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Nebraska Sportsmen's Foundation 10/01/2019
Response to NGP issue of a depredation tag on 09/27/2019

Nebraska Sportsmen's Foundation (NSF) members, partners and fellow sportsmen thank you all for your inquiries, concerns and suggestions regarding the Nebraska Game & Parks (NGP) action on issuing a depredation Elk tag for western Nebraska on September 27, 2019.

The NSF has been involved in hearings, discussions and meetings regarding this issue since the summer of 2018. We feel it is important for you to understand the WHO, HOW and WHY timeline that lead to the actions by the NGP.

We can assure you the GOAL of the NSF is to work on writing and enhancing positive legislation, work to correct proposed legislation that is harmful, being at the legislative table and part of the solution. If we are not successful in either of those directions, we work to stop the proposed legislation.

The NSF is a member driven foundation. We are here to protect sporting rights, working side by side with NGP, State Leaders and State Senators, in partnership.

The balance between healthy wildlife populations, recreational hunting, and social tolerance is an objective of big game management for the Commission, the Nebraska Sportsmen's Foundation and of course all sportsmen and women.

To be clear, we feel the depredation tag issued is the direct result of the following: Upon the insistence of a State Senator that the Commission needed to provide immediate action to kill elk for a landowner limited access and reluctance to shoot antlerless animals have complicated the use of hunting as a population management tool. Where historic range and hay land is now row crops (1.2 million more acres in row crops planted in NE in the last 20 years), which increases the likelihood of conflicts between wildlife populations and agricultural landowners. The final tipping point is LB 126 and Senator Erdmann pushing the landowner and the NGP through media soundbites.

Nebraska State Statutes on depredation are very clear on how the NGP must proceed and how they must handle all claims. They are bound by state law on how to issue based on damage.

Yes, the NSF has concerns about the number (50) NGP issued and the issues that this brings. LET ME reiterate we feel this is the result of personal agendas and a lack of discussions to find solutions and compounded by State Senators and current LAW.

In working with the NGP over the past years, I have reviewed all damage control complaints covering the state. I have reviewed the work done after the complaint is filed and the results. They have been very solid at working with those landowners who have used the current programs. However, a large number of landowners either are not aware of current programs or do not want the interference. With that said every agency needs to review action plans and direction to make sure they are doing all that is allowed by law. The NG&P understands that this discussion has had benefits for them and is looking at new ideas and directions regarding depredation, number of permits and number of antlerless tags across the state.

The landowner they issued the tag for on Friday, September 27, 2019, has been working with the NGP for the past 6 or 7 years on depredation issues caused by Mule Deer and Elk. The ELK issue has increased. In the past, NGP and the landowner have worked to add fencing and other attempts. However, in 2019, the landowner has been slow to respond to plans to help with the situation. Landowner wanted to use hunters to solve the problem first and had not contacted the NGP in 2019 regarding any issue.

In our opinion with Senator ERDMAN pushing an agenda the landowner felt he had to complain and the NGP took the following steps.

NGP investigated and did record an estimated herd of 80 to 100 Elk on the roughly 11,000 acres, with severe crop loss damage due to the Elk. The landowner planned on up to four people hunting this year, who would pay a fee to hunt. Plus, three family and friends hunting. Using the media, Senator ERDMAN created the issue and the NGP once again revisited with the landowner. The TAG was issued.

THE FACTS are the following

Up to 50 Elk may be taken.

ALL horns must be turned over to NGP.

Once the harvest begins, NGP will review to see if the Elk have moved away, as we all understand they tend to move once the shooting begins. They will be monitoring the progress and will decide if more needs to be harvested. We doubt all 50 will be taken, but that could happen in this case.

The landowner cannot profit from the tag or sell or transfer the tag.

Thanks to Senator Erdman the landowner is under a very high level of review right now and would not do anything to create an issue.

The landowner has the right to allow or not to allow hunters on his land.

NSF would prefer The North American model of management by hunting and control the cow population.

Yes, the NSF has concerns with the number issued However we have a larger concern on the steps that brought us to this point. OUR mission is to educate hunters, Senators and NGP on the hot this TAG effects sportsmen, landowners and the Elk herd and to find other ways to manage depredation moving forward.

We understand the strong feelings about the 50 number and understand the discussion. However, please be clear as you go through our timeline below to understand who really pushed this and why. Our Goal again is to Educate and find other directions.

NSF TIMELINE LB 126, LR 142 and Depredation

April 2018

NSF heard soft discussions were taking place by two western Nebraska Senators regarding wildlife depredation.

We inquired and were told “nothing to discuss” yet just looking into it.

We offered our help and desire to be at the table.

July 2018

News stories appeared in local papers out west from Senator Erdman District 47, that nonresidents were harming the peacefulness of the Sandhills deer hunting and they were harming the use of lake Mac. Senator Hughes District 44 stated that crop depredation is a concern and that landowners were feeding the deer, so they should get some relief. See Links at end for stories.

August 2018

NSF met with Senator Hughes on two occasions, seeking what his goals were and what he felt was right. We were told - do not worry this was only a step to create awareness of the issue and to have the NGP do more.

We met with NGP leaders twice to discuss facts, history and direction.

November 2018

NSF learned an LB had been written to address Crop Depredation, additional landowner permits, a separate LB 127 and an extended season for landowners.

NSF met, again, with Senator Hughes, again informed No need to worry; WE KNEW BETTER.

NSF met with members and partners, crafted a defense of both LB 126 & 127.

NSF worked in partnership with NGP to defeat both bills. We gathered facts, numbers and reality of depredation issues in Nebraska.

NSF also understood that the way the bill was written it did nothing to address crop depredation in any manner.

NSF knew that current state statute on Depredation already is in place and states what the NGP duties and roles are to be.

January 10, 2019

LB 126 is introduced by Senator Hughes.

LB 127 is introduced By Senator Hughes

January 23, 2019

Natural Resource Committee (NRC) holds hearings on both bills.

NSF testifies, opposed both bills; NSF partners, members and sportsmen respond sending 150 letters against and 10 testify against.

Keep in mind, Senator Hughes is chair of the NRC and introduced the bills. The testimony by his people proved it really had nothing to do with depredation; they wanted a private season prior to the rifle season to shoot in their words - that big 8 pointer they have fed before anyone else could.

NSF fought the bill after the hearing by working with Senators. We were able to amend LB 127 limiting the number of Landowner permits allowed. LB 126 was still in committee.

April 5, 2019

Senator Hughes forces LB 126 out of committee to the General file. Even with the strong opposition numbers he pushed it out. Senator Bostelman is the only no vote to move it out. We are told by Hughes no worries it will not be heard this session.

The problem is the bill now sits until next session, can be amended and voted on.

NSF is informed he will do an interim study to work with the sportsmen, landowners and NGP. We ask for clarity: is this about depredation or shooting horns? No real answer given.

May 16, 2019

LR 142 is introduced by Senator Hughes, an interim hearing to review the four areas of the NGP: (1) Commission districts and representation; (2) Management of wildlife

populations; (3) Frequency, content, and location of meetings and hearings; and (4) Management of park facilities.

The goal of LR 142 is to review the areas through public testimony and make recommendations to the Full Body. We know it is to create pressure on NGP and add items to LB 126, when the next session starts. The NSF goal is to the kill this bill and find better solutions.

May, June & July 2019

NSF meets with Senator Hughes staff, committee legal counsel on four occasions. We provide five different approaches from other states concerning depredation involving management by landowners, youth driven mentor hunts with depredation tags, donation to the Hunters Helping the hungry program. We've shown we are willing to work with Senator Hughes to find other ways for resolutions on the issue, other than paying for crop loss.

During the same time frame, we are invited to meet with NGP, provided four years of data concerning this issue, including harvest numbers for Does and depredation issues statewide.

We are still not clear from Senator Hughes on WHAT HE WANTS other than money for crop loss.

In the same time Senator Erdman is preaching throughout District 47 about how bad the NGP is and lack of response to the issues.

August 9, 2019

Hearing dates set for LR 142: Scottsbluff September 18, McCook September 19.

NSF starts to plan on testimony direction for the hearings. We have been trying to work with all involved, but feel we are being stonewalled. We prepare for two directions: nice and easy continuing to work together to find solutions or to take the fight up a notch if needed. We continue to work with our partners and the NGP on direction.

September 18, 2019

NSF attends the Scottsbluff hearing; we have five partners there to testify. We are ambushed by Senator Hughes' people; the hearing was taken a direction that was not positive. I set new course for the next day.

September 19, 2019

I agree that we will continue to work with all parties to find a solution, but it needs to be a fair discussion **with the facts, not fiction**, must be used by all parties or will we work to kill the bill. We had 15 partners, including landowners, testify against the bill. BY THE WAY, Senator ERDMAN did not bother to show up at either hearing. He did, however, keep pushing the NGP and the media during this time.

NSF GOAL's for LB 126 is a bill that truly addresses depredation without a cash payment to landowners or kill the bill if that common ground cannot be found.

NSF is not happy with the Elk depredation tag that was issued and the push by a Senator to make it happen, however, we understand the HOW THE WHY AND THE WHO. Now we will still work to achieve our goal, so this does not happen again moving forward.

To review the LB's listed, follow the link below.

<https://nebraskalegislature.gov/> in upper righthand corner you can type in the number and review the entire bill.

You can also use the same link to find each Senators contact information, to let them know your thoughts and opinions.

Links to Senator Erdmann's statements.

https://www.starherald.com/hemingford/opinion/erdman-a-separate-hunting-season-for-landowners/article_5df9a0f8-f41c-11e8-97ad-471d040d8c75.html

https://www.nptelegraph.com/news/local_news/bill-could-give-farmers-first-shot-at-deer/article_4fc6630e-26ad-11e9-b385-7bbb568d8c2d.html

<http://news.legislature.ne.gov/dist47/>