



OREGON HUNTERS ASSOCIATION

Protecting Oregon's Wildlife, Habitat and Hunting Heritage

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For the record, I am Al Elkins, representing the Oregon Hunters Association. We asked that this bill be introduced and Rep. Witt graciously offered to be the sponsor. HB 2566 was originally written to develop an "adult mentor" hunting program, but after additional thought it was decided that a better way to introduce more to hunting was through the expansion of our current youth mentor program.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife currently offers a youth mentor program for youth ages nine through thirteen years of age. The youth hunts while accompanied by a supervising hunter who is twenty-one years of age or older and who has a valid license and tag(s) for the dates, area and species being hunted. The mentor:

- Register annually with ODFW and must maintain proof of that registration while in the field.
- Must sign a form saying that they have review material and understand safe hunting practices.
- Must follow all regulations regarding hunting in the wildlife management unit, management area or location.
- Must have a valid hunting license and tag(s) valid for the dates, area and species being hunted.
- Must maintain immediate control of the mentored youth hunter always while the youth is in possession of any legal weapon for the hunt.

Under today's program at the age of fourteen a youth is no longer eligible to participate in this program. Today youth from age fourteen through seventeen, a youth must pass an approved hunter education program and possess his or her own license and/or tags.

Today's high-school age youth are extremely busy with homework, extracurricular activities and jobs, and it can be difficult for high school kids with a marginal interest in hunting — the ones we need to reach — to commit to a 3-week class and weekend range day just to sample hunting for the first time. We think expanding this program through age seventeen that is a step towards helping this age group, fourteen through seventeen, explore their interest in hunting.

In summary, HB 2566 with the amendment would extend the age limit of the program and allow youth until the age of 17 participate in the youth mentor program without having to pass an approved hunter education program and possess his or her own license and/or tags.

The Oregon Hunters Association is bringing this idea forward as our members have told us of the need to expand the program so that more interested youth could participate in this age range.

In their 2015 Ways and Means presentation, ODFW reported that some 20,000-youth registered in the had registered in the youth mentor program since it started in 2007

That concludes my testimony, would be glad to answer any questions.