



Testimony of Rep. Dianne Hesselbein
Committee on Sporting Heritage, Mining and Forestry
AB 187 and SB 115: Providing Wild Turkey Licenses
For Disabled Veterans and Purple Heart Medal Recipients
February 2, 2016

Chairman Tiffany and members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this public hearing and inviting me to speak in support of AB 187 and its companion bill SB 115.

As many of you are aware, the return – the rebounding -- of the wild turkey is a great Wisconsin success story. Since the turkey was re-introduced in 1976, its population has increased dramatically. We even see them crossing Williamson Street in Madison, not far from the Capitol!

Last year, more than 200,000 resident and non-resident hunters participated in the spring and fall wild turkey hunts.

The bill before us would give a small perk to the tiny fraction of resident Wisconsin turkey hunters who are disabled veterans and recipients of the Purple Heart medal. It would allow the Department of Natural Resources to issue turkey licenses and tags directly to disabled veterans and Purple Heart medalists. AB 187/SB 115 would allow all Purple Heart recipients, in state and out of state, to be exempt from the cumulative preference system for issuing wild turkey hunting and license tags. Disabled Veterans with 50% disability would be included if they were Wisconsin residents.

Why are we doing this? It is a small way of saying “thank you” for veterans’ service and physical sacrifice.

How many people are we talking about? Probably few thousand out of a pool of 205,000.

DNR figures show that:

- In 2014 there were a total of 3,899 veterans with 70 percent disability who qualified for a resident disabled fishing permit.
- In 2014 there were 1,113 disabled veterans with 50 percent disability who qualified for a disabled veteran recreation card.
- And in 2014 there were 858 Purple Heart recipients who qualified as resident Purple Heart conservation patrons.
- There were also 11 non-resident Purple Heart conservation patrons.

Based on these figures, a maximum of about 5,800 individuals could qualify for the disabled veteran and Purple Heart privilege. Not all of them would take advantage of it.

I talked to several disabled veterans and they said it would give a nice boost to disabled hunters who live every day with their service-related injuries.

Please join me in supporting AB 187 and SB 115.



JERRY PETROWSKI

WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

Assembly Bill 187 and Senate Bill 115

February 2, 2016

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on Assembly Bill 187 and Senate Bill 115, which exempt disabled veterans and recipients of the Purple Heart medal from the cumulative preference system used in issuing wild turkey hunting licenses and tags.

Under current law, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) issues wild turkey hunting licenses and tags by using a cumulative preference system when the number of applicants for a given hunting zone or time period exceed the available number of tags allocated by DNR. Under that system, the department issues a limited number of tags based on several preference categories, including landowner status, resident status, and the number of seasons someone has applied for but was not issued a license.

These companion bills would allow disabled veterans, with a disability rating over 50 percent, and recipients of the Purple Heart medal, to obtain wild turkey hunting licenses and tags without using the cumulative preference system. This same exemption exists under current law for current members of the armed forces.

We believe this idea can serve as a small token of our appreciation for the great sacrifice made by these veterans. These bills will ensure that disabled and combat-wounded veterans have the opportunity to take part in the great Wisconsin tradition of hunting and will provide an additional avenue for these veterans to take advantage to heal physically and emotionally in our state's great outdoors.

I will note there was an amendment introduced in the Assembly committee stipulating that only residents may take advantage of this proposed program. I support this amendment as a way to prevent an excessive number of wild turkey hunting tags from being removed from the system.

Thank you members of the committee for the opportunity to speak today on these bills.

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Committee on Sporting Heritage, Mining and Forestry
Disabled Veterans and Purple Heart Recipient Wild Turkey Hunting Tags
2015 Senate Bill 115
February 2, 2016

Good afternoon Chairman Tiffany and committee members. My name is Linda Olver, Policy Advisor in the Bureau of Customer and Outreach Services of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Thank you for the opportunity to testify for informational purposes on Senate Bill 115, which allows disabled veterans and Purple Heart medal recipients to purchase a wild turkey tag without requiring the tags be issued using the cumulative preference system.

State law currently requires the department issue wild turkey tags via a cumulative preference system when the number of applicants for a given wild turkey hunting zone or season time period exceeds the number of available turkey tags allotted by the department. Preference within this system is based upon residency, landowner status, and the number of seasons for which the applicant applied for but was not issued a license. State law currently allows resident active duty U.S. armed forces members stationed outside of the state on furlough or leave to purchase a turkey tag without it being issued via the cumulative preference system. In addition, state law currently limits the number of turkey tags that may be issued to U.S. armed forces members to the same number a person may receive through the cumulative preference system.

SB 115 proposes to extend this benefit beyond resident active duty U.S. armed forces members to allow resident and nonresident disabled veterans and qualified recipients of the Purple Heart medal to receive a turkey tag without the tag being issued via the cumulative preference system. Under this bill, a disabled veteran must produce evidence showing he or she is a veteran and is receiving disability benefits for a disability rating that is 50 percent or greater, or is receiving disability benefits due to being unemployable. Also under this bill, a qualified recipient of the Purple Heart medal must exhibit proof that he or she has received the medal.

If enacted, the provisions of SB 115 would guarantee Purple Heart medal recipients and certain disabled veterans an opportunity to annually purchase a turkey tag for any turkey management zone during any time period even if the tags for that zone and time period were all issued through the cumulative preference system or if any remaining tags sell out when offered for sale "over the counter." While the method to purchase a turkey tag provided in this bill will not displace hunters applying for tags through the standard preference system, it will result in more turkey tags issued than allotted for the season. The extent to which these additional turkey tags *actually exceed* allotted turkey permit levels is unknown at this time but DNR can roughly estimate the number of disabled veterans and Purple Heart recipients that would be *eligible* to purchase a turkey tag outside of the cumulative preference system.

Based on previous sales of license products with similar qualifying criteria and assuming each newly-eligible disabled veteran or Purple Heart recipient would opt to purchase one turkey tag only, DNR estimates 11,000 turkey tags could annually be issued in excess of allotted turkey permit levels. Time periods and zones for which these turkey tags are issued cannot be exactly predicted, however it can be safely assumed the impact of these additional tags will likely be magnified due to the fact tags for the *first two* time periods of the turkey season are the most highly sought-after and tags issued under this bill will *likely* be sold for these earlier time periods. The Department is ready and willing to provide the bill author assistance to refine a process that achieves the bill author's intent without oversubscribing Wisconsin's turkey population.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak to you about this bill today. I hope you find this information helpful.