



PATRICK TESTIN

STATE SENATOR

DATE: March 9th, 2017
RE: **Testimony on 2017 SB 46 and AB 82**
TO: The Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Mining, and Forestry
FROM: Senator Patrick Testin

Chairman Tiffany and members of the committee, thank you for today's opportunity to testify on behalf of Senate Bill 46 and Assembly Bill 82. This legislation demonstrates respect for Purple Heart recipients and disabled veterans by ensuring that they get the chance to participate in our state's great tradition of turkey hunting.

Current law stipulates that the DNR use a lottery type cumulative preference system to assign wild turkey hunting licenses and tags should the number of applicants in a given hunting zone or time period outnumber the available allocated number. Several preference categories are considered, including landowner status, the number of seasons someone has applied for but not received a license, and resident status.

Senate Bill 46 and its companion Assembly Bill 82 would enable Purple Heart recipients and veterans with a disability rating over 50% to obtain wild turkey hunting licenses and tags without being subject to the cumulative preference system. The state has already seen fit to extend this exemption to current members of the armed forces.

Our disabled and wounded veterans have sacrificed a great deal to serve their country. In recent years, several publications, including *USA Today* and *TIME Magazine*, have written about the therapeutic benefits that hunting and fishing can have on the lives of combat veterans. These men and women served on the front lines for us; it's only right that we move them near the front of the line when it comes to granting access to an activity that could prove beneficial for their mental and physical well-being.

Thanks again to Chairman Tiffany and the members of the committee for hearing my testimony on this legislation. I ask that you join me in support of this bill for our veterans.



Testimony of Rep. Dianne Hesselbein
Committee on Sporting Heritage, Mining and Forestry
SB 46 and AB 82: Providing Wild Turkey Licenses
For Disabled Veterans and Purple Heart Medal Recipients
March 9, 2017

Chairman Tiffany and members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this public hearing and inviting me to speak in support of SB 46 and its companion bill, AB 82.

As many of you are aware, the return - the rebounding - of the wild turkey is a great Wisconsin success story. Since the turkey was re-introduced in 1976, its population has increased dramatically.

Last year, more than 213,672 permits were issued for the spring and fall wild turkey hunts.

The bill before us would give a small perk to the tiny fraction of resident Wisconsin turkey hunters who are disabled veterans and recipients of the Purple Heart medal. It would allow the Department of Natural Resources to issue turkey licenses and tags directly to disabled veterans and Purple Heart medalists. SB 46 would allow all Purple Heart recipients, in state and out of state, to be exempt from the cumulative preference system for issuing wild turkey hunting and license tags. Disabled Veterans with 50% disability would be included if they are Wisconsin residents.

Why are we doing this? It is a small way of saying "thank you" for veterans' service and physical sacrifice.

How many people are we talking about? We are talking about a few thousand people. In total there were 16,267 resident disabled fishing licenses issued for the 2015 license year, making up approximately 24% of the total fishing licenses issued.

According to DNR figures:

- In 2015 there were approximately 3,900 veterans with 70 percent disability who qualified for a resident disabled fishing permit
- In 2015 there were there were 1,314 disabled veterans with 50 percent disability who qualified for a disabled veteran recreation card
- And in 2015 there were 1,053 Purple Heart recipients who qualified as resident Purple Heart conservation patrons.
- There were also 14 non-resident Purple Heart conservation patrons in 2015

Based on these figures, a maximum of about 5,800 individuals could qualify for the disabled veteran and Purple Heart privilege. Not all of them would take advantage of it.

I talked to several disabled veterans and they said it would give a nice boost to disabled hunters who live everyday with their service-related injuries.

Please join me in supporting SB 46 and AB 82.

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Fishing, hunting help injured veterans heal

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Enlarge By Mark Sobhani for USA TODAY

Amputee Brett Wolf is helped by Julie Mogenis after hunting at the Record Buck Ranch in Utopia, Texas. Mogenis, host of *Huntin' with the Judge*, taped the Iraq veteran's excursion for her show.

By Emily Bazar, USA TODAY

Army Spc. Brett Wolf is one of those sportsmen who says hunting is about relaxing and hanging with other hunters, not just bagging a prize.

Still, he gleefully describes the spoils of his Halloween weekend hunt in Texas Hill Country: a wild hog — the first he'd ever seen — and a 200-pound whitetail buck. No matter that the terrain was rough on his wheelchair, or that his shooting arm has been operated on three times in 18 months.

Wolf, 26, lost both legs above the knee and suffered head and elbow injuries in Iraq when an improvised explosive device (IED) exploded under his Humvee on Sept. 11, 2007.

PHOTOS: Outdoor therapy for wounded veterans

"Just because you can't walk around and do everything everybody else can, it doesn't mean you don't need to go and still enjoy yourself," he says.

Like many veterans hurt in Iraq or Afghanistan, Wolf is turning to rugged activities such as hunting and fishing to help heal physical and mental wounds. Groups such as the Armed Forces Foundation organize outings to get a growing number of veterans out of hospitals and sterile rehabilitation centers and into the therapeutic embrace of nature.

"There definitely has been a surge" in the number of programs and participation by veterans, says Patricia Driscoll, president of the Armed Forces Foundation. Outdoor activities help them cope with challenges from amputations and post-traumatic stress disorder to social isolation, she says.

Her group's programs are gaining popularity as hunting ranches offer free services, she says. Special equipment, such as hydraulic hunting stands that move up and down and accommodate wheelchairs, helps hunters overcome physical limitations.

"These guys start out very glum. They think, 'I can't do this. I'm not the way I used to be,'" Driscoll says. "Once we get them out there, they realize, 'I can still do this. This is exciting.' You just see their whole attitude change."

Sandy Trombetta, program director at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Grand Junction, Colo., has been working with disabled veterans outdoors for 30 years. He is director of the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic.

Rafting, fishing, hiking and skiing provide exercise, fresh air, weight control and other benefits, he says. "It's health care outside of the hospital."

Wolf grew up on a Missouri farm, fishing and enjoying his favorite pastime, hunting.

Last weekend, he joined an Armed Forces Foundation group on a hunt at RecordBuck Ranch, west of San Antonio. Hunting can be physically taxing. He describes a previous outing when he climbed 10 feet up into a deer blind — a camouflaged structure — using prosthetic legs but he says the benefits are mostly mental.

William White, 48, of Southport, N.C., lost his 23-year-old son, Christopher Neal White, in Iraq in 2006. He decided to memorialize him by buying 170 acres in Farmington, Mo., naming it Chris Neal Farm and dedicating it to wounded vets.

White believes the best healing comes after the deer and turkey hunts he hosts for wounded veterans, when they gather around the campfire to share experiences — "the camaraderie of being together, of being able to discuss some of the issues in their lives, being able to forget what's going on."

Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing has taken 2,000 disabled veterans fishing since 2005, founder Ed Nicholson says.

Fishing gives injured veterans an alternative to alcohol or other destructive behavior, says program manager David Folkerts, who uses a customized reel that allows him to cast and crank with one arm and one hand. Shrapnel from an IED in Iraq caused nerve and artery damage in his left arm.

"It played a big part in changing my mind-set from thinking about all the things I couldn't do to thinking about all the things I could do," he says.

Army Sgt. Keniel Martinez, 27, struggled with nightmares and panic attacks after returning from a tour in Iraq in 2006. A motorcycle accident last December tore all the ligaments in both of his knees.

Last month, he went fly-fishing with Healing Waters on the western shore of Maryland's Chesapeake Bay. He hooked a rockfish, but it got away.

He says fly-fishing practice got him out of his hospital room and helped his body — and his mind — heal.

"They're teaching us to be independent again," he says. "My self-confidence has definitely gotten a boost out of it."

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Military Order of the Purple Heart

Department of Wisconsin



Jason E. Johns
State Legislative Officer
104 King St, Ste. 301
Madison, WI 53703
608-665-3380
jason@nmlbvet.com

March 9, 2017

Members of the Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Mining and Forestry;

The Military Order of the Purple Heart-Department of Wisconsin gladly expresses its SUPPORT for SB 46-relating to an exemption for resident disabled veterans and for recipients of the Purple Heart medal from the cumulative preference system for issuing wild turkey hunting licenses and tags.

Wisconsin has long been a great state to be an outdoorsman(woman) and a veteran. SB 46 continues this tradition in a very honorable and worthwhile way. We wish to thank Senator Testin and all Senate co-sponsors, as well as Representative Hesselbein and all Assembly co-sponsors for the companion bill to SB 46. There is an impressive co-sponsorship list of bi-partisan support for this legislation who have stepped forth to show gratitude for our more severely disabled veterans and Purple Heart veterans who have bled for our country. SB 46 makes it easier for these brave men and women to experience the outstanding healing powers, both physical and mental, that the sporting heritage in Wisconsin provides.

The MOPH of WI encourages each member of this committee to vote for passage of SB 46 and we look forward to seeing it signed in to law!

Jason E. Johns

State Legislative Officer
MOPH Department of WI