



RON TUSLER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 3rd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony on Assembly Bill 72
Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage
November 15, 2023

Chairman Pronschinske and committee members,

Today, I stand before you to advocate for a significant step forward for the State of Wisconsin – the establishment of a resident lifetime fishing license. This initiative, introduced by Senator Patrick Testin and I, is more than just a legislative proposal; it's a commitment to our state's rich outdoor heritage and a beacon of hope for future generations of anglers.

Fishing is a timeless sport, enjoyed by people of all ages, and is often a passion that starts in childhood and extends throughout one's life. The proposed lifetime fishing license offers an incredible opportunity for Wisconsinites to enjoy the outdoors and foster a lifelong hobby. It's especially valuable as an option for avid fishermen and as a perfect gift for younger family members who are just beginning to explore the joys of fishing.

Wisconsin's proposal for a lifetime fishing license, priced at \$577.50, is both competitive and reasonable. This pricing, calculated as thirty times the annual resident fishing license fee, places Wisconsin in a favorable position compared to other states where lifetime license fees range from around \$200 to \$2,000. With this proposal, Wisconsin joins nearly half of the states in the U.S., including neighboring states like Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, and Ohio, in offering this beneficial option. In 2019, over 7,000 Iowans bought a lifetime fishing license and that number remains steady today.

The financial implications of this proposal are significant. Resident fishing licenses are a major source of revenue for Wisconsin, contributing approximately \$9-\$10 million annually. These funds are vital for the Department of Natural Resources' conservation fund, which supports various fish and wildlife management projects. The introduction of a lifetime fishing license ensures a steady and sustainable source of funding for these crucial conservation efforts. Additionally, the DNR would be able to absorb this cost within its own budget, according to their own fiscal estimate.



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This bill is about more than just the financial aspects; it's about a long-term commitment to the sport of fishing and to the future of conservation in Wisconsin. By allowing anglers to make this lifelong investment, we're fostering a deeper connection between our residents and the natural environment. It's a gesture that signifies a commitment not only to a sport but also to the stewardship and preservation of our state's natural resources.

In summary, the resident lifetime fishing license represents an investment in both the present and the future. It ensures that fishing, a cornerstone of Wisconsin's outdoor culture, remains a cherished and sustainable activity for generations to come. This bill is an affirmation of our dedication to outdoor recreation, conservation, and the enduring spirit of Wisconsin's angling community.

I urge your support for this bill, as it symbolizes our collective commitment to the anglers of Wisconsin and to the conservation of our natural heritage. Let us unite in supporting a future where fishing continues to be a beloved part of Wisconsin's identity.

Thank you for your consideration and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



PATRICK TESTIN STATE SENATOR

DATE: November 15, 2023
RE: **Testimony on Assembly Bill 72**
TO: The Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage
FROM: Senator Patrick Testin

Thank you Chairman Pronschinske and members of the committee for holding a hearing on Assembly Bill 72.

Fishing is a sport for people of all ages, and one that anglers often get hooked on for life. Fishing generates almost \$2.3 billion in economic activity in Wisconsin, and helps employ more than 22,000 people across the state.

With the exception of children under the age of 16 and active duty military personnel on furlough or leave, every person who fishes here in the state needs a license. Wisconsin does a good job of offering a variety of licenses to suit different consumer needs. There is the standard license, a one-day license, reduced cost licenses for seniors, sixteen and seventeen years old, disabled individuals, disabled military veterans, and married couples.

This bill creates another option for sportsmen and women – a lifetime fishing license.

Twenty-six states have some form of a lifetime fishing license, including Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, and Ohio. The cost of the license varies by state, with fees running from around \$200 up to the \$2,000 range. The current proposal would place Wisconsin somewhere in the middle, as the price per license is set at thirty times the fee of a resident annual fishing license, which is currently sold for \$19.25 (not including the seventy-five cent processing fee).

Presently, states receive federal funds based off the sale of various licenses, such as fishing licenses. In order for Wisconsin to not forfeit any of these matching federal funds, the bill creates a lifetime fishing trust fund. From that trust fund, the DNR may adopt rules to prorate the fees and interest from lifetime fishing license revenue to transfer into the conservation fund to qualify for federal funds each year.

The holder of a resident lifetime fishing license must still purchase a fishing stamp if the type of fishing in which he or she will be engaged requires such a stamp.

I hope you'll join me and support this bill to give another option to Wisconsin anglers and allow them to make a lifetime commitment to their sport.



Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage
2023 Assembly Bill 72
Resident Lifetime Fishing License, Lifetime Fishing Trust Fund
November 15, 2023

Good morning, Chair Pronschinske and members of the Committee. My name is Katherine Walker, and I am the Customer and Outreach Services Policy Advisor for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. With me today to help answer questions is Scott Loomans, Fish and Wildlife Policy Advisor. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, for informational purposes, on Assembly Bill 72 (AB 72), related to a resident lifetime fishing license.

