

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office

Natural Resources Committee February 18, 2026

Rough Draft

BRANDT: Welcome to your Natural Resources Committee. I'm Senator Brandt-- Tom Brandt from Plymouth, Nebraska, representing the 32nd District, and I serve as Chair of this committee. The committee will take up the bills in the order posted. This public hearing is your opportunity to be part of the legislative process and to express your position on the proposed legislation before us. If you plan on testifying today, please fill out one of the green testifier sheets that are on the table at the back of the room. Be sure to print clearly and fill it out completely. When it is your turn to come forward to testify, give the testifier sheet to the page or to the committee clerk. If you do not wish to testify but would like to indicate your position on a bill, there are also yellow sign-in sheets at the back on the table for each bill. These sheets will be included as an exhibit in the official hearing record. When you come up to testify, please speak clearly into the microphone. Tell us your name, spell your first and last name to ensure we get an accurate record. We will begin each bill hearing today with the introducer's opening statement, followed by proponents of the bill, then opponents, and finally by anyone speaking in the neutral capacity. We will finish with a closing statement by the introducer if they wish to give one. We will be using a 5-minute light system for all testifiers. When you begin your testimony, the light on the table will be green. When the yellow light comes on, you have 1 minute remaining, and the red light indicates you need to wrap up your final thought and stop. Questions from the committee may follow. Also, committee members may come and go during the hearing, this has nothing to do with the importance of the bills being heard. It is just part of the process, as senators may have bills to introduce in other committees. A few final items to facilitate today's hearing. If you have handouts or copies of your testimony, please bring up at least 12 copies and give them to the page. Please silence or turn off your cell phones. Verbal outbursts or applause are not permitted in the hearing room. Such behavior may be cause for you to be asked to leave the hearing. Finally, committee procedures for all committees state that written position statements on a bill to be included in the record must be submitted by 8 a.m. the day of hearing. The only acceptable method of submission is via the Legislature's website at nebraskalegislature.gov. Written position letters will be included in the official hearing record, but only those testifying in person before the committee will be included on the committee statement. I will now have the committee members with us today introduce themselves starting on my right.

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JUAREZ: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Senator Margo Juarez, District 5.

HUGHES: Jana Hughes, District 24: Seward, York, Polk, and a little bit of Butler County.

RAYBOULD: Jane Raybould, Legislative District 28, central Lincoln.

MOSEER: Mike Moser, District 22, it's Platte County and most of Stanton County.

DeKAY: Barry DeKay, representing District 40, which consists of Holt, Knox, Cedar, Antelope Counties, northern part of Dixon and northern part of Pierce County.

CLOUSE: Stan Clouse, District 37, which is Shelton, Gibbon, Kearney, the Sandhill Crane capital of the world.

BRANDT: OK. Also assisting the committee today to my right is our legal counsel Cindi Lamm; on my far left is our committee clerk Sally Schultz. And our pages will introduce themselves.

TERESA WILSON: Hello, my name is Teresa Wilson. I'm a junior APR major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

MADDIE BANKS: Hi, everyone, my name is Maddie. I'm a sophomore at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and I'm studying political science.

BRANDT: OK. Thank you. And with that, we will open our hearing on LB1197. Senator Storer. Welcome.

STORER: Thank you. This is my first time, I think, in front of Natural Resources. Good afternoon, Chairman Brandt and members of the Natural Resource Committee. My name is Tanya Storer, T-a-n-y-a S-t-o-r-e-r. I represent District 43, which is 11 counties, comprising a good chunk of the Sandhills of Nebraska. I'm here today to introduce LB1197. This is really a bill that simply gives more Nebraskans the chance to hunt private land by providing landowners a limited, responsible tool to share that access. Nebraska's private landowners are essential partners in wildlife conservation. And this bill gives them a practical, responsible tool to better manage wildlife on their property while also opening doors for more Nebraska sportsmen to have opportunities. LB1197 allows Nebraska resident landowners to transfer their hunting permits to a designee through the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Both the landowner and the designee would pay the

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full permit cost directly to the Commission, meaning this bill would very likely result in an increase in revenue for the Nebraska Game and Parks. Permits are transferred at face value with no financial gain allowed. This is a regulated transfer process, not a commercial sale. Think about what this really looks like in practice. It's a landowner making sure perhaps his grandson, who lives in Omaha, can come home and hunt the family farm or ranch. It's a farmer giving his neighbor's nephew, a Nebraska resident who loves to hunt but doesn't own land, a chance to access their ground. These are real people, relationships, and hunting opportunities that simply don't exist today under our current statutory limitations. LB1197 creates a narrow, accountable pathway for landowners to extend that privilege to the people they choose all through a transparent process that Game and Parks would know who indeed is shooting the animal or harvesting the animal and, and being paid for those permits as well. This legislation is restricted to Nebraska resident landowners only. That restriction is intentional and important as it keeps the number of transferable permits controlled and prevents out-of-state exploitation. Nebraskans managing Nebraska land for the benefit of Nebraskans. We recognize that there are concerns about potential commercialization or online auctions. We've received several emails as I'm sure you have as well. LB1197 does not permit that. All transfers occur at face value and go through the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission ensuring full transparency and oversight. The intent of LB1197 is straightforward. It is, again, to benefit Nebraska landowners, hunters, and the Game and Parks Commission alike. With that, I am happy to answer any questions that you might have.

BRANDT: All right, