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Testimony Before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Fisheries,
Wildlife, Oceans, and Insular Affairs, on H.R. 3065,
“Target Practice and Marksmanship Training Support Act”
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Good afternoon Chairman Fleming and Members of the Subcommittee, and thank you for inviting me to be with you today to share the perspectives of the state fish and wildlife agencies on the importance of providing safe places for recreational shooting, and marksmanship training for our military and law enforcement officers. My name is Gordon Myers and I am the Executive Director of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. North Carolina has a 19 member Commission all supportive of the goals of H.R. 3065. North Carolina is a member of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA, or Association), which is the professional trade association for the fifty state fish and wildlife agencies. All 50 states are members of the Association. The Association supports HR 3065 and respectfully urges that it be expeditiously reported from Committee.

The federal land managing agencies are also members of the Association, including the two federal agencies specifically referenced in H.R. 3065, the National Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. AFWA’s goal is to promote sound resource management and strengthen federal, state and private cooperation in ensuring the vitality and sustainability of fish and wildlife resources and the habitats on which they depend for the use and enjoyment of all our citizens. An important component of resource management and sustainability is the ability of our hunters and recreational shooters to safely practice shooting at facilities designed to accommodate the practice and ethics of safely handling firearms.

A recent study by Mark Duda of Responsive Management, an internationally recognized public opinion and attitude study survey research firm specializing in natural resource and outdoor recreation issues, found that a large majority of Americans support the right of their fellow citizens to engage in shooting activities: 71% of respondents in the 2011 survey indicated approval of legal, recreational shooting, with 44% saying they strongly approve. More than a third (37%) say they are interested in going recreational target or sport shooting in the future. And more than a quarter of Americans (27%) say they are interested in going hunting in the future. (December 2011) These statistics also indicate the public’s acknowledgment that we need ranges to train law enforcement, military, hunters, and to provide for shooting as a recreational activity.

There is a shortage of shooting ranges in this country. From the Canadian border to the Mexican border, the same pattern is emerging detrimental to the future of recreational shooting and is jeopardizing the ability to practice the safe handling of a firearm. More and more governmental lands are being closed, and fewer and fewer outdoor ranges are

being built. It is harder and harder to find a place to shoot anymore, especially for people who live in a city.

HR 3065 would provide additional incentives for states to develop much-needed shooting ranges on federal and nonfederal lands by increasing the amount the state could spend of its Pittman-Robertson grant dollars on shooting ranges. Based on FY2011 apportionments, this would amount to an annual increase of approximately \$700,000 that we could use to build or upgrade shooting ranges in North Carolina. Under the Pittman-Robertson Act, the funds are collected by the federal government and held for one year and then apportioned to the states for use the next year. They are apportioned through grants administered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service to the states and territories based on a formula that includes the state's population, land area and hunting license sales. Only state fish and wildlife agencies and their counterparts in U. S.-held territories and Commonwealths are eligible for these grants. To maintain eligibility, the states and territories must enact laws that prohibit the diversion of hunting license fees for any purpose other than the administration of the agencies' conservation, hunting, and shooting sports programs. Allowable projects are funded on a 3:1 matching basis. In most cases, states use hunting license dollars for their 25% match. The federal government's 75% reimbursement derives from the Pittman-Robertson excise taxes on firearms, ammunition and archery equipment.

In order to facilitate acquiring land for, expanding, or constructing public target ranges on federal and nonfederal lands, HR 3065 would increase the reimbursement match from 75% to 90%. Pittman-Robertson funds are allocated to states on a formula basis. Therefore, while it would provide additional capability to the state fish and wildlife agencies, the reimbursement rate would not result in increased federal spending. The bill does not require a state to use the money on ranges, and some states may not be in a position to do so. In addition, this important legislation if enacted would amend an existing requirement that Pittman-Robertson funding used for shooting ranges be obligated within two years by allowing the funds to accrue over five years. This extension would allow individual projects to be funded over multiple budget cycles and significantly enhance the ability of states to build and maintain shooting ranges.

