



March 1, 2022

Delegate Lee Ware

Chairman, House Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources Committee

Re: Senate Bill 8; Sunday Hunting on Public Lands

Position: Support

Dear Chairman Ware and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we respectfully encourage you to pass Senate Bill 8 out of your Committee. The legislation passed the Senate on a strong bipartisan vote (29-11), and we encourage you to support the bill to eliminate the access disparity between hunters and other user-groups to publicly owned lands and to increase opportunities for Virginia's hunters that depend on access to public lands for hunting.

Senate Bill 8 would only allow Sunday hunting on public lands where hunting is permitted the other six days of the week. The legislation would not open hunting on state parks, national parks,

or other public lands where hunting is already prohibited. Additionally, the legislation would not remove the prohibition against hunting deer or bear with the aid or assistance of dogs on Sunday.

As you consider this legislation, we hope you take into the account the resolution adopted in October 2021 by the Virginia Board of Wildlife Resources expressing support for allowing Sunday hunting on public lands. Additionally, North Carolina opened Sunday hunting on 1.6 million acres of its public lands in 2021 so now every state adjacent to Virginia allows public land Sunday hunting. In fact, 46 states allow Sunday hunting on public lands, and Virginia is one of only two Southern states (the other is South Carolina) that prohibits it, although there is strong support for removing the ban in South Carolina this year with legislation (House Bill 4614) which is sponsored by 24 Representatives from both sides of the aisle.

Hunting is the only otherwise authorized recreational activity prohibited on public lands on Sunday in the Commonwealth. Allowing Sunday hunting on public lands would provide access parity with other user-groups as hunters are the only constituency barred from using Wildlife Management Areas, State Forests, and National Forests on Sunday even though these public lands are supported with funding from hunters. In addition to being taxpayers, hunters contribute financially to the acquisition and management costs of Wildlife Management Areas by purchasing licenses and paying excise taxes on hunting-related equipment through the Wildlife Restoration Program (Pittman-Robertson Act). Unlike other user-groups, Virginia's hunters also purchase stamps to use State Forests and National Forests.

Senate Bill 8 would significantly improve access and opportunity for Virginia's hunters and support hunter recruitment, retention, and reactivation (R3) efforts by removing a barrier that is well-documented to have a negative impact on participation rates. Like other user-groups that depend on access to public lands to engage in their recreational pursuits, many hunters in Virginia would not have a place to hunt but for the public lands system. Allowing Sunday hunting would double the number of hunting days for youth during the school year and provide additional flexibility for hardworking adults with limited opportunities to hunt during the work week.

Allowing seven-day hunting on public lands would also significantly benefit Virginia's economy. An additional day to hunt on public lands across the state would result in more dollars spent by hunters in restaurants, hotels, and other businesses. Virginia's sportsmen and women are a significant economic force – spending more than \$1.5 billion, supporting more than 39,160 jobs, generating more than \$1.17 billion in salaries and wages and \$242 million in state and local taxes. Allowing Sunday hunting on public lands would help retain in-state hunters and attract out-of-state public land hunters that are currently disincentivated from planning a weekend hunting trip to Virginia. Creating additional hunting opportunities will encourage hunting-related tourism and further bolster local economies throughout the Commonwealth.

We additionally encourage you to consider the importance of sportsmen and women to the Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR). In 2020 alone, Virginia's sportsmen and women

contributed \$63.66 million to conservation funding for the DWR generated through licenses and excise taxes on sporting-related goods. This “user pays – public benefits” American System of Conservation Funding depends on Virginia’s license-buying constituency, and opening Sunday hunting on public lands would support funding for the DWR, whose critical conservation work benefits all residents.

In closing, repealing the antiquated Sunday hunting prohibition is a top priority for our organizations, and we respectfully encourage you to support the legislation.

Sincerely,

American Woodcock Society
Capital Region Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation
Delta Waterfowl
National Deer Association
National Rifle Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
Pheasants Forever
Quail Forever
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Ruffed Grouse Society
Safari Club International
Virginia Bowhunters Association
Virginia Deer Hunters Association
Wildlife Foundation of Virginia

Enclosure: Virginia Board of Wildlife Resources Sunday Hunting Resolution

BOARD OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES
POSITION SUPPORTING PUBLIC LANDOWNERS RECEIVING ABILITY
TO ALLOW SUNDAY HUNTING ON THEIR LANDS
OCTOBER 28, 2021

WHEREAS, the mission of the Board of Wildlife Resources includes connecting the public with wildlife, and hunting is a means of such a connection; and

WHEREAS, Virginia's past, present, and future hunters have been and will be major contributors to conservation efforts through license purchases, excise taxes on hunting equipment, and advocacy for sound stewardship of wildlife populations and habitats; and

WHEREAS, this contribution includes funding used to purchase and nurture wildlife populations, wildlife habitats, and access to wildlife-dependent recreation on public lands, including the Department of Wildlife Resources' Wildlife Management Areas; and

WHEREAS, in 2014, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation allowing hunting on Sundays on private lands in the Commonwealth, by and as allowed by the private landowner; and

WHEREAS, the aforementioned legislation additionally allows the hunting of waterfowl on Sunday on all of the Commonwealth's lands and waters; and

WHEREAS, with only those limited exceptions as specified in Virginia Code § 29.1-521(a), hunting on Sundays on public lands remains prohibited in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, since the inception of hunting on Sundays on private lands in 2014, hunters with access to private land have enjoyed an additional day per week on which to hunt, while hunters limited to public lands have had no such opportunity; and

WHEREAS, nearly 40% of hunters pursue game species on public lands; and

WHEREAS, it is the Board's opinion that hunters of public lands should be treated equitably with hunters of private lands; and

WHEREAS, hunting on Sundays as it currently exists in the Commonwealth has not had a detrimental impact on wildlife populations or presented an unacceptable burden upon law enforcement resources, but has provided a valued additional opportunity; and

WHEREAS, the opportunity for hunters to use public lands on Sunday can contribute positively to the local economy; and

WHEREAS, it is the Board's opinion that public landowners, including the Department, are in the best position to determine whether and when hunting on the lands that they own is appropriate, to employ management specific to their lands to provide optimum recreational opportunities for all, and to take into consideration the desires of all parties and any considerations necessary to avoid user conflicts; and

WHEREAS, public landowners are afforded the ability allow hunting on Sundays in the vast majority of other states;

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Board of Wildlife Resources supports further amendments to the Code of Virginia granting public landowners the ability to allow hunting on Sundays on their lands in the same manner as that currently afforded to private landowners.

ADOPTED this 28 day of October, 2021.