, Wisconsin. I won’t take up much of your time as I know you have a busy day and I want you to get a chance to hear from them regarding their passion and knowledge on this subject.

For background however, since 1851 the Ruffed Grouse has been a statewide favorite for small game hunting. In Northern Wisconsin, the bird has done much to drive hunters into the Park falls area, that the city is now unofficially known as the “Ruffed Grouse Capitol of the World”.

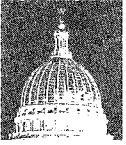
I’m pleased to have introduced this bill and to bring it before you today. Thank you for your consideration of this legislation. I look forward to taking any questions you may have but also hearing the testimony from the students and community leaders today.



25th Senate District

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE
BETH MEYERS

Rep. Meyers Testimony for SB 21 in the Assembly Committee on Government Operations, Technology and Consumer Protection

Tuesday May 7, 2019
10:00 AM
411 South
Wisconsin State Capitol
Madison, WI

Senator Stroebel and members of the committee, thank you for agreeing to hear this bill, and for giving me the opportunity to submit testimony on its behalf.

Senate Bill (SB) 21 was introduced to designate the Ruffed Grouse as the State Small Game Bird. This bird is not only a part of our glorious natural environment in the North – it is an integral component to our state economy and community, and has prevailed throughout Wisconsin’s history.

The idea for this bill was championed by the Class Act Charter School in Park Falls, Wisconsin. A dedicated group of students joined the Tracy Lake Ruffed Grouse Habitat Team to commit to the protection of this bird by planting food sources, tracking bird activity, and creating proper trails that are respectful of natural habitats. These individuals have earned class credit for their hard work and may serve as a model for other schools to do the same. To recognize their efforts, the group earned the 2016-2017 Wisconsin School Forest Award by UW-Stevens Point and the Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education.

Starting with its first season in 1851, the Ruffed Grouse has been a statewide favorite for small game hunting. Since then, it has become one of the longest managed bird populations in the state of Wisconsin. This bird’s fruitful impact in Northern Wisconsin does not go unnoticed in the local economy and hunting community - so much that Park Falls has been garnered as the unofficial Ruffed Grouse Capitol of the World. Committing this bill to state law would give recognition to this bird’s special place in state history and support initiatives for healthy outdoor recreation.

Senator Bewley and I hope to solidify the appreciation and recognition of this important animal through the passage of this bill for the state of Wisconsin. Again, thank you for your consideration of this important proposal and I am hopeful that it will move swiftly through this Committee.



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RUFFED GROUSE SOCIETY

6 May, 2019

Dear Wisconsin Legislator,

With 130 chapters and over 15,000 members in the United States and Canada, the Ruffed Grouse Society is the nation's leading advocate for young forest habitat, wildlife, and the hunting traditions they support. Our members and staff recognize the numerous economic, recreational, and aesthetic values that are generated from Wisconsin's forest and wildlife resources. This is why the Ruffed Grouse Society supports the Wisconsin Senate Bill 21, that is up before the Senate Committee on Government Operations, Technology, and Consumer Protection, to make the Ruffed Grouse the official "State Small Game Bird" of Wisconsin.

Ruffed Grouse are what are known as a *bellwether* species. They are an indicator of complex ecological changes and an early warning sign of environmental damage. This is because of Ruffed Grouse's reliance on and utilization of diverse, balanced forest age classes to live out their life functions. As a result, changes in population relate directly to the implementation of sound forest management principles. This reliance on actively managed forests have also made the ruffed grouse an advocate for the Wisconsin forest products industry and many of the rural economies they support in northern and southwest Wisconsin. So it should be no surprise, that with Wisconsin having the strongest forest products industry in the Midwest, we remain in the top 3 ruffed grouse hunting destinations in the continental United States.

Despite this beneficial relationship with Wisconsin's forest products industry, the upland gamebird that is our society's namesake has recently been faced with an uncertain future. For decades now, Wisconsin Ruffed Grouse, and many other game and non-game wildlife species, have been in long-term trends of decline. This is due to the availability of high-quality habitat and because many of Wisconsin's forests are simply growing too old to be viable for their use by wildlife. This past year the population index, that has monitored Wisconsin ruffed grouse since 1964, unexpectedly indicated a sharp decline in their population. This decline prompted a three-year monitoring effort for West Nile Virus in the grouse population and the creation of the State's first Ruffed Grouse Management Plan due to be completed in 2020. This decline also led to an unprecedented decision by the NRB to end the ruffed grouse hunting season early.

Elevating the Ruffed Grouse to the official status of "State Small Game Bird" of Wisconsin will help bring much needed attention to this iconic, native upland game bird that helps define life in the forests of Wisconsin. Doing so also solidifies the importance Wisconsin places on its forest products industry, hunting heritage, and the role they play in maintaining a quality of life many Wisconsinites have come to enjoy. It also brings attention to the role public lands managers, private landowners, and industry professionals play in ensuring that Wisconsin's 16 million acres of forests are managed sustainably, based on sound scientific principles, so that they can continue to produce healthy and abundant wildlife populations.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter,

Jon Steigerwaldt
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RUFFED GROUSE  SOCIETY

Healthy Forests - Abundant Wildlife - Sporting Traditions

National Headquarters

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