



NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
1783 Buerkle Circle
St. Paul, MN 55110
(651) 773-2000
(651) 773-5000 FAX
(877) 773-2070 TOLL-FREE
www.PheasantsForever.org

Pheasants Forever Testimony on HB4313 – Pheasant License Bill

Good afternoon, Chairman Howell and Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill that is of great relevance to Pheasants Forever. My name is Bill Vander Zouwen. I am chair of the Michigan Pheasant Restoration Initiative and State Director for Michigan Pheasants Forever. I previously served as Upland Gamebird Specialist and Wildlife Division Section Chief for Wisconsin DNR, where I was responsible for both wild and stocked pheasant programs and worked with the Governor's office to create a Wisconsin Pheasant Stamp.

Pheasants Forever has been actively serving Michigan for 36 years. We currently have 33 chapters and about 8000 members. Our mission is to provide habitat for pheasants and other wildlife and to recruit the next generation of hunter conservationists. Our efforts benefit other game species, songbirds, pollinators, monarch butterflies, and water quality as well. We are Pheasants Forever rather than Pheasants-For-A-Day, so we don't use our funds for stocking pen-reared birds that don't survive. We accomplish our mission through staff and volunteers and by leading the Michigan Pheasant Restoration Initiative Coalition of 11 agencies and conservation organizations.

We suggest that the Pheasant License Bill not be advanced until the DNR completes the evaluation of the pilot stocking program. In December, the legislature provided significant funds to DNR for evaluation purposes. It would seem prudent to evaluate the pilot program before creating a mandatory funding mechanism for a 5-year program extension.

Pheasants Forever is opposed to HB4313 in its original and substitute bill form. However, we could support the Pheasant License Bill if there were 4 modifications:

- The license fee is no more than \$15,
- The license revenue is used 50% for pheasant stocking and 50% for habitat programs,
- The entire license revenue is ear-marked statutorily in a pheasant subaccount for the above purposes, and
- The license is not required of participants in agency or non-profit organization events that introduce youth of all ages and novice adults to pheasant hunting.

License Fee: We are most concerned about the proposed fee. It is likely that a \$25 fee will result in less pheasant hunters, rather than more. In my view, only people who hunt the stocked properties may consider the \$25 fee to be reasonable. For many, a \$25 fee for pheasant hunting will seem like a huge fee increase from the \$11 base license now required of small game hunters. The fee will seem especially high for all the people who hunt wild pheasants on private or public land and all the people who buy their own pheasants to release and hunt on their own land. In comparison, the deer license is \$20, duck stamp is \$12, and turkey license is \$15. The Wisconsin Pheasant Stamp is \$10.

When the bill first came out, Wildlife Division Chief Russ Mason suggested that a \$25 fee would be the end of pheasant hunting in Michigan. Later he pointed out that raising the federal duck license to \$25 caused the loss of a significant number of waterfowl hunters, even though ducks were abundant and seasons were liberal.

Equally Funding Stocking and Habitat: We ask that Pheasant License revenue allocation honor all the efforts put into Michigan habitat programs by Pheasants Forever for so many years. If a license is required of all pheasant hunters, and not just stocked property hunters, we believe a significant portion of the revenue should fund habitat programs that have wide-ranging benefits. For example, license revenue could be used to fund a portion of the cost of key positions like the jointly funded MUCC Landowner Cooperative Coordinator and the Pheasants Forever Adopt-A-Game-Area Coordinator. It could be used to promote federal farm conservation programs that now bring \$48 million to Michigan and could bring much more. It could be used as match to leverage federal and foundation grants for habitat programs. Even pheasant stocking programs require habitat restoration and maintenance on the stocked state game areas to have suitable hunting sites. With DNR Wildlife Division having to cut 20% or \$8 million of its budget, they will have a lot less money for habitat programs. In Wisconsin, the Pheasant Stamp revenue goes 40% to habitat and 60% for stocked pheasants.

Statutory Revenue Ear-Marking: We are concerned that any revenue that is not statutorily ear-marked into a pheasant subaccount may be used for programs only tangentially related to pheasant habitat. If there is good reason to statutorily ear-mark the stocking portion of the revenue, there is equally good reason to statutorily ear-mark the habitat portion of the revenue into the same subaccount.

Exemption for Agency and Conservation Organization Recruitment Events: We are very concerned that a \$25 license requirement will be a significant barrier to participation by older youth and adult novices in pheasant hunter recruitment events held by DNR and conservation organizations. Examples include the Allegan and Shiawassee State Game Area hunts funded by the legislature this fall.

We would be happy to sit down with a group of interested organizations and legislators to brainstorm bill modifications that we can all live with. Thanks again for the opportunity to provide Pheasants Forever testimony on this important bill. And, thanks for your interest in pheasants and pheasant hunting.

Most sincerely,



Bill Vander Zouwen, Pheasants Forever State Director