



Connecticut Department of  
**ENERGY &  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
PROTECTION**

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Public Hearing – February 28, 2014  
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Interim Commissioner Robert J. Klee  
Presented By Deputy Commissioner Susan Whalen

**Raised Senate Bill No. 241 – AN ACT CONCERNING YOUTH HUNTING AND FISHING LICENSES, REVISING CERTAIN HUNTING AND FISHING LICENSE FEES AND REQUIRING REGISTRATION BY HUNTING AND FISHING GUIDE SERVICES**

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Raised Senate Bill No. 241 – AN ACT CONCERNING YOUTH HUNTING AND FISHING LICENSES, REVISING CERTAIN HUNTING AND FISHING LICENSE FEES AND REQUIRING REGISTRATION BY HUNTING AND FISHING GUIDE SERVICES. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) offers the following testimony.

We appreciate the Committee’s willingness to raise this bill at the request of the DEEP. This proposal, which we strongly support, would promote life-long participation in outdoor activities and conservation and would increase sales of hunting and fishing licenses by:

- Establishing a license exemption for secondary school students when participating in school fishing events or field trips intended to teach fishing techniques;
- Establishing a reduced rate fee structure for young adults (16 and 17 year olds);
- Providing DEEP discretion to designate one or two days per calendar year where a free promotional one-day sport fishing license may be issued;
- Providing DEEP discretion to offer temporary reduced rate license and permit fees as a marketing tool with OPM approval;
- Increasing opportunities for prospective hunters to attend on-line courses of instruction in safe firearms and archery hunting practices provided by private vendors by removing current prohibitions on the charging of a fee by vendors offering such courses;
- Establishing a registry of individuals providing hunting and fishing guide services and a modest registration fee.

## **Section 1**

A number of secondary schools are conducting, or planning to introduce, outdoor education components in various courses. These structured components may include activities such as teaching fishing techniques that can meet core requirements in physical education, science and technology and the language arts. Coursework typically includes ecological principles, conservation history, digital research, and social communication skills. These programs provide an introduction to healthful outdoor activities that can be enjoyed lifelong. This connection to the outdoors can instill a lifelong interest in conservation issues and environmental stewardship.

Currently, conducting these classes in secondary schools is complicated due to the age structure of students, with some students needing a fishing license and others not needing a license. This section would allow the commissioner to issue exemptions for students from the fishing license requirement for certain fishing events or field trips conducted by their secondary schools. The events or field trips would be required to be part of a class conducted by the school, and would be intended to teach fishing techniques. This proposal would facilitate incorporating fishing into class curricula, generate an interest in fishing, promote a strong interest in the outdoors and conservation, and increase future sales of licenses.

This section also clarifies that 16 years of age is the age at which a fishing license is required. This is consistent with traditional and ongoing practice (a license is required when one turns 16) and is consistent with the age at which adult trapping and hunting licenses are required. In 1982, amendments to this section associated with the establishment of junior hunting and trapping licenses and a further rewording in 1983, inadvertently inserted ambiguous wording for the age at which a fishing license is required.

## **Section 2**

Anglers and hunters are often the public's most knowledgeable, passionate, and effective conservationists. However, participation in fishing and hunting has dropped off in recent years as costs have increased, both in Connecticut and on a national level. The proposals in this section are intended to promote life-long participation in outdoor activities that will foster a strong conservation ethic and increase sales of fishing and hunting licenses and permits. Fishing, hunting and trapping license and permit fees would be reduced by 50% for youth aged 16 and 17. As marketing tools, the commissioner would be able to designate up to two "free-license" days; and with OPM approval, also offer temporary reduced rate license and permit fees. Additionally, the group fishing license is reduced 50% and several combination license fees are adjusted to better conform to the current and proposed fee structure.

Currently over 138,000 youth between the ages of 6 and 15 fish in Connecticut (USFWS/Bureau of Census survey data). However, the number of 2012 fishing and hunting licenses sold to 16 year olds in Connecticut was only 2,050 and the total number of license buyers aged 16-17 was only 4,149. Reducing the cost of licenses and permits by 50% for youth aged 16 and 17 will make ongoing participation more affordable to young people and their parents and will increase long-term revenues to the state as active participation is extended into and through the full adult years.

At least eight other states have traditionally offered reduced rates on fishing and/or hunting licenses to youth (typically 16-18 or 15-17 years of age). Massachusetts eliminated the fishing license fee for 15-17 year olds effective in 2012. In 2011 Kansas established a five year license for young adults (age 16 through age 20) that effectively reduces annual license costs by 60%.

