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03/14/2017

Re: SB68/AB61

Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage Mining and Forestry

Assembly Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage

On behalf of the Conservation Congress and organizations whose 360 members are elected by the citizens of this state to represent their interest on natural resources, I must respectfully register our opposition to SB68/ AB61. In 2016, the DNR initiated the first 5-year review of the DNR 15 year CWD response plan and Gov. Scott Walker's CWD presented his CWD initiatives, at the 2016 Wisconsin Conservation Congress Annual Convention Where he asked that the County Deer Advisory Council be involved in the review and engage the public in a discussion on how best to handle CWD in Wisconsin's deer herd. Following these directives, three organizations came together as sponsors of a broader CWD Process: the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC) and the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP).

The sponsors established an ad hoc, multi-stakeholder advisory committee (aka Review Committee) to further discuss and assess the CWD response plan, and to recommend modifications to it. Membership of the CWD Response Plan Review Committee consisted of Wisconsin agencies and non-governmental organizations including the following:

Wisconsin DNR - Law Enforcement, Wisconsin DNR - Wildlife Management, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Lab, Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Wisconsin Department of Tourism, Wisconsin Conservation Congress, Wisconsin Commercial Deer and Elk Farmers' Association, Whitetails of Wisconsin, Wildlife Rehabilitation Advisory Council, Whitetails Unlimited, Quality Deer Management Association, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, Wisconsin Veterinary Medical Association, Wisconsin Bowhunters Association, Safari Club International, the Archery Trade Association, and the Sporting Heritage Council.

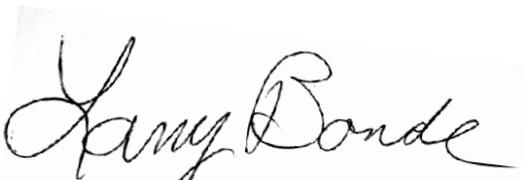
As established by Wisconsin State Statutes, the Wisconsin Conservation Congress is officially recognized as the only natural resources advisory body in the state where citizens elect delegates to represent their interests on natural resources issues on a local and statewide level to the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources. Their mission is to represent the citizens of Wisconsin by working with the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources to effectively manage Wisconsin's greatest asset, our abundant natural resources, for present and future generations to enjoy.

Each group had a significant stake in addressing CWD in Wisconsin. Members of the public provided comment during the designated public comment period at each meeting and the sponsors actively engaged the public and sought their input.

In addition, as requested by Governor Walker the County Deer Advisory Councils (CDACs) across the state held meetings in each county and had localized discussion through surveys and citizen participation in public meetings.

Through this review process there were numerous action items discussed related to CWD, but as it relates to baiting and feeding, discussion on a statewide ban on baiting and feeding was among the most controversial action items taken up by the CWD review committee and the CDAC's. A state wide ban was supported by the majority in all counties and in all categories (the categories were broken down into those counties unaffected by CWD, those affected by CWD, those with CWD within 10 miles, those with cases of CWD in the wild herd, those with cases of CWD in captive herd, and those with CWD in both the captive and wild herd). It was most widely supported by counties with CWD in its wild deer herd (74% of counties supported, 23% opposed and 3% tied).

A question about establishing a sunset clause on baiting and feeding, which is essentially what AB61 is, was the only action item to be opposed by the majority of the counties. SB68/AB61 is contrary to the recommendations of the CWD Response Plan Review Committee and the majority of the CDAC public input forum that were held across the state. Passing this bill would disregard the thousands of volunteer hours citizens across this state have spent engaged in this CWD process: attending meetings, reviewing studies and scientific literature, talking to fellow citizens and participating in this grass roots effort. The CWD sponsor team engaged a broad spectrum of groups that have a stake in CWD, and the CDAC's engaged the citizens of their counties. These groups worked diligently to gather public input and get various perspective on CWD issues, including baiting and feeding, and dismissing their hard work and input could be damaging for future efforts to engage the public. For these reasons I respectfully request you do not support AB 61.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry Bonde". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Larry Bonde, Chair
Wisconsin Conservation Congress