

Testimony of Charles M. Nelson in Support of HB 4371

I am writing in support of HB 4371, which would provide the opportunity for those under the age of 10 to begin hunting with a mentor. As a boy, I began to hunt with my neighbors when I was 9. My success in harvesting game was almost non-existent, but the excitement of hunting ruffed grouse, woodcock, pheasants and rabbits took a lifelong hold on me, as did the importance of hunter safety. When my sons (now 20 and 23) were the age I started hunting back in 1997 and 2000, I was unable to take them hunting in Michigan. We traveled out of state where they could purchase a license after completing hunter safety, which they both did by the time they were 10. My older son had his first hunt in Nebraska and harvested his first game there, a mallard. My younger son had his first hunt in Oklahoma and harvested his first game, a green wing teal. Both are now men who are still avid hunters. Today, with our youth waterfowl hunts and lowered hunting age, both my boys would have been able to start in Michigan. Every year since my sons have been too old for the youth season I have been privileged to introduce other young people and their parents to waterfowl hunting through our youth season.

As a hunter and MSU natural resources faculty member, I was asked to serve in a leadership role in the DNR hunter recruitment and retention workgroup in 2006-07. We developed recommendations to enhance Michigan hunter recruitment and retention including: lowering the hunting age, developing an apprentice license program, informing the public that 26% of Michigan is open to public hunting (vast majority of public lands + commercial timber act lands + hunter access program lands leased for public hunting by DNR) by clearly showing where that public hunting opportunity is located and developing a hunter mentoring program. As you know, the legislature reduced the hunting age to 10 for small game and archery deer and to 12 for firearm deer on private lands. The apprentice license program was also created by the legislature and has been used by thousands. The DNR developed MI-Hunt on their website which identifies those lands open to public hunting across the state using GIS technology. However, up until this bill, the mentoring program had not come about. As a hunter and a parent, I support this bill to develop a mentoring program.

I provided the attached sheet to show the importance of hunter recruitment. Over the past 30 years we have seen a decline of close to 200,000 distinct hunters. This threatens our hunting heritage, our ability to manage wildlife, the funding for conservation and Michigan's economy. On the other side of the sheet note that through the hunting age being reduced and the apprentice license program (2006), the sale of junior licenses has increased in 2009-10 by 17% over the last season (2005-06) when the minimum hunting age was 12 for small game and archery deer and 14 for firearm deer and there was no apprentice license program.

As we move forward with mentoring to recruit new hunters, let's not forget retention to keep our existing hunters. Besides an aging population, we need to clearly understand why people, young and old drop out of hunting or only participate sporadically. We need to take steps to encourage their regular participation. It's like filling the bathtub, hard to do if the water is coming in but the plug is not in place. Recruitment without similar emphasis on retention will not bring us the result we seek. As a concerned citizen and a natural resource scientist, I applaud your efforts. I also look forward to seeking other opportunities to strengthen hunter recruitment and retention in the future. Remember, if each of us took one new person hunting and helped retain them in the sport we would not be having the challenge of declining hunter numbers we currently face. Thank you.

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Final Junior Hunting License Sales 2005-06, 2006-07 and 2009-10

| Junior License | 2005-06 Jr. (Ages 12-15) | 2006-07 Jr. | 2009-10 Jr. | 2006-07 App. Jr. | 2009-10 App. Jr. | 2006-07 Total (App. Jr. + Jr.) | 2009-10 Total (App. Jr. + Jr.) | % change 05-06 vs. 06-07 | % change 05-06 vs. 09-10 |
|----------------|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Small Game | 31,864 | 35,386 | 29,282 | 4,133 | 2,296 | 39,519 | 31,578 | 24% | - 1% |
| Archery Deer | 7,653 | 4,297 | 3,242 | 1,077 | 702 | 5,374 | 3,944 | - 30% | - 48% |
| Combo Deer | 33,179 | 46,366 | 46,230 | 3,109 | 3,133 | 49,475 | 49,363 | 49% | 49% |
| Fur Harv. | 1,034 | 1,357 | 1,515 | 79 | 51 | 1,436 | 1,566 | 39% | 51% |
| Total | 73,952 | 87,624 | 80,269 | 8,398 | 6,182 | 95,804 | 86,451 | 30% | 17% |

Number of distinct Michigan hunters and anglers, 1980-2008 (a).

| Year | Distinct Hunters | Distinct Anglers |
|------|------------------|------------------|
| 2008 | 790,789 | 1,160,790 |
| 2007 | 802,299 | 1,164,630 |
| 2006 | 814,643 | 1,166,739 |
| 2005 | 789,244 | 1,161,432 |
| 2004 | 832,835 | 1,171,742 |
| 2003 | 863,946 | 1,189,822 |
| 2002 | 870,432 | 1,233,739 |
| 2001 | 887,235 | 1,251,146 |
| 2000 | 897,916 | 1,271,245 |
| 1999 | 920,473 | 1,322,134 |
| 1998 | 957,264 | 1,346,910 |
| 1997 | 952,584 | 1,306,588 |
| 1996 | 964,531 | 1,348,107 |
| 1995 | 934,430 | 1,464,027 |
| 1994 | 1,126,826 | 1,484,622 |
| 1993 | 1,140,700 | 1,505,862 |
| 1992 | 1,171,721 | 1,577,701 |
| 1991 | 1,156,422 | 1,564,494 |
| 1990 | 1,148,163 | 1,577,875 |
| 1989 | 938,503 | 1,619,485 |
| 1988 | 913,194 | 1,644,342 |
| 1987 | 926,328 | 1,566,589 |
| 1986 | 925,332 | 1,483,910 |
| 1985 | 900,266 | 1,414,914 |
| 1984 | 912,119 | 1,391,515 |
| 1983 | 890,519 | 1,390,981 |
| 1982 | 1,150,160 | 1,376,317 |
| 1981 | 1,135,265 | 1,457,495 |
| 1980 | 957,209 | 1,325,156 |

(a) A distinct hunter or angler is one individual regardless of the number of licenses purchased. The table does not include anglers under age 17 who do not need to purchase a license to fish.