



HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

October 19, 2021

**Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage,
Small Business and Rural Issues**

Testimony on Senate Bills (SB) 610, 613, 615, 616 and 617

Good morning!

Thank you Chair Stafsholt and committee members for hearing the Sporting Freedom package of bills to preserve and enhance Wisconsin's sporting heritage for hunters and sportsmen and sportswomen.

As a lifelong hunter, I am proud to be the lead author of five of these proposals. My bills simplify turkey hunting regulations, seek to reduce the number of different types of hunting licenses offered in WI, share more information about public land access, clear obstacles for dog trainers and encourage partnerships for sport fish stocking in lakes and streams.

Turkey Hunting Simplification Bill (SB 610) – This bill would modify administrative rules relating to the hunting of wild turkeys to combine hunting zones and seasons to just two zones and two seasons (down from the complicated and restrictive six seasons that makes it difficult for many hunters to participate), and to modify youth hunting restrictions.

The spring turkey hunting season starts in mid-April, with the youth hunt on April 17th & 18th this year. On opening day of the regular season, April 21, 2021, there was a snow storm across portions of southern Wisconsin. The application for a turkey permit is due December 10 of the prior year. Unpredictable weather in April and May, can discourage youth hunters who have been looking forward to the hunt.

DNR Hunting License Categories Simplification Bill (SB 613) – This bill would require the DNR to prepare a report that identifies ways to consolidate or eliminate hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses to reduce the total number of types of licenses DNR is required to issue.

Currently there are over 20 categories of hunting and trapping license approvals, five special species stamps, and at least 12 different fishing licenses. Additionally, there are first time licenses for youth, disabled, spousal or mentored hunts. Hunters and anglers want to ethically participate in the sport, but could be left wondering if they have the proper license or tag for the season or the equipment that they are using?

DNR Public Lands Access Report Bill (SB 615) – This bill would require the DNR to prepare a report that identifies public access opportunities on all lands owned or managed by DNR, land

acquired under the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson stewardship program, and open managed forest lands.

Guidance from the legislature has been to increase access to lands funded by public dollars. Over the past decade additional emphasis included providing vehicular access on established roads. An aging hunting population often finds these roads gated and blocked providing inadequate access.

Dog Training Bill (SB 616) – This bill would require the DNR to make available on the Go Wild website dog training licenses. Currently, this license is not available there and that makes it harder for hunters to comply.

During the pandemic, many DNR Service Centers were closed, and counter service was restricted. This required hunters to mail a paper application for dog training licenses, allowing one to two weeks for processing. There is no justification for not making the application and permits available on the Go Wild system with all of the other hunting and fishing licenses.

Aquaculture Partnership Bill (SB 617) – This bill requires the Department of Natural Resources to prepare a report that identifies opportunities for partnering with the private aquaculture industry for increased stocking of desirable sport fish in lakes and streams.

Public-private partnerships can take advantage of the aquaculture expertise that exists in Wisconsin. The successful Walleye Initiative can be used as a model to partner with private fish farms to stock popular game fish and increase angling opportunities and enhance native fish populations.

Thank you again to the chairman and committee for holding this hearing. This package of legislation is about simplifying the DNR rules and regulations, so whether you're a seasoned hunter, angler or new to the sport, you can be sure that you purchased the right licenses, permits or tags to be part of the sporting culture in Wisconsin.

The Sporting Freedom package of bills is very timely as hunters return to the fields, set-up their stands and harvest wild game all over Wisconsin. I am proud to be a part of this effort to protect and defend our sporting freedoms and heritage. I look forward to working with my colleagues to advance this legislation.



ROBERT BROOKS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 60TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Hearing Testimony

Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Small Business, and Rural Issues

Tuesday, October 19, 2021

10:00 A.M.

Wisconsin State Capitol, North Hearing Room

Chairman Stafsholt and members of the Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage and Rural Issues, thank you for affording me with the opportunity to testify in favor of Senate Bill 610.

Senate Bill 610 would require the Department of Natural Resources to modify administrative rules relating to the hunting of wild turkeys, combine hunting zones and seasons, and modify the youth hunting restrictions. Each of the aforementioned would simplify the process, enhance the hunting experience, and exponentially increase both participation and access.

