



April 26, 2021

**RE: Governor Hutchinson's Veto of Senate Bill 298**

Dear Members of the Arkansas General Assembly:

On behalf of the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, and as a fellow Arkansan, I am writing to encourage you to vote "no" on a veto override of Senate Bill 298. While I can personally appreciate the premise of the bill, if enacted, this legislation will likely have significant, unintended consequences for Arkansas's fish and wildlife and our sportsmen and women. Therefore, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation stands with the Governor's decision and encourages that his veto not be overridden.

In 1937, Congress passed the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, also known as the Pittman-Robertson Act (P-R) that redirected an 11% excise tax on firearms and ammunition into a separate account in the United States Treasury that is to be used only for wildlife conservation purposes with most of it going back to the state natural resources agencies. The repurposing of this tax was supported by both hunters and the firearms and ammunition industries. The program provided a much-needed boost in funding to address wildlife conservation needs in each of the states. Over the years, additional amendments to add handguns and archery equipment to the list of taxable items for this critical program were again supported by those paying the tax.

By the late 1940's, anglers and the fishing industry advocated for a similar tax on fishing equipment to be used for fish and aquatic resource conservation. In 1950, the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act, also known as the Dingell-Johnson Act, became law. Again, at the urging of the fishing and boating industries, the bill was amended in 1984 to expand the taxable items to include electric trolling motors and motorboat and small engine fuels. These industry and sportsmen and women-supported taxes, along with our hunting and fishing license fees, is known as the American System of Conservation Funding. It is a highly successful "user pays – public benefits" System that is unique to the rest of the world.

Last year, Arkansas received over \$17 million in federal aid through the Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program. Since 1939, Arkansas has received \$223 million from the Wildlife Restoration Program and an additional \$175 million through the Sportfish Restoration Program. However, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service – the administering authority of the Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program – has stated in writing that, "If SB 298 is enacted it will result in the State of Arkansas being out of compliance with the Wildlife Restoration Act and its implementing regulations at 50 CFR Part 80 as they relate to the acceptance and use of funds under the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Acts." Therefore, Arkansas would no longer be eligible to receive these funds. Essentially, the money that Arkansans have contributed to these funds through the purchase of equipment and fuel for their outdoor pursuits will go to other states.

**The Sportsman's Voice in the Nation's Capitols**

While the intention of SB 298 is something that many sportsmen and women and firearms owners can appreciate and support, the language of the bill will have unintended consequences for Arkansans, our fish and wildlife resources, and the habitats on which they depend. We urge you to vote “no” on a vote to override the veto. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the General Assembly on a revised version of the bill in a future session that safeguards Arkansas’s sportsmen and women’s investments in conservation funding here in the Natural State.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris Horton".

Chris Horton  
Senior Director, Midwestern States  
Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation

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**The Sportsman’s Voice in the Nation’s Capitols**