The ability to designate one or more days per calendar year as “free fishing license days” will provide an additional marketing tool for increasing participation. The requirement to obtain a free license will enable DEEP to obtain contact information from potential new customers. This will provide DEEP with a large target audience for information on our education programs and promotional material. The “free fishing license days” would be limited to no more than two (2) calendar days per year.

The proposed authority to offer temporary reduced rate license and permit fees is intended to enhance recruitment and retention, thereby increase long-term participation and revenues, by providing DEEP with the ability to temporarily adjust pricing structure (with OPM concurrence) for marketing purposes similar to the way businesses do. Possible measures could include reducing late-season license rates to entice participants and generate sales and revenue that otherwise would not occur (ex. fishing licenses being offered at ½ price beginning September 15); and reducing license fees for participants in Connecticut Aquatic Resource Education and Conservation Education/Firearms Safety programs. Reducing license fees for the year that they attend classes will provide an additional incentive for taking the class and for adult/parent participation. The active participation and mentorship by an adult or parent has been shown to greatly increase recruitment and retention.

The group license was established in 2010 to enable nonprofit organizations to conduct multiple fishing events or outings for groups of disabled veterans, or persons receiving certain services from DDS, DCF or DMHAS without requiring that clients obtain individual fishing licenses to participate in the fishing events. By obtaining a group license a nonprofit organization could conduct up to 50 events per year for up to 50 eligible individuals at each event. However, the current annual fee of \$250.00 has been found to be too expensive for a number of smaller organizations, including group homes that service smaller numbers of clients (between 5 and 10 individuals) for whom fishing may be beneficial. Currently only two organizations have taken advantage of the group license opportunity. It is expected that decreasing the group license fee by 50% to \$125.00 will allow additional organizations to make use of the group license.

This section also corrects existing fees of two resident supersport combination licenses to be less than the cost of the sum of purchasing their components separately and corrects one combination fee to make its fee equitable with other existing fees.

### **Section 3**

All persons applying for a license to hunt with a firearm or bow and arrow are required to successfully complete a course of instruction in safe hunting practices, and in the handling of hunting implements. Recent advances in web-based learning have resulted in several commercial vendors providing high-quality, on-line training options. Online training provides many advantages including the convenience learning at home, personalized instruction pace, content review, and savings in transportation time and cost. As a result, these options are highly valued by the hunting public. As commercial products, vendors charge a nominal fee for these offerings. However, under existing law, no fee shall be charged for a course of instruction in hunting or archery. Consequently, the only option for making these learning platforms available is for DEEP to underwrite the costs of instruction by paying the vendor fees in advance. Alternately, prospective students must instead attend multiple in-classroom courses, frequently a long drive from home. Travel to and from in-classroom courses demands substantially greater commitments of time and cost. Additionally, transitioning to on-line learning services reduces costs to the state by reducing the number of on-site classes. It will also facilitate the redeployment of volunteer instructor services to the required hands-on learning sessions in the safe handling of firearms

and archery equipment. By removing the prohibition on charging fees, DEEP will be able reduce administrative costs and reduce travel costs to the students, while continuing to offer free course options through volunteer instructors.

Ten of the thirteen northeastern states, including Massachusetts, New York, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Vermont and Pennsylvania, accept certificates of completion of on-line courses. Like the program intended for our state, all ten northeastern states require a one-day field component in addition to the on-line certificate.

#### **Section 4**

A registry of guides would be used by DEEP to promote fishing and hunting to out-of-state sportsmen. DEEP frequently receives requests from individuals in other states and from Connecticut businesses for lists of fishing and hunting guides. Businesses routinely bring people into Connecticut for meetings, workshops, and conferences and these groups often include sportsmen. Up-to-date information on guide services will enable DEEP to more effectively market outdoor activities to potential out-of-state customers. Charging a modest fee is reasonable as the guides' business is dependent on the public trust fish & wildlife resources managed by DEEP.

In summary, the DEEP strongly supports Raised Senate Bill No. 241 – AN ACT CONCERNING YOUTH HUNTING AND FISHING LICENSES, REVISING CERTAIN HUNTING AND FISHING LICENSE FEES AND REQUIRING REGISTRATION BY HUNTING AND FISHING GUIDE SERVICES as it would increase participation in outdoor activities, promote higher retention of young participants into and through the adult years, maintain a constituency with a strong interest in environmental stewardship, and provide long-term increases in license revenues. Additionally, hunter education courses will be more convenient for the public and a registry of hunting and fishing guides would be available.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact Robert LaFrance, DEEP's Director of Governmental Affairs, at 860.424.3401 or [Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov](mailto:Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov) (or, Elizabeth McAuliffe, DEEP Legislative Liaison, at 860.424.3458 or [Elizabeth.McAuliffe@ct.gov](mailto:Elizabeth.McAuliffe@ct.gov) ).