

# ANDRÉ JACQUE

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## Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 137

April 24, 2013

Chairman Ott and Committee Members,

Thank you for your attention and the opportunity to testify before you today as the author of Assembly Bill 137, which would properly classify the woodchuck by removing it from the protected species list. Also known as groundhogs or whistle pigs, they are relatively abundant and prolific breeders which have taken a particular liking to agricultural areas. I am pleased to bring this bi-partisan legislation forward at the request of many constituents, including members of leadership within the Conservation Congress and the Manitowoc County Fish and Game Association, a model network of more than two dozen conservation and sportsmen clubs surrounding the southern part of my district. This proposal passed the Conservation Congress in 2009 in all 72 counties and by an overwhelming overall ratio of more than 7 to 1, and I consulted with both sportsmen and the DNR in drafting the language before you.

The Department of Natural Resources currently prohibits hunting and trapping woodchucks with few exceptions by designating the woodchuck as a “protected wild animal”, a status without biological or resource management justification which places Wisconsin out of step with the other states within the woodchuck’s natural range. This designation is typically reserved for species in need of protection for social or biological reasons. Some other species currently listed as protected include lynx, badgers, moose, albino deer and birds of prey. Under this bill, a woodchuck is defined as a “game animal” and as a “fur-bearing animal.” As a result, a person would be able to hunt woodchucks under the authority of a small game hunting license and trap woodchucks under a trapping license. Also under this bill, DNR is required to establish an open season for woodchucks from March to the end of December without a bag or possession limit.

According to Jeff Pritzl, Regional DNR Wildlife Supervisor for Northeast Wisconsin, past discussions among DNR wildlife staff have favored treating woodchucks more like coyotes, a game animal with essentially unlimited harvest opportunity. Such a change would bring Wisconsin in line with the rest of the Midwest and Northeast US, including Minnesota, Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania (home of Punxsutawney Phil), Missouri, Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, New York, Vermont and Massachusetts, where they are labeled “pests”, “nuisance species”, and “varmints” on official websites, among other things. The Missouri Department of Conservation notes, “A young medium-sized groundhog makes excellent table fare if properly prepared”, while a Kentucky state university extension wildlife specialist’s report states that they “provide a tasty meal when boiled or fried.”

According to UW-Madison Forest and Wildlife Ecology professor emeritus Scott Craven, "They're just like a lawnmower in the garden. They're ferocious herbivores," and the Minnesota DNR warns that they "have the ability to destroy an entire garden or flowerbed in a relatively short time. In addition to plant damage, burrowing along sidewalks, driveways and building foundations can lead to serious damage to structures." I have heard these complaints from a great many constituents as well as citizens statewide. Even Henry David Thoreau's book *Walden* seethes "My enemies are worms, cool days, and most of all woodchucks. The last have nibbled for me a quarter of an acre clean."

Our colleague Senator Vinehout offers some helpful perspective from the agricultural community: "We have a lot of problems with woodchucks that are very fat and eat a lot of our grain. I look out my bedroom window every morning and see those guys running around. They're very fat and very happy. This bill would allow the neighbor boy to come over and shoot them and solve a small problem on the farm." Another farmer writes "When baling hay, the piles of dirt (from excavation of burrows) gets spread into the hay and the animals won't eat it. Sometimes tractors will hit the holes, caving them in and over goes your wagon-load of hay. The dirt also dulls the cutting knives and sometimes breaks them." I have heard several situations regarding woodchucks' propensity to endanger structures with their tunneling and have appended two emails from my constituents attesting to it at the end of my testimony.

The fact remains that there is no question of woodchucks' abundance or their destructive capability, and it lessens the credibility of Wisconsin's protected species list to list animals that don't need to be specially protected. Thank you for your consideration.

Dear Representative Jacque,

My name is James Downey and I am a Wisconsin trapper. I live in Manitowoc County and I attend the University of Wisconsin Madison, studying animal science/PreVet. I have been trapping for six years now and I appreciate your support of AB 137. Woodchucks are plentiful in the areas that I trap and oftentimes inhabit old buildings and junk piles. However, sometimes woodchucks move into machine sheds and make burrows in the building as well as under the building. This can undermine the structure of the building and poses a risk to the contents of the building. Removing the woodchucks is the only solution for this problem, and it is best accomplished by using traps. I hope that AB 137 is passed so that nuisance woodchucks can be trapped and damage caused by them is reduced. I do not think that all the woodchucks need to be eradicated, but passing this bill would allow us trappers to take care of the nuisance ones that cause damage.

Thank you,

James Downey

Hello Andre,

I am in support of AB 137 to remove the woodchuck from the endangered species list. They are all over including always trying to dig into my buildings. Three to six times a year we are filling in holes where woodchucks dig in only to raise hell once they are inside. Thank you for your consideration.

Bob Schuh

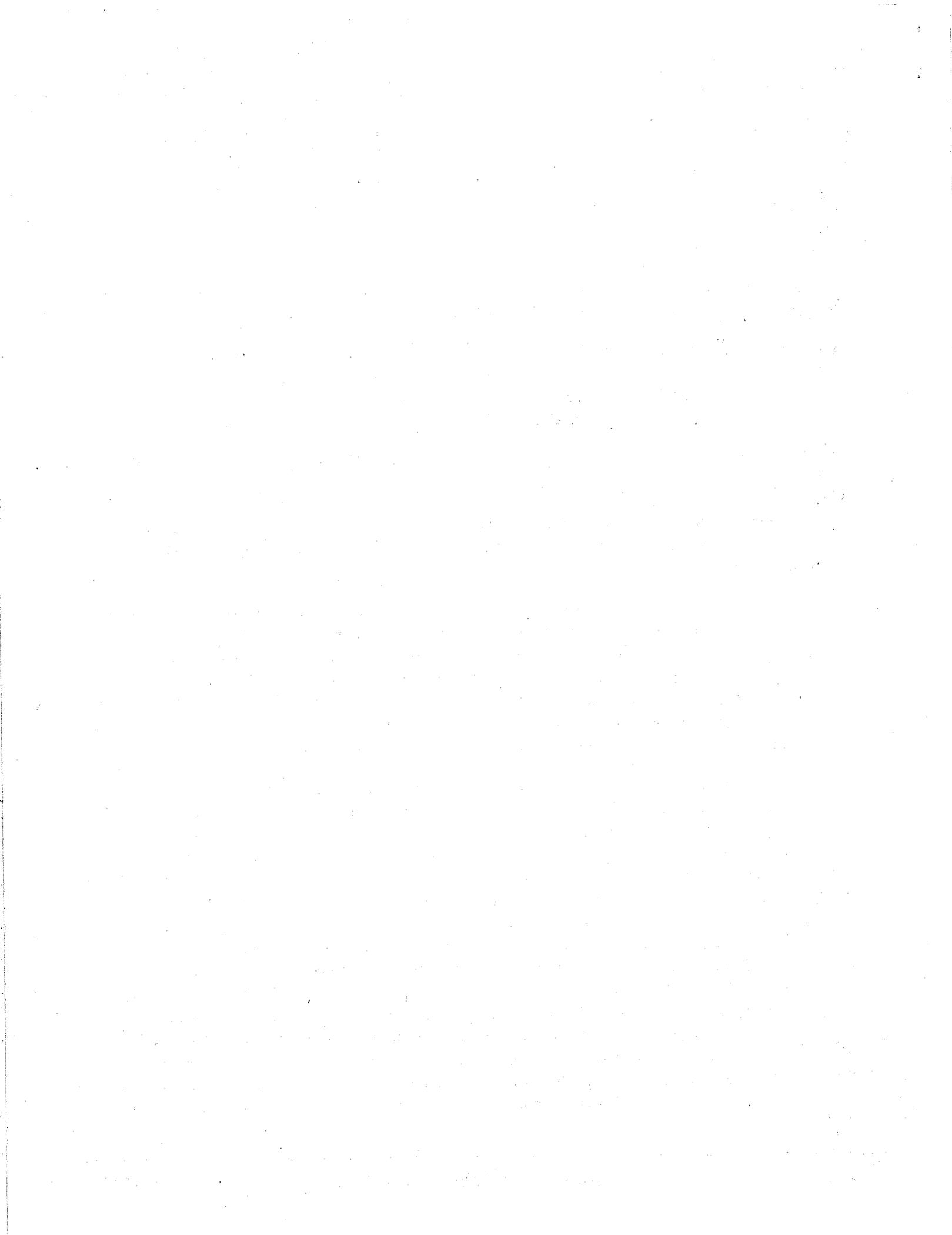


April 24, 2013

### Speaking points for Assembly Bill 137

Dear Chair Ott and Committee members:

- People often ask, “How many wood chucks are there in Wisconsin?” We do not have specific population information on woodchucks but do consider them to be a common wildlife species.
- Some background information on the species is:
  1. They are a rodent and a member of the squirrel family that is found throughout the state.
  2. They are a true hibernator that relies entirely on body fat reserves for energy throughout their winter sleep - late October through March or April.
- Woodchucks can be beneficial, as their abandoned burrows provide homes for small game like rabbits, fox and weasels – which may be a reason they are protected.
- Woodchucks can be damaging to gardens, pastures, lawns due to their interest in consuming plant material and can be damaging to foundations and other structures due to their ability to excavate numerous tunnels.
- Since 1967 Landowners have had statutory authority to control woodchucks: (like raccoon, rabbit & squirrel)
  1. Landowners and occupants of any lands can trap or shoot these species year round [s. 29.337(1)].
  2. Landowners/occupants are not required to have a hunting or trapping license to shoot or trap these species as well as coyote, fox and beaver on their property [s. 29.337(1)].
  3. A municipality, landowner, lessee, or occupant may solicit an agent to aid in the removal of these animals when causing damage [NR 12.10(3)(c)]. An agent of the landowner is required to have a valid hunting or trapping license to shoot or trap these species [ss.29.337, 29.024, and NR 12.10(1)(b)1.c.]
- Department staff have recently discussed establishing a hunting/trapping season.
  1. As with other wildlife, where regulated harvest is a management tool, the department has not been eager to open the season at a time when they have dependent young, especially considering that landowners and their agents have full authority to conduct nuisance removal at any time.
  2. A consideration would be to expand the closed period proposed in this bill, or shift its timing, to include March-June, in order to preclude harvest of females with dependent young.
  3. If the department were to initiate the establishment of a hunting season, it might be consistent with the squirrel hunting season, Saturday nearest September 15 through January. However, a couple of our surrounding states allow hunting/trapping earlier and that would be considered.
  4. A consideration should be given to establishing any trapping season to beginning with other dry-land trapping seasons. Currently, this is the Saturday nearest October 17. We are not aware that trappers would specifically target woodchucks, but this would allow utilization of an incidentally trapped wood-chuck.
  5. We (and the Conservation Congress) are currently evaluating if the dry land trapping seasons for other species should be changed from the current Saturday nearest Oct. 17<sup>th</sup> each year, to simply be October 15<sup>th</sup> every year (regardless of the day of the week). Some have suggested that all of these



species should have one consistent opening date. Currently, the wolf trapping season is set by statute and cannot be changed by rule - so the thinking of some trappers is that all the upland trapping seasons should open on October 15<sup>th</sup>.

### Background Information

The North American Fur Auction company was contacted by our fur-bearer specialist on the status of woodchuck as a saleable furbearer. They advised they do not handle woodchucks. However, they did say there is a company out of Missouri that purchases woodchuck pelts primarily for the tail, as the tail hairs are highly sought after for certain types of uses (fishing fly's was the one item they knew of). Prime woodchuck tails sell for up to \$5.00.

Since at least 1957, the woodchuck has been listed as protected which was the same time that wolves were listed as a state protected species under administrative code rules, with no open season. From 1925 until 1975, Counties were allowed to offer a bounty on species like woodchucks, wolves, red and grey fox, coyote, bobcat, lynx and certain other species. Bounty for woodchucks when set by statute was 25 cents. In 1975, the bounty authority was eliminated for **woodchucks**, wolves (when they became federal endangered species), lynx, and rattlesnakes. It would appear that only individual who would have been eligible to collect a bounty on a woodchuck from 1957 -1975 would have been landowners, as the season was otherwise closed.

As a Conservation Congress advisory question in 2009 the following proposal was supported by a vote of Ayes, 5,532; Noes, 760.

Comparison with surrounding states:

- Iowa's groundhog hunting season runs from June 15 to Oct. 31 but there is no trapping season.
- The Illinois trapping season runs from June 1 to Sept 30 and the hunting season runs from June 1 to March 31.
- Woodchucks are not protected in Minnesota.
- There is no closed season in Michigan.

<p><b>ENDANGERED RESOURCES AND LAW ENFORCEMENT STUDY COMMITTEE ADVISORY QUESTIONS</b></p>
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#### **QUESTION 69 – Remove Woodchucks from the List of Protected Species**

Woodchucks are currently listed as a protected species in the State of Wisconsin. However, there is no biological or resource management related evidence that supports the listing of woodchucks as a protected species. The designation of "protected" means that a person may not take, attempt to take, transport or possess a woodchuck with a few exceptions. This designation is typically reserved for species in need of protection for social or biological reasons. Some other species currently listed as protected include lynx, badgers, moose, albino deer and birds of prey.

Currently, there is an exemption in state statute that allows landowners in Wisconsin, without a small game license and subject to all other restrictions except seasons, to hunt or trap on their property for woodchucks year-round. Landowners are also allowed to give others permission to hunt or trap woodchucks that are causing damage.

Removing woodchucks from the list of protected species would still allow landowners to hunt or trap woodchucks without a license on their property, but it would also allow non-landowners to hunt or trap woodchucks under the authority of a small game license.

Would you support removing woodchucks from the list of protected species?

69. Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_





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Monday, April 22, 2013

The Honorable Alvin Ott  
Chair, Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage  
Room 323 North, State Capitol  
Madison, WI 53708

RE: Assembly Bill 137 relating to requiring an open season for woodchucks

Dear Chair Ott and members of the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting heritage:

On Monday, April 13, 2009, the Wisconsin Conservation Congress asked the following question on the Spring Hearings Questionnaire.

**QUESTION 69 – Remove Woodchucks from the List of Protected Species**

Woodchucks are currently listed as a protected species in the State of Wisconsin. However, there is no biological or resource management related evidence that supports the listing of woodchucks as a protected species. The designation of "protected" means that a person may not take, attempt to take, transport or possess a woodchuck with a few exceptions. This designation is typically reserved for species in need of protection for social or biological reasons. Some other species currently listed as protected include lynx, badgers, moose, albino deer and birds of prey.

Currently, there is an exemption in state statute that allows landowners in Wisconsin, without a small game license and subject to all other restrictions except seasons, to hunt or trap on their property for woodchucks year-round. Landowners are also allowed to give others permission to hunt or trap woodchucks that are causing damage.

Removing woodchucks from the list of protected species would still allow landowners to hunt or trap woodchucks without a license on their property, but it would also allow non-landowners to hunt or trap woodchucks under the authority of a small game license.

Would you support removing woodchucks from the list of protected species?

This question passed in all seventy-two counties with 5,532 yes votes to 760 no votes.

The Wisconsin Conservation Congress supports the removal of woodchucks from the protected list, the defining of woodchuck as a game animal and as a fur-bearing animal, and the right for persons to hunt woodchucks under the authority of a small game hunting license and trap woodchucks under a trapping license. On behalf of our constituents that attended and voted in favor of the change in 2009, we respectfully request that you support the passage of AB-137.

Rob Bohmann, Chair  
Wisconsin Conservation Congress

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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.



# NRA-ILA

INSTITUTE for LEGISLATIVE ACTION

## Wisconsin: Governor Announces 2013 Policy Initiatives for Wisconsin Hunters and Sportsmen

Posted on February 8, 2013

Today, Governor Scott Walker (R) joined NRA President David Keene and members of the NRA State Association WI-FORCE at their annual meeting in Wausau. Governor Walker took this opportunity to announce a number of policy initiatives his administration will seek to continue his unwavering support for Wisconsin's rich hunting and sporting heritage. Speaking during a meet and greet at the WI-FORCE annual meeting, Governor Walker outlined three important goals for the coming legislative session.

One of the most important actions the Governor announced today is the full implementation of the list of recommendations produced by the independent study of Wisconsin's deer management strategy. In past years, Wisconsin's abundant deer populations declined due to mismanagement and ineffective wildlife policies. From the start, Governor Walker heard the cries of Wisconsin's hunters and commissioned national deer management expert, Dr. James C. Kroll, to study the state's declining deer populations and to suggest improvements. Dr. Kroll's final report included 62 conclusions and recommendations on how to restore Wisconsin's deer population to its once thriving past. Governor Walker has pledged to implement these recommendations fully.

In addition, Governor Walker announced his plan to lower the cost for hunters who wish to hunt wolves in Wisconsin. The cost for a wolf tag during last year's season was \$100. The Governor has proposed lowering the license fee to \$50, ensuring that financial means will not be a disincentive to participation in this newly created season.

Finally, Governor Walker announced that he has allocated \$50,000 in his annual budget to improve and expand hunter education. Thanks to two highly successful programs championed by the Governor – the state's new Right-to-Carry law and Sporting Heritage Act – the demand for hunter safety classes has exploded and tens of thousands of new hunters have joined the state's ranks of sportsmen and more than 150,000 now have a license to carry a concealed firearm for self-defense.

Governor Walker has again shown his strong commitment to gun owners, hunters and sportsmen in Wisconsin. The members of the National Rifle Association along with the more than 600,000 licensed hunters who enjoy time afield in the Badger State applaud the Governor, and thank him for remaining a shining example of leadership on hunting and sporting issues.

Tags:

[Hunting/Conservation, Governor Scott Walker](#)

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PATRICIA LOWERY

