



March 13, 2020

The Honorable Eduardo Garcia, Chair
Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee
1020 N Street, Suite 160 Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 2299 (Gallagher): Free Hunting Days - **SUPPORT**

Dear Assembly Member Garcia:

The below signatory wildlife conservation organizations are pleased to offer their strong support for AB 2299 (Gallagher), legislation which would require the Director of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) to designate two days per year as “Free Hunting Days” – with one free hunting day taking place in the fall hunting season and the other free day during the spring hunting season.

Regulated hunting plays an integral role in wildlife conservation and management in California and throughout North America. Revenue generated from the annual sale of hunting licenses and associated stamps and tags provides a substantial amount of the funding necessary for DFW to carry out its wildlife research, management and enforcement mandates. Additionally, since 1939, sportsmen and women have generated nearly \$20 billion for wildlife conservation and related purposes nationwide via the federal Pittman-Robertson Act which places an excise tax on the sale of hunting gear, ammunition, sporting arms, archery equipment and handguns.

But over the past few decades, California has seen a steady decline in hunting license sales and an associated reduction in critically needed funding for wildlife conservation. To address this concern, DFW is working with stakeholders on an active campaign to put more hunters back in the field. An important component of this effort is to increase the number of youth and adults that enroll in the mandatory Hunter Education course an individual must take to obtain the Hunter Safety Certificate necessary to purchase a hunting license. Although the number of people taking the course has increased, many of those who pass the course are not purchasing a license – often due to concern over where to go, or fear of not knowing what to do to be successful.

AB 2299 would take a big step towards addressing this problem by requiring DFW to designate two days each year as “free hunting days”, during which an unlicensed hunter who has completed the Hunter Safety Course would be

allowed to hunt without a license – if accompanied by a licensed hunter, 21 years or older, who has held a valid hunting license for at least the last three consecutive years. Further, to ensure necessary safety in the field and appropriate hands-on supervision, AB 2299 would restrict licensed mentors to only accompanying one unlicensed hunter at a time.

AB 2299 would allow interested, yet unlicensed individuals to get in the field and hunt with appropriate oversight and have the positive experience necessary to provide the excitement, confidence and motivation they need to take the next step and purchase a license.

In 2010, Governor Brown signed SB 1179 (Hollingsworth), legislation which authorized the DFW Director to declare two free hunting days per year. SB 1179 was meant to be instituted after the Automated License Data System (ALDS) was implemented, so DFW could properly track participation. However, although ALDS has been operational since 2012, no free hunting days have ever been declared.

For many years, DFW has annually offered two “free fishing” days – an effort which has proven to effectively promote fishing license sales. By requiring, rather than merely authorizing the Director of DFW to declare two free hunting days each year, AB 2299 would utilize this proven approach to introduce new hunters to the field and provide a much-needed boost to the sale of hunting licenses.

Revenues generated by the annual sale of hunting licenses, stamps and tags, and the purchase of hunting equipment, firearms, munitions and other related gear are essential to the conservation and management of California’s wildlife and their habitats. AB 2299 would take an important step in stemming the steady decline in these much-needed revenues by helping to recruit new and returning hunters in California. Because of all the above reasons, we ask for your strong support of AB 2299 when it comes before your Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee on March 24th.

Sincerely,

Donn Walgamuth, President
California Deer Association

Kyle Weaver, President and CEO
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

Fred Harpster, President
Black Brant Group

Adam Chavez, President
California Hawking Club

Lori Jacobs, President
California Houndsmen for Conservation

Don Martin, President
California Chapter – Wild Sheep Foundation

Steve Miller, President
Tulare Basin Wetlands Association

Gary F. Brennan, President
San Diego County Wildlife Federation

Don Kirby, President
Cal-Ore Wetland and Waterfowl Council

Chriss Bowles, President
California Bowmen Hunters/State Archery Association

Rick Travis, Executive Director
California Rifle and Pistol Association

Mark Hennelly, Vice President Government Relations
California Waterfowl Association

Aoibheann Cline, Western States Coordinator
Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation

Steve Chappell, Executive Director
Suisun Resource Conservation District

Cathie Nelson, President
San Francisco Bay Area Chapter - Safari Club International

cc: Members, Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee
The Honorable James Gallagher