



April 26, 2017

The Honorable Michael Dembrow, Chairman
Oregon State Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: HB 2566
Position: Support

On behalf of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF), I write today to express support for House Bill 2566. This pending legislation would extend the age range of those eligible to participate in Oregon's youth hunter mentoring program from the current maximum of 13 years of age to 16 years of age.

The NWTF operates on a mission dedicated to the conservation of the wild turkey and the preservation of our nation's hunting heritage. We represent a member base of over 230,000 individuals from across North America, including over 600 members in Oregon. The NWTF extends its support to non-members in Oregon, including 15,605 turkey hunters spending a collective 65,011 hunter-days spring and fall turkey hunting within the state in 2016.

In 2005, the NWTF partnered with the Sportsmen's Alliance and the National Shooting Sports Foundation to establish the Families Afield program. Families Afield was created in an effort to reduce and remove unnecessary barriers that impede the next generation of sportsmen and women from developing a passion for the outdoors. The cornerstone of the Families Afield program is the apprentice or mentored hunting program. The creation of a mentor program allows a new hunter to safely try hunting under the watchful eye of an experienced adult mentor before completing a hunter education class. Mentors instill safety, ethics, and their passion for the hunting lifestyle in a safe setting, while allowing the new hunter the thrill of the hunt.

It is important to note that mentored hunters are by far the safest hunters in the woods. Data from the Families Afield program indicates that apprentice hunting is five times safer than the general hunting population. Additionally, Families Afield offers a strong track record of retaining new hunters. Data from Pennsylvania and Ohio indicates that roughly 50% of new hunters participating in the mentor program return to buy a license in subsequent years. Data from Minnesota shows that the mentor hunting approach also results in three times higher recruitment of female hunters.

In an age overrun with cell phones, social media, YouTube, and other distractions of the modern world, it is important to grab the attention of youth before they are lost to technology. A mentored hunt program provides an environment in which Oregon's wild spaces are able to capture the hearts of our children. Allowing our youth to develop an appreciation for wildlife conservation and appreciation for their hunting heritage today is critical to ensuring a future for all wildlife in the state tomorrow. By extending the mentor hunting program in Oregon to include 14, 15 and 16 year olds, HB 2566 would allow mentors throughout the state to reach a wider demographic of potential new hunters.

Not only is the passing of HB 2566 critical to the success of the Families Afield program and the preservation of our hunting heritage, it is critical to the fiscal success of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

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(ODFW). According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in 2011 there were approximately 94,000 fewer Oregonians participating in hunting activities than there were in 1996. The ODFW operating budget is largely supported from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses within the state, together with dedicated funds from several federal programs stemming from the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act. These federal funds are generated through excise taxes on firearms, ammunition, and other recreational hunting and fishing equipment. While Oregon hunters and anglers proudly support the ODFW directly through tag and license sales, and indirectly through purchase of sporting equipment, the steep decline in hunters within the state and corresponding decline in revenue generated, puts the financial future of ODFW in jeopardy. Simply stated, where there are fewer hunters, there are fewer funds generated to sustain the future of wildlife in the state.

In 2016, 461 licensed, adult hunters spent 1,453 days mentoring youth during the spring turkey season. It is rationally deducted that, should HB 2566 be passed and the maximum age for participation in the state's mentored youth program be increased from 13 to 16 years of age, even more youth would have the opportunity to be mentored and develop a lifelong passion for hunting.

In a measure to support our hunting heritage, the NWTF urges the Oregon Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources to send House Bill 2566 to the Senate Floor with a "do pass" recommendation.

Sincerely,

Michelle Whitney Bodenheimer
Regional Director- Oregon, Washington and Alaska
National Wild Turkey Federation

cc: Senator Alan Olsen
Senator Dennis Linthicum
Senator Floyd Prozanski
Senator Arnie Roblan