As denoted, simplifying regulations with regards to the state's turkey hunting season and zones will provide greater opportunities for public access. Under the current system, there are fewer demands for later season tags, which are typically issued on a first come, first serve basis.

This bill requires the Department of Natural Resources to issue a wild turkey license and accompanying stamp and tag to each individual who applies for a license during the last four weeks of Wisconsin's turkey hunting season. The tag issued with the license would be valid for either the northern or southern zone the entire four weeks. Under current law, the tag issued with a license under the preference system is to one of seven wild turkey hunting zones and one of six time periods.

Turkey hunting regulations in this state are beyond confusing and need to be revised. This common sense piece of legislation streamlines the process for hunting wild turkeys and provides and provide Wisconsinites with a longer hunting season. Perhaps more important, however, the bill is a first-rate tool for recruiting new hunters.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have.



Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Small Business, and Rural Issues

2021 Senate Bill 610

Administrative Rules Relating to Hunting Wild Turkeys

October 19, 2021

Good morning Chair Stafsholt and members of the Committee. My name is Eric Lobner, Director of the Bureau of Wildlife Management for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Joining me today to assist with questions is Scott Karel, Regulation Policy Specialist. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to Senate Bill 610 (SB 610), related to administrative rules relating to hunting wild turkeys.

The current turkey season framework is very popular with our state's spring turkey hunters. Each year, the department sends out a survey to 10,000 random spring turkey permit holders in proportion by zone. This survey is consistently the most represented snapshot of turkey hunters in the state. Responses from our 2016 spring turkey hunters survey indicated that 71% of respondents felt that maintaining the system of 6-week time periods is important in maintaining a quality spring turkey hunting experience with only 14% disagreeing. That same survey also showed that 75.5% of spring turkey hunters were satisfied with the current spring turkey season framework with only 13.4% disagreeing.

Current turkey hunting zones were established based on habitat availability, landownership patterns, turkey density, hunter success rates, and input from local biologists. These zones allow us to fine tune the number of harvest authorizations given out to minimize hunter interference and maintain hunter success and satisfaction. This new format will not allow for precise control of harvest authorization issuance and hunter densities. Since there will be fewer time periods, larger zones, and likely the same number of turkey hunters, there will be more crowding of all turkey hunters, but especially those that hunt on public lands. Under the structure in the proposed bill, the department will likely have to offer fewer harvest authorizations to prevent overcrowding and hunter safety issues.

Turkeys are the only game bird in Wisconsin that are harvested during their breeding season. Therefore, it is necessary to be more conservative with our harvest timing and structure during the spring season. Wisconsin's current turkey season framework equally distributes hunter harvest and pressure across time and space to prevent overharvest that can lead to less breeding and a drop in the turkey productivity and population. Recent brood survey data has shown a consistent increase in the number of turkey broods observed, indicating our current season framework allows for good natural reproduction.

Recent studies in southeastern states have shown that decreasing turkey populations and productivity may be due to liberal, open, and continuous seasons where hunters can go afield at any point during a month-long season. A recent study in South Carolina showed that under an open continuous season framework almost 75% of all hunting activity occurred in the first two weeks of the season. This leads to overcrowding of public lands, decreased hunter satisfaction, and increased safety incidents. In the 2021 Wisconsin spring turkey hunter questionnaire respondents ranked "Not seeing other hunters" as having

higher importance when measuring their hunting experience over “Harvesting a turkey” or “Harvesting a mature Tom.”

The hunting pressure and harvest also impacts turkey breeding behavior. Turkeys have a complex social structure where more dominant males hold the best strutting and breeding locations. Studies have shown that gobbling behavior is decreased in the presence of high hunter numbers, which could potentially depress normal breeding activities and negatively impact population productivity. On a local scale, in a heavily hunted area, especially in the beginning of the season, hunting activity will be heavily skewed towards the beginning of the two proposed periods when impacts to breeding behavior could be the most detrimental. Hearing turkeys gobble is also one of the factors that influence hunter satisfaction, so reduced gobbling activity resulting from turkeys over-pressured during a short time frame may also decrease hunter satisfaction.

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, we would like to thank you for your time today. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.