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# JAMES W. EDMING

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**Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 677**  
*Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage*  
December 15, 2021

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of Assembly Bill (AB) 677. I would like to thank Senator Stafsholt for working with me on this important legislation.

Outdoor recreation is a Wisconsin tradition. As a lifelong resident of northern Wisconsin, I can say that Wisconsin is a great place to enjoy our state's sporting heritage. Not only are outdoor recreation activities like hunting a part of Wisconsin culture, but they also have a big impact on the local economy in many parts of our state. Unfortunately, the number of folks that take part in our state's sporting traditions, like hunting, has been on the decline in recent years. While there are a number of things that factor into this decline, as I talk with sportsmen and women in my district one of the concerns I've heard about is decreased hunting opportunities.

This bill seeks to address that by increasing the number of pheasants that the Department of Natural Resources is required to produce each year at the Poynette State Game Farm and requiring the department to create a schedule for stocking pheasants around the state. Under AB 677, stocking would occur on both public land and private land that is enrolled in a program that requires it to be open to public hunting.

A number of states to our west, like Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota have become destinations for pheasant hunters. There is no reason Wisconsin cannot become one as well. By stocking more pheasants here in our state we are not only increasing opportunities for Wisconsin hunters, but for out-of-state hunters as well. By encouraging more hunting in our state we will be helping to keep one of our state's sporting traditions strong while providing a boost to the state and local economies.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today and I ask you to join me in supporting AB 677.



# ROB STAFSHOLT

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**TO:** Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage  
**FROM:** Senator Stafsholt  
**DATE:** December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
**SUBJECT:** Testimony for Assembly Bill 677

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Thank you Chairman Pronschinske and members of the Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage for having a hearing on Assembly Bill 677 (AB 677). This legislation is to expand the number of pheasants in Wisconsin closer to the numbers to when pheasant hunting was better, years ago.

I talk with many sportsmen and women across the 10<sup>th</sup> Senate District and the state, and a concern for them is the decline in quality hunting opportunities in this great state of Wisconsin. I have found that one of the reasons for this decline in quality hunting opportunities, is the lack in stocking efforts by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). For pheasants alone, the Day-old Chick Program peaked at a distribution of 190,000 chicks annually back in 1958. Currently, the Day-old Chick Program produces only about 30,000 rooster chicks annually.

AB 677 would require these stocking numbers to be increased. The DNR would be required to annually produce 200,000 rooster pheasants and 50,000 pheasants for the Day-old Chick Program. These stocking numbers would significantly increase the quality hunting opportunities in Wisconsin, allowing our outdoorsmen and women to stay here to hunt pheasants, and not to travel out of state to do so. The DNR would also be required to report their schedule for these stocking pheasants to assure that these pheasants are reaching public hunting grounds as well as private land enrolled in a program that requires that specific land to be open to the public for hunting.

Sportsmen and women have a large economic impact on our state as they spend billions of dollars in Wisconsin and provide thousands of jobs. These sportsmen and women deserve the respect in return, so I am hopeful that we can once again provide them with quality hunting opportunities.

Thank you again for having a hearing on this legislation. I ask for your support on AB 677.



## Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage

### *2021 Assembly Bill 677 Stocking Pheasants for Hunting December 15, 2021*

Good morning Chair Pronschinske and members of the Committee. My name is Eric Lobnier, Director of the Bureau of Wildlife Management for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Joining me today to assist with questions is Scott Karel, Regulation Policy Specialist. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to Assembly Bill 677 (AB 677) related to pheasant management.

The department raises pheasants for stocking at the state game farm located near Poynette. Currently, the game farm raises 83,000 pheasants and holds 7,700 back for breeder flock. This bill would result in an increase of 2.5 times the number of pheasants that we currently stock. The current facilities at the game farm are not capable of hatching and raising 250,000 pheasants as required in this bill. A new hatchery was recently built, and it would need to be significantly expanded to accommodate the increase. To raise the number of birds required under this bill, we would need to significantly increase all aspects of the facilities, staffing, and annual budget of the State Game Farm.

It would also be challenging to meet the mandated number of pheasants in the time required by the bill. Currently, the game farm has a closed flock to decrease the opportunity for disease outbreak. Bringing in outside eggs or birds raises the likelihood of disease transmission into the captive flock. Avian diseases can negatively affect egg laying and fertility and can even be fatal to an entire flock. Likewise, it would be expensive to purchase mature ring-necked pheasants from outside facilities to meet the stocking threshold established in the bill. The average cost to purchase a rooster is \$11.50. The cost for 125,000 roosters would be approximately \$1.5 million.

One potential unintended consequence of this bill is that in order to stock the desired number of pheasants, it may require extending the closed period in place during the open week of the pheasant season, decreasing opportunities for pheasant hunters. Current rules close pheasant hunting on certain pheasant-stocked properties at noon on weekdays to protect department staff and allow the pheasants time to acclimate to the new surroundings. An increase of pheasants stocked to this amount would require stocking on weekends, so these properties would also have to close at noon on weekends instead of the standard shooting hours.

At current stocking levels, department field staff spend 3,400 hours annually stocking pheasants. To meet the proposed new quota, it would take an additional 5,100 hours of staff time. This would reduce time spent on habitat management and other priority projects. Property managers also indicate some stocked properties are currently at carrying capacity.

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, we would like to thank you for your time today. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.