



MISSOURI CHAPTER
of
The Wildlife Society

P.O. Box 743
Columbia, Missouri 65205-0743

February 17, 2015
Senator Joe Keaveny
Missouri Senate
Post Office 201, West Capitol Avenue
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Subject: Bills Affecting Wildlife

Dear Senator Joe Keaveny:

The Wildlife Society was founded in 1937 and is a non-profit scientific and educational association of nearly 11,000 professional wildlife biologists and managers dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education. Our mission is to represent and serve the professional community of scientists, managers, educators, and others who work actively to conserve wildlife and wildlife habitat worldwide. The Missouri Chapter of The Wildlife Society was created in 1962 and represents Missouri wildlife professionals working for various state, federal, and private organizations.

This year, there are five legislative initiatives we are particularly concerned about and wish to go on record as being **opposed to their passage**. All five target the Missouri Department of Conservation (the Department).

HJR 27 (Spencer; Co-sponsors: Muntzel) - **Proposes a constitutional amendment reducing the sales tax from 1/8 of a cent to 1/16 of a cent.**

If successful, this resolution would reduce general support to the Department by approximately \$53 million. This loss would cause substantial harm to programs, services, and infrastructure managed for the benefit of Missouri's citizens. It appears this is strictly a punitive action by the legislature as there is no supporting rationale for this sizeable reduction in funding.

HJR 28 (Spencer; Co-sponsors: Muntzel) - **Proposes a constitutional amendment requiring the conservation sales tax to be approved by voters every 10 years.**



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As originally envisioned and approved by the voters in 1976, the conservation sales tax was intended to be a permanent source of earmarked funding, recognizing that conservation work is long-term, and benefits all Missourians. While it may seem reasonable to ask for re-approval every ten years, the periodic risk of de-funding the agency would make long-term planning impossible, making this an unwise and unnecessary action.

SJR 1 (Munzlinger) - Modifies the membership composition and terms of service of the commissioners on the Conservation Commission.

Fundamentally, the Commission is expected to represent the interests of all Missourians. Our observations suggest this expectation has been well achieved. The main problem with expanding the size of the Commission and requiring a Commissioner from each defined region is that Commissioners will assume they have specific constituents that they must represent, thereby losing the statewide perspective. Whether it is folks back home or a special interest group, the focus of individual Commissioners will narrow and political battles will ensue. The Commission will lose effectiveness and the Department will become politicized.

SB 56 (Munzlinger) - Eliminates hunting, fishing, and trapping permit fees for Missouri residents.

If successful, this unprecedented action would significantly reduce the Department permit revenue and cause the loss of most federal aid money from the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs (\$30 million in permit sales and \$26 million in federal aid money annually). Missouri hunters, anglers, recreational shooters, and boaters pay a significant amount of money into the national trust funds through excise taxes on guns, ammo, archery equipment, fishing tackle, and motorboat fuel taxes. The state of Missouri is able to receive funds from the national trust based on the number of hunting, fishing, and trapping permits sold so this bill would also deny the return of those funds to Missouri and guarantee more money to other states.

SB 337 (Munzlinger) - Bans the Conservation Commission and Department of Conservation from providing money, services, or other things of value to 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporations.



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Whereas the work of conservation cannot be carried solely by one agency, working together in partnership with other agencies and not-for-profit organizations can be critical, resulting in substantial and meaningful benefits to Missouri's natural resources for its citizens. This bill would result in the elimination of many conservation partnerships at the state and local levels. Current partnerships include 4H, FFA, and other student organizations; numerous non-governmental organizations like National Rifle Association, Quail Forever, National Wild Turkey Federation, Whitetails Unlimited, Audubon Society of Missouri; and other groups of people that enjoy the outdoors. Because of the Department's current partnerships, children are learning about natural resources, learning firearm safety, and getting introduced to hunting, fishing, and other outdoor activities. By banning the Department from involvement in these partnerships, this bill would severely lessen the positive impacts provided by everyone involved.

Missouri's citizens have repeatedly spoken out against changing the formula for a tremendously successful conservation agency. By repeatedly introducing such bills, legislators are going against the wishes of their constituents and the citizens of the state. As a leader in Missouri's legislature, we are asking for your assistance to prevent these unnecessary and damaging bills from going to committee. We look forward to working with you to prevent any further exploitation of public trust wildlife resources, which belong not to individuals, but to present and future generations of Missouri citizens. If you have questions regarding the information provided or would like additional information, please feel free to contact me anytime at 660-676-4958, or by email at camybree77@gmail.com.

Respectfully,

ANTHONY G. ELLIOTT, PRESIDENT
MISSOURI CHAPTER OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY