

February 18, 2020

Natural Resources Committee Members
Nebraska State Legislature



RE: **Oppose LB1071**, Wildlife Damage Recovery Act

Dear Natural Resources Committee,

The Nebraska Chapter of The Wildlife Society (NETWS) respectfully submits testimony in **opposition of LB 1071**, the Wildlife Damage Recovery Act. **We request this letter be included as part of the public hearing record.**

The NETWS is an organization of wildlife professionals dedicated to excellence in wildlife conservation through science and education. We represent biologists, researchers, managers, educators, technicians, and others who work to study, manage, and conserve wildlife and their habitats in Nebraska.

LB1071 would amount to an approximately 50% budget cut. Transferring \$3 million each fiscal year from the State Game Fund would rob all Nebraskans of conservation funding. The State Game Fund is the lifeblood of wildlife conservation funding for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (Commission) and is matched to federal conservation funding, namely Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (PR) funds. According to the fiscal note, transferring \$3 million from the State Game Fund would result in loss of approximately \$15.6 million in revenue because the Commission would no longer be eligible to receive this funding. According to the Commission's annual report, this amounts to a 50% cut in funding to their Wildlife and Fisheries division's annual expenditures. A reduction of funding of this magnitude would cripple the Commission's ability to carry out its mission and serve the citizens of Nebraska.

Wildlife research funding would be crippled. NETWS advocates for the use of science-based wildlife management with wildlife research as the core of sound conservation decision and policy making. With funding for research all but eliminated, the Commission would be unable to make the informed decisions the citizens of the state expect.

This bill would result in job loss. A budget reduction of this magnitude would result in the loss of jobs across the state. Many of these positions spread throughout rural Nebraska, provide technical assistance to private landowners on a range of conservation topics.

This bill would harm rural economies. Hunting, trapping, and fishing activities have a \$1.2 billion economic impact in Nebraska. This bill would eliminate funding available for the Commission's Open Fields and Waters Program (OFW) and habitat incentives programs. In 2019, OFW and incentive payments to private landowners totaled roughly \$1.8 million. Hunters trappers, and anglers would no longer have the opportunity to recreate on 347,000 acres of private lands and waters across the state. The loss of this program would result in less hunters,

trappers, and anglers afield in rural Nebraska where economies benefit from them buying gas, food, and supplies while staying at the local motel.

This bill would violate state statute. Neb. Rev. Stat. § 37-901 states “No funds accruing to the State of Nebraska from permit or license fees paid by hunters shall be diverted for any other purpose than the administration of the Game and Parks Commission.”

In closing, the members of NETWS **oppose LB1071** because it would divert funds from wildlife conservation, result in job loss, hurt rural economies, and landowners. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



Shelly McPherron

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