

February 10, 2020

Natural Resources Committee Members  
Nebraska State Legislature



RE: **Oppose LB1173**, A BILL FOR AN ACT relating to hunting; to amend sections 37-410, 37-447, 37-449, 37-450, 37-456, and 37-560, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, and section 37-455, Revised Statutes Supplement, 2019; to provide for limited transferable permits to hunt either antelope, deer, or elk as prescribed; to provide duties for the Game and Parks Commission; to harmonize provisions; and to repeal the original sections.

Dear Natural Resources Committee,

The Nebraska Chapter of The Wildlife Society (NETWS) respectfully submits testimony in **opposition of LB 1173**, A BILL FOR AN ACT relating to hunting; to amend sections 37-410, 37-447, 37-449, 37-450, 37-456, and 37-560, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, and section 37-455, Revised Statutes Supplement, 2019; to provide for limited transferable permits to hunt either antelope, deer, or elk as prescribed; to provide duties for the Game and Parks Commission; to harmonize provisions; and to repeal the original sections. **We request this letter be included as part of the public hearing record.**

NETWS is an organization of wildlife professionals dedicated to excellence in wildlife conservation through science and education. We represent biologists, managers, educators, technicians, and others who work to study, manage, and conserve wildlife and their habitats in Nebraska. Many of our members are hunters and believe in the North American Model of wildlife conservation, which this bill is in direct conflict with.

The North American Model of wildlife conservation is a set of principles that has guided wildlife management and conservation in the United States for over 100 years. The usage of this model has led to thriving wildlife populations and countless success stories, one of which is big game like deer and elk. In the North American Model, wildlife is held in the public trust. This means that fish and wildlife are held by the public through state and federal governments. In other words, though an individual may own the land upon which wildlife resides, that individual does not own said wildlife. Instead, the wildlife is owned by all citizens. NETWS believes LB1173 is in direct conflict with this principle by providing landowners and leaseholders unfair access to wildlife resources. The deer permitting regulations already in place provide landowners a reasonable preference in the form of reduced price and guaranteed permits.

**Free permits are in fact not free, they rob all Nebraskans of conservation funding.** Every free permit provided would not only result in the direct loss of revenue, but also results in a loss of \$60-\$70 of Pittman-Robertson (PR) funds. This PR funding is critical for wildlife management and conservation in Nebraska. In fact, private landowners stand to lose because this bill will result in the reduction of dollars paid to private landowners for private lands conservation. Add in the costs to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (Commission) for administration and enforcement of this bill, and the result is an enormous net loss.

**This bill would result in an administrative and enforcement nightmare.** Tracking and administration of the provisions in this bill would require countless hours of staff time. Conservation officers across the state are already stretched thin and this bill would only exacerbate that fact. This bill would be a nightmare for officers protecting a public trust resource from fraud and abuse. It would create unnecessary conflict between landowners, leaseholders, their family members, and officers trying to uphold game laws.

**This bill would take deer management out of the hands of the Commission where it belongs.** The North American Model recognizes science as a basis for informed management and decision-making processes. It is correct to assume that a majority of landowners or leaseholders meeting the criteria in this bill would request a transferable permit. The Commission would have to account for the transferable permit allocations when setting permit quotas in order to maintain populations. Simply put, for each transferable permit given out, one regular permit for that species would need to be removed from the quota. For elk, that would likely mean that no elk permits would be available to non-landowners or non-leaseholders. We can also assume that antelope and deer permit availability during the regular firearm seasons would also be drastically reduced and result in less opportunities.

**This bill would put landowners against each other.** This bill requires a landowner or leaseholder to own or lease more than 320 acres of land to be eligible, a requirement which would not be acceptable to landowners or leaseholders of less than 320 acres. The bill also gives non-resident landowners and leaseholders the same preference as resident landowners and leaseholders. This would not be acceptable to resident landowners, leaseholders, and hunters.

**This bill would commercialize deer, elk, and antelope hunting.** LB1173 does not restrict the amount of compensation a landowner or leaseholder could receive for the transferable permit. Landowners and leaseholders would sell these permits to the highest bidder, with permits likely going for thousands of dollars. This bill would create “market hunting” for trophy animals. The high price that could be gained by selling permits will dramatically increase the number of leased properties, driving up property values, and ultimately property taxes. An increase in leased properties would mean less places to hunt for non-landowners and non-leaseholders.

In closing, the members of NETWS **oppose LB1173** because it is bad for the hunting tradition that Nebraskan’s value. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



Shelly McPherron

President-Elect, Nebraska Chapter of The Wildlife Society

3100 North 95<sup>th</sup> St., Lincoln, NE 68507

402-659-6589

Shellymc5@yahoo.com