In addition, the legislation would limit the unnecessary exposure to liability that federal land management agencies fear they may face when providing recreational shooting opportunities on public lands. This provision in the bill is similar to the state statutes which provide limited liability for sport shooting ranges if an individual is injured at a public or private range. The fact is, however, shooting ranges have one of the lowest incidents of injury of recreational activities.

Let me share with you how this bill would benefit North Carolina. I will also share specifically the perspectives of several of the other state fish and wildlife agencies. I will tell you about projects that are on the table and how the provisions of this bill, such as a reduction from 25% to 10% in the nonfederal share requirement that the state has to come up with, would put a spade in the ground.

In North Carolina, one of the principal impediments to target range development is the initial capital cost attributed to land acquisition, facility design, and construction. H.R. 3065 includes a combination of key incentives that significantly reduce these barriers. The combination of reducing the non-federal match requirements from 25% to 10% and authorization to utilize section 4b funds for target range acquisition and construction would appreciably offset and help overcome state-level budget austerity. Further, the complementary provision to allow accrual of funds for a five-year period would greatly enhance our ability to set aside funds over multiple years to acquire land for target range development, or to accumulate construction funds while completing project acquisition and design phases.

The Indiana fish and wildlife agency observed that the 5-year accrual and the lower match rate would have helped them a few years back when they rebuilt three of their public ranges. The price tag for the first one was \$1.4 million, the second \$1.6 million and the third, a much larger one, \$4.7 million. The Indiana General Assembly provided them with some funding for the State share, but by the time they got to the third range, it was almost gone, and far from 25% of \$4.7 million price tag. Indiana had to complete the design and engineering for the third range in one federal fiscal year and stage the start of construction so that it occurred over two additional federal fiscal years to have enough Pittman-Robertson money available to complete the project.

The Missouri Department of Conservation believes that the primary benefit to Missouri would be the ability to use Pittman-Robertson funds for up to 90% of the construction cost of a new range or the renovation of an existing range. It is possible the additional funding could help make some previously unaffordable projects, affordable. One of Missouri's largest shooting ranges located in St. Louis needs a major renovation and the project would certainly be more feasible with additional funding through Pittman-Robertson.

In addition, allowing a five-year accrual instead of two will be very helpful. Shooting range projects are very costly and funding them from one or two years of Pittman-Robertson PR funding can significantly reduce activity in other programs. Allowing a five year accrual period will minimize the impact to other programs funded with Pittman-Robertson dollars.

The Arizona Game and Fish Department shares that the biggest benefit of the bill's passage is that it would provide it with some flexibility in acquiring and/or developing ranges. For the most part, Arizona has not used federal funds to acquire or develop ranges in the past due to the lack of funds available along with other issues. While currently all of its Wildlife Restoration funds (other than sections 4c and 10 funds which have been used for range development) are fully utilized for other priority wildlife conservation activities, that does not mean in the future there would not be opportunities to use up to 10% of them for range acquisition or development. For example, Arizona is currently building one range (purchased with state funds) and close to breaking ground on another in the state. The set aside budgets (both state funds) for development are not adequate to

meet full build out for either range, therefore, the bill would provide them with another option to fund these build outs.

The Arizona Game and Fish Department also has several other range acquisitions (some existing ranges, some new) that they have been tasked with moving forward on in the near future and there will almost certainly be more in the distant future. Again, HR 3065 would give the states another tool in meeting those demands both with acquisition and development funds. Arizona, like the other states, pointed out that the five-year accrual period is potentially very big in that it would allow states to plan ahead and set aside smaller amounts each year that could be used to either purchase or build a range when the time comes. Five years is a fairly good period as ranges take several to acquire and then several more to develop.

The shooting sports is a part of our heritage. It is an Olympic activity. Recreational shooting is growing in numbers. Hunters need a place to go shoot and to practice, and ranges are used to train law enforcement and those in the military.

The Association supports the Target Practice and Marksmanship Training Support Act and urges its passage.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my and the Association's perspectives, and I would be pleased to answer any questions.