



March 12, 2020

The Honorable Eduardo Garcia, Chair  
 Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee  
 State Capitol, Room 219  
 Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: AB 2106 (Aguiar-Curry) – SUPPORT**

Dear Assembly Member Garcia:

Our organizations, which represent hundreds of thousands of wildlife conservationists and outdoor enthusiasts in California, urge you to support AB 2106 (Aguiar-Curry), which would provide necessary funding for the Nesting Bird Habitat Incentive Program (NBHIP).

The NBHIP was authorized in 2018 by AB 2697 (Gallagher) to encourage farmers and other private landowners to voluntarily cultivate or retain upland cover crops or natural vegetation on idled lands to provide waterfowl, upland game bird and other bird nesting habitat. This not only benefits many wildlife populations, but also helps to sequester carbon and can provide air quality benefits in the agricultural landscape.

The NBHIP is designed to be flexible enough to meet California growers' needs. For example, it would allow for one year or multi-year contracts and permit farmers to rotate their fallowed fields each year. It would also incentivize wheat farmers to delay harvest of their crop to give nesting waterfowl and other birds enough time to successfully hatch their eggs.

There is a pressing need for the NBHIP. Lack of sufficient vegetative cover (especially in agricultural areas like the Sacramento Valley rice growing region) is a significant limiting factor for breeding waterfowl and other grassland-nesting birds, as identified in the Central Valley Joint Venture Implementation Plan: <http://www.centralvalleyjointventure.org/science>. Mallard breeding populations have declined 43% statewide since 1992. Most notably, mallard breeding numbers have fallen by 72% in the Sacramento Valley (as compared to the period of 1992-2000), the greatest decline of any waterfowl breeding region within our state. Ring-necked pheasant and sage grouse populations, for example, have also experienced substantial statewide declines. Implementation of the NBHIP would help to address these declining population trends, as well as benefit other grassland-dependent species.

The NBHIP was supposed to be initially funded from Proposition 3, but that measure failed on the statewide ballot. Because of this, an alternative funding source is now needed.

AB 2106 would provide for a \$5 surcharge on both the State Duck and Upland Game Bird Stamps, each required to hunt waterfowl and upland game birds in California. This would generate over \$1 million annually for the NBHIP, and would provide critical start-up funding. The NBHIP would be administered by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, which has the technical expertise to successfully deliver private land wildlife habitat incentive programs such as the NBHIP.

It should be noted that when the Federal Duck Stamp price was increased in 2015 by \$10 in order to protect breeding habitat on private lands in the Prairie Pothole region of the upper Midwest and Canada, there was no corresponding drop in Federal Duck Stamp revenues. A 2016 study by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources also found that hunting licenses sales tend to be inelastic. That is, modest increases in price lead to net increases in revenue.

AB 2106 also provides greater accountability and improved transparency over the spending of funds collected via the Upland Game Bird Stamp. The bill would ensure the Upland Game Bird Advisory Committee meets at least once per year and require that non-habitat project expenditures (e.g. for administration and enforcement) are reviewed by the committee and posted on the Department of Fish and Wildlife's website.

AB 2106 builds on the highly successful, non-regulatory approach of other waterfowl/bird conservation initiatives, such as those provided through the Federal Farm Bill, Federal Duck Stamp and North American Wetlands Conservation Act, that provide financial incentives and work cooperatively with private landowners. For these reasons, please support AB 2106 when it is considered by your committee.

Sincerely,

Mark Hennelly, Vice President of Legislative Affairs  
California Waterfowl

Paul Buttner, Manager of Environmental Affairs  
California Rice Commission

Todd Manley, Director of Government Relations  
Northern California Water Association

Dennis Lundberg, Owner  
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John Devney, Senior Vice President  
Delta Waterfowl

Kyriakos Tsakopoulos, President  
Conaway Preservation Group

Aoibheann Cline, California State Director  
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

Steve Chappell, Executive Director  
Suisun Resource Conservation District

Roger Mammon, President  
Lower Sherman Island Duck Hunters Association

Dawnita Harwood, California State Chapter President  
National Wild Turkey Federation

James Stone, Executive Director  
NorCal Guides Association

Don Kirby, President  
Cal-Ore Wetlands and Waterfowl Council

Ed Miller, President  
The Black Brant Group

Chris Bowles, President  
California Bowman Hunters Association and State Archery Association

Donn Walgamuth, President  
California Deer Association

Steve Miller, President  
Tulare Basin Wetlands Association

Pablo Garza, Legislative Advocate  
Environmental Defense Fund

cc: Members, Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee