

## TESTIMONY

### WDNR NATURAL RESOURCES BOARD MEETING

August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014

3.B.2. – Request adoption of Emergency Board Order WM-04-14(E), proposed rules modifying chapter 10 related to establishing the 2014 migratory bird hunting seasons

#### WISCONSIN WATERFOWL ASSOCIATION:

Supports adoption of the proposed waterfowl season structure, with the exception of the 9am start time, on the opening days.

Chairman Cole, esteemed members of the Board, Madame Secretary, thank you for allowing me time to address your group today.

My name is Don Kirby, for the past five years I've represented the Members of the Wisconsin Waterfowl Association, from all over the state, as the Executive Director of this organization.

As indicated in my written testimony, the Wisconsin Waterfowl Association fundamentally supports the proposal that has been prepared for this year's waterfowling seasons. I'm sure many of you are aware of the lengthy process that has already occurred, in arriving at today's product. It is yeoman's work, in crafting a product which features aspects that will attempt to please many diverse user groups. I would like to bring to your attention, the fact that the proposal you see today, has had numerous changes made to it already, from its first draft, some two weeks ago. In response to public input, from conservation groups, from individuals, and from a series of public hearings, department staff has molded and adjusted the details of the proposal. In a time where the DNR is sometimes criticized for alleged failures to respond to public input, the efforts of

Kent Van Horn and Taylor Finger should be acknowledged, as an example of responding to their stakeholders. Kudos to these gentlemen for their efforts.

It is in this spirit of cooperation, and a desire to move the conversation forward, that I'm appearing before you today. Although the Association fundamentally supports the proposal offered, there is an aspect that we would seek to have changed.

During my time with the Association, I have had the good fortune to talk to waterfowl hunters, all year 'round. For more than 15 years prior to that, I spent my time managing large sporting goods stores in Wisconsin. One only needs to talk to a duck hunter for a short while, before the conversation will turn to "opening day".

For many years, Wisconsin and other states, delayed the start of hunting on the first day of duck season, first until noon, and more recently, until 9am. Advocates for this action cite safety concerns, a desire to force hunters to observe waterfowl for a period of time without shooting to assist identification skills, or even the "tradition" of a delayed start, as reasons for this rule.

Unfortunately, these concerns fall flat in the real world: we don't have terrible accidents on day 2 of the season, at a half-hour before sunrise, (nor during the youth hunts – which open at first light), and the idea that the delayed start of "shooting time" prevents conflicts in the dark, is laughable. The vast majority of hunters are still engaged in securing their "hide" for the day, well before first light, and then simply have to wait it out, until legal "shooting time" arrives, hours later than what could be allowed. Perhaps our greatest "tradition" is creating an "opening weekend" scenario that is only half as good as it could be, a sure disappointment for those hunters who might only be able pursue ducks and other waterfowl, for a few precious weekends each fall.

Department staff have made surveys of public opinion on this topic, for many years. The returned surveys of a few hundred of the tens of thousands of waterfowl hunters in Wisconsin would indicate that a slim “majority” are still in favor of a 9am, delayed opening on season opening days. I have even observed a few individuals, at various public venues, who still advocated for a 9am, or even a noon opener. However, my personal experience indicates, in interacting with hunters, there is a great, unheard, majority, who want to enjoy a “full” opening weekend experience, who do not want a delayed “shooting time” on opening days. Normal “shooting times”, of a half-hour before sunrise, would then apply to all the days of the season, changing as each day grows shorter.

As you consider this concept, imagine if we asked deer hunters to “sit back and relax”, until 9am, on the first Saturday before Thanksgiving. As a deer hunter, I predict we’d have a riot! It is important to note: the rule, as currently written, provides a hardship to many stakeholders, who would like to begin hunting at a more conventional hour. Those who wish to delay the start of their hunts, for safety, for tradition, even for breakfast, are free to do so, if the 9am start time is eliminated, but those who wish to hunt at dawn’s first light, are not free to make that choice – on a cherished start to another year’s waterfowl season.

Recently, our neighbors in Minnesota, eliminated their own delayed start on opening days. Surveys done of hunters there, following the change, revealed greater satisfaction in the hunt experience, and no negative feedbacks, despite the concerns expressed by some, prior to the change. Wisconsin now stands alone, as the only state in the Union, that prevents duck hunters from enjoying the opportunity to participate fully in their passion, on the first day of our seasons. Even our own department’s limited survey responses would indicate that the tide of public opinion on this topic is shifting rapidly towards eliminating the delayed start.

On behalf of our members, and the tens of thousands of waterfowl hunters in Wisconsin that would benefit from this change, I'd ask you to consider striking this limitation from the proposed rule for this year – and allowing a half-hour before sunrise start to hunting, during all the regular duck hunting seasons in Wisconsin.

*(this excludes the new experimental early teal season, which has different federal rules on when hunting may begin)*

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Board.

Presented By:

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