

Testimony in favor of HB 458, March 4, 2011

Chairman Arntzen, Vice Chairman Berry, and members of the committee:

My name is Mary Ellen Schnur. I urge your support of HB 458. I reside east of Townsend. My husband and I have operated our outfitting business since 1971. Raising our seven children in our family's outfitting business has produced conscientious, hard-working adults, who are productive citizens today.

We've seen many changes in the outfitting business over the past forty years. One of the biggest came in 1995, when HB 195 guaranteed our nonresident clients the opportunity to purchase a big game hunting license. In order to ensure that our industry would not abuse the ability HB 195 gave us to anticipate a stable customer base for the industry, HB 196 was adopted as a companion to HB 195. HB 196 instituted limits on the numbers of hunters of any kind that an outfitter could serve. These limits were based on historic use, and originally applied per species. New outfitters not purchasing an existing business, have had to pay the Board of Outfitters \$500.00 for each client allowed. An outfitter, who wishes to serve clients in a camp more than 100 miles from his base of operations in another Fish Wildlife & Parks region, must pay \$5,000.00 annually.

In a practical sense, here's how NCHU has worked for us: For some years prior to 1995, a third of nonresident big game licenses were set aside in a separate drawing process for outfitted hunters. The outfitters who had participated in this process had historic use which constituted their Category 1 NCHU. Category 1 set the maximum number of outfitter sponsored licenses our clients could use. Category 1 was divided into B-10, which are elk/deer combination licenses, and B-11, which are deer combination licenses. They were not interchangeable.

Our historic use for nonresident elk and deer hunters who'd been licensed through the general draw, resident elk and deer hunters, antelope hunters, bear hunters, sheep hunters, and moose hunters set our Category 2 NCHU. This has been a tricky category, because we have to be awfully careful not to exceed our total through combined species hunts. We count a lot!

Bird hunters, for upland, migratory, or turkey, constitute Category 3.

If an elk or deer hunter with an outfitter sponsored license has hunted another species, such as bear or antelope, he is counted for two NCHU, one in Category 1 and one in Category 2.

If a resident elk or deer hunter hunted antelope also, he counts as two in Category 2.

If a bear or antelope hunter wants to hunt birds, he is counted for two NCHU, one in Category 2 and one in Category 3. If he drew a sheep license, he would be counted for two NCHU in Category 2 and one in Category 3.

We must keep detailed logs of all clients served, which we turn in to the Board of Outfitters at the end of the year. We must reconcile our logs with a stat sheet, which summarizes harvest of game and total number of resident and non resident hunters served. For each type of NCHU used, we must record the client's information separately on the logs, although we only pay the "per client fee" once. Big game combination license holders can fish on their license; if they do, we need to record them on fishing logs and the fishing stat sheet, as well. The Board of Outfitters staff is required to review all these records in microscopic detail. We'd better not make any addition mistakes or transposition errors when transferring information from one form to another.

I'm submitting copies of these report forms with my written testimony.

NCHU has definitely had the dampening effect the 1995 legislature hoped for. In addition to being constrained by our operating plan, which details where and when we serve our clients, the numbers of NCHU in each category restrict our total number of guests. This has been worth it, when we knew for sure that there would be about 7,000 deer and elk hunters available for outfitters to serve.

Given the constraints already created by NCHU, the \$5000.00 camp fee is an unnecessary and excessive burden on outfitters. Their profit margin has been historically slim; now even making expenses is purely speculative. We count ourselves lucky that we live within ten miles of our FWP boundary; if we had had to pay the Board of Outfitters another \$5,000 per year in expenses, we could not have survived in the outfitting business.

The high costs of expanding NCHU have made it very difficult for outfitters to adjust to changes in wildlife populations in their own neighborhoods, much less to change their operations to accommodate changing client demand. It's pretty nerve-wracking to buy some additional Category 3 NCHU to meet our customers' demand for more bird hunting, and then sweat for the next few years to be sure we actually do use all of it, so we don't have to forfeit it and lose our investment in it.

I urge you to support HB 458. This bill will bring some ability for outfitters to diversify their operations to survive the annual uncertainty over availability of big game hunters.