



KEN SKOWRONSKI

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 82nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

(608) 266-8590
Toll-Free: (888) 534-0082
Rep.Skowronski@legis.wi.gov

P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708-8953

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Dear Chairman and members of the Committee,

As an avid sportsman, I enjoy all of the wonderful natural resources and sporting heritage that Wisconsin has to offer. Unfortunately, there are those who abuse what we have inherited from past generations and we should do everything we can ensure that those individuals are punished accordingly so that our children and grandchildren can enjoy the great Wisconsin outdoors as we have.

Assembly Bill 471, which increases fines for trophy poaching, is similar to a bill from last session authored by Rep. Mary Williams and Senator Petrowski, which passed the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage unanimously.

It is our duty as elected officials to do our very best to ensure that animals that are taken illegally do not rob honest sportsmen of the opportunity to enjoy all that Wisconsin's great outdoors has to offer. Wisconsin has a reputation for being home to large trophy bucks, and if we do not protect these beautiful animals, future sportsmen will not be able to enjoy the sporting heritage that Wisconsin has grown accustomed to.

While fines already exist for poaching, the current maximums are \$43.75 for deer, regardless of the age, sex, or size of the animal. Other maximum fines are \$175 for bear, \$2,000 for elk. The fines for trophy fish poaching are currently between \$8.75 and \$43.75 and haven't been adjusted in many years. These low fines do not discourage trophy poaching, selling of poached antlers and other parts of trophy animals for thousands of dollars. This bill would go a long way to make poaching an unprofitable enterprise in Wisconsin.

We must ensure that the penalty for trophy poaching is strong enough to deter poachers. Using the Boone and Crocket, fines for trophy poaching of deer would be increased to \$2,000 For any deer with antlers measuring at least 125 inches but less than 150, \$5,000 for any deer with antlers measuring at least 150 inches but less than 170 and \$10,000 For any deer with antlers measuring 170 inches or more. For any elk with at least 6 points on one antler or with antlers measuring 260 inches or more the fine would be \$10,000. And For any bear with a skull measuring 20 inches or more the fine would be \$2,000. Fines for poaching fish would increase based on inflation.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak my piece in support of Assembly Bill 471, which will ensure Wisconsin's natural resources and sporting heritage are available for future generations. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.



Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage

2015 AB 471

Wild animal protection surcharges

Good morning Chairman Ott and committee members. My name is Matt O'Brien, and I am the law enforcement policy officer at the Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, for informational purposes, as to the conservation law enforcement components of AB471.

Under current law, if a court imposes a penalty for the unlawful taking of certain wild animals, the court may impose a wild animal protection surcharge, in addition to the other penalties and surcharges imposed. Section 29.983, Stats., specifies the types of animals and amounts for which a court is authorized to impose this surcharge.

The current statutorily established wild animal protection surcharges were first created in 1979. Most have not changed in the 36 years since, and many species of wild animals do not have a surcharge enumerated, such as minnows, reptiles, amphibians, clams, crayfish, non-game species, and even certain wild plants which may be illegally harvested, such as ginseng.

The application of these surcharges is not discretionary on the part of a warden issuing a citation; the warden is required to include the statutorily prescribed wild animal protection surcharge, where applicable, in the bond amount listed on a citation issued for unlawful taking (such as fishing without a license or hunting out of season). Wardens do not include the surcharge amount when the animal was not killed and could successfully be released alive.

This bill would increase the surcharge amounts for several species of fish, and would additionally create a new surcharge category for certain deer, elk, and bear--generally known as a "trophy surcharge." This proposal also instructs the Department to establish the measurement system to be utilized for enforcement of the "trophy surcharge." Based on the experiences of several other states, the Department would likely adopt the Boone and Crockett Club's long established system of measuring big game animals to accomplish this.

The proposed increased surcharges, if imposed by courts, have the potential to create increased revenues to the Conservation fund, but the deterrent effects of these higher surcharges may also reduce illegal harvest rates of large/trophy animals.

I hope you find this information helpful, and would be happy to address any questions you may have.



Wisconsin Wildlife Federation

November 17, 2015

Testimony on AB 471---Increased Penalties---Trophy Poaching

Chairman Ott and Members of the Assembly Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation and the 195 hunting, fishing and trapping organizations that we represent throughout the state. The Wildlife Federation strongly supports to Assembly Bill 471.

Wisconsin Statutes establishes solid penalties for poachers that take deer and bear in manners and times contrary to state conservation laws. State sportsmen and women support strong penalties for game violations in order to protect species and the fair chase opportunity for all hunters to harvest wild game. While these penalties have provided to be an adequate deterrent for poaching for the great number of cases, when it comes to trophy deer and bear, the size of the normal violation penalties are insufficient to prevent a poacher from illegally harvesting a large buck or a large bear. The value to the poacher exceeds the risk of getting caught and paying a large penalty.

Therefore the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation supports the increase in penalty surcharges for game violations involving the taking of large bucks and bear. They should provide a good tool for state conservation wardens to prevent the taking of such animals and to enable them to be available to law-abiding Wisconsin hunters.

Our hats are off to Representative Skowronski for introducing this bill and for all the other bipartisan sponsors for their support. We respectfully ask the Committee to pass AB 471 on to the full Assembly in the near future.

Submitted by:
Ralph Fritsch, Chair
Wildlife Committee
Wisconsin Wildlife Federation