



January 22, 2009

To: Members, Senate Agriculture Committee
Re: Colorado Sportsmen Oppose SB 09-24

Dear Senate Agriculture Committee Members:

The future of hunting and fishing is fused with the future of agriculture in Colorado. Many ranchers depend upon public lands grazing and hunting operations to supplement their incomes. Similarly, fishing streams flow through private lands, just as elk and other game animals move from public to private lands seasonally. Both industries are sustainable and essential to our state's economy. Consequently, to work against either is to work against both.

We, the united sportsmen and women of Colorado, ask you to stop the ill-advised SB 09-24 in Committee, as it has little chance of gaining final approval by the full General Assembly, and will reflect poorly on the agricultural industry. Please consider the following:

- **40 states pay landowners nothing for game damage. Of the 10 states that do pay for game damage, Colorado already pays the most.** There are several forms of payments for game damage; direct monies paid out in game damage claims (\$1,000,000 in FY 2008), materials provided to landowners for the prevention of game damage, and the Habitat Partnership Program (HPP), which was funded at \$2,580,000 in FY 2008. Decisions in HPP are made by **local collaborative efforts that are led by landowners**. The funding for HPP is directly from sportsmen pockets as a "set aside" (percentage of big game hunting license dollars). This amounts to 5% of big game license fees.
- **The \$100 access fee limit, IF a landowner also claims game damage, is not without purpose. This fee was put in place to encourage landowners to provide public hunter access, especially for antlerless game, primarily cow elk, to serve as policy for not hoarding big game on private lands.** Landowners currently may charge what they

wish for hunting access *when they do not also claim game damage*, and these higher access fees are commonly \$2,000 and greater for elk. As Harvey Nyberg, a retired Montana game manager, said, "**A landowner who charges a fee to hunt encourages wildlife to accumulate on his property, thereby increasing the likelihood of game damage.** He / she should not be rewarded with compensation for that damage."

- **This legislation, in the current period of great economic uncertainty, would have a fiscal impact of \$3,200,000, according to the Division of Wildlife. This monetary impact alone is reason enough to kill the bill.**
- **This bill represents an utter failure by the organizations who have conceived of and developed this bill to collaborate.** When so many among landowners, sportsmen and the Division of Wildlife have extended themselves in the past to work cooperatively with all stakeholders, this bill is a slap in the face to collaborative discussions and decisions, necessary to ensure efforts are successful. So far as we know, the organization or organizations who have been proponents of this bill did not seek any collaboration nor provide advance notice of the bill.
- **Currently there is no ceiling on the cost of game damage claims for which Colorado sportsmen are liable, which most states have.** At a time when DOW budgets are already shrinking this legislation would remove the floor and side-rail large amounts of money for needed wildlife management programs. **In the past, the legislative intent has been clear: landowners who derive economic benefits from wildlife should support wildlife by absorbing some damage.**
- **The response times required for wildlife officers in this legislation would require staffing increases to meet those deadlines.** At a time when we need more feet on the ground in winter to prevent poaching and to accommodate situations like last winter's West Slope feeding operations for big game --and accompanying efforts to keep elk out of haystacks -- , wildlife officers would now have their priorities rearranged and wildlife would suffer.
- **This bill also creatively increases Landowner Preference by building in additional kill permits for game that are producing game damage.** Here the vouchers/licenses for killing game damage animals would either go to the landowner or be distributed by the Division of Wildlife. **(We have a lot we would like to say and have**

said about the current voucher system which we believe is already patently unfair, but that is another discussion.)

Clearly, SB 09-24 is bad policy for all concerned, including the larger agriculture community. We thank you for your consideration and urge you to stop SB 09- 24 in your Committee.

Sincerely,

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