AB 72 establishes a resident lifetime fishing license, establishes the fee for this license at 30 times the fee for a resident annual fishing license and creates a lifetime fishing trust fund for the fees and interest accrued. This proposal allows the department to adopt rules establishing a system complying with 50 CFR 80 for prorating those fees for purposes of the transfer to the conservation fund. In addition, this proposal specifies the resident lifetime license remains valid even if the holder is no longer a resident and is not transferable, exchangeable, or refundable and cannot be combined with any other discount on approvals. Under this proposal, the holder of a resident lifetime fishing license must still purchase a fishing stamp if the type of fishing in which they would be engaged requires such an annual stamp.

The resident lifetime fishing license would add complexity to the department's annual certification reports, as we currently do not offer lifetime licenses. The department would need to incorporate options currently within 50 CFR 80 for taking lifetime licenses into consideration for federal reporting required to receive Dingell-Johnson funds. Administrative rulemaking would likely be required to identify processes for the disbursement of license fees and interest accrued from the trust fund created by this proposal.

In addition, this lifetime product would add complexity to future licensing system changes due to the need to transfer data for up to 30 years.

This proposal would greatly reduce the number of interactions between lifetime license purchasers and the department's license issuance system. Lifetime license buyers whose fishing license privileges have been revoked or suspended by a court of law receive notification of the suspension each time they attempt to purchase from the department's licensing system until the suspension is lifted, these customers would now need to rely solely on communications received from the court system regarding the status of their fishing privileges as they would no longer be using the license issuance system regularly.

For each fishing license sold, there is a 75-cent issuing fee included in the total cost of the license charged to the customer. If a customer purchases the resident lifetime fishing license instead of a different annual fishing license, there would only be one 75-cent issuing fee applied to the lifetime fishing license (50-cents of which is retained as a commission by the department or agent). This means that the department and private-sector agents would only receive a portion of one 75-cent issuing fee as their commission instead of receiving a 75-cent issuing fee for each individual resident fishing license sold annually. For example, the proposed resident lifetime fishing license is set at 30 times the cost of an annual fishing license, which is essentially the cost of 30 resident annual fishing licenses. If a customer purchases a resident lifetime fishing

license, the department or private-sector agent would only receive one commission from the lifetime license, instead of the possible 30 separate commissions from the sale of 30 resident annual fishing licenses from that individual customer ($30 \times \$0.75 = \22.50). Thus, the department and private sector agents would only receive a one-time nominal fee for the administration of this license, even though there would be annual documentation and account management required.

The proposed resident lifetime fishing license could also impact the department's current resident fishing licenses and its combination license sales. In the current license year (March 1, 2023, through October 31, 2023), there were 1,170,778 individuals between the ages of 16 and 99 who purchased a fishing license from the department. The department's licensing system does not allow a customer to purchase the same license if they already purchased a similar license, due to the statutory prohibition that prevents customers from holding more than one of the same type of license. In this case, if a customer purchased a resident lifetime fishing license, the customer would then be prevented from purchasing any similar department fishing license product that contained a fishing license (such as the Conservation Patron and Sports combination licenses). Similarly, the resident lifetime fishing license purchaser would no longer be eligible for various fishing license privileges available to Wisconsin veterans or active U.S. armed forces members or purchase the discounted fishing licenses (including the husband-and-wife fishing license [that is being renamed the spousal license in this bill], senior, or first-time buyer discounted licenses). Also, because the resident lifetime fishing license cannot be transferred, exchanged, or refunded, once a customer purchases this lifetime license, they are prevented from purchasing any other similar department fishing licenses for the rest of their lives. As a result, the customer would have to choose at the time of purchase whether they wish to continue with the resident lifetime fishing license at the expense of other similar department licenses for their entire lifetime, as the proposed license is non-refundable. Without explicit messaging to customers about this, the interrelationships of differing license types could be confusing and frustrating to customers.

Additionally, because the proposed resident lifetime fishing license remains valid even when the license holder no longer lives in Wisconsin, the proposed license allows nonresidents to continue using the resident product once they've left Wisconsin. For example, if a former Wisconsin resident customer purchased a resident lifetime fishing license and then later moved to Illinois, that nonresident would still benefit from the resident lifetime fishing license despite now being an Illinois resident. Because Wisconsin is a tourist destination for many nonresident sportspersons, any former resident with a resident lifetime fishing license would continue to receive Wisconsin resident benefits even though they are no longer a resident in Wisconsin.

In conclusion, we appreciate the author's efforts to provide options for Wisconsin's anglers and to increase participation in outdoor recreation. As licensing in Wisconsin currently stands, there are 191 different license prices listed in Ch. 29 Wis. Stats. and over 300 separate license SKUs. The system is quite complex and can be confusing for our customers. Overall, the department would prefer to move toward streamlining our licenses in a way that makes sense for licensees, and improves administration, possibly through some of the options outlined in the 2020 Legislative Council report on Streamlining Wisconsin's Hunting, Trapping, and Fishing Licensure System.

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, we would like to thank you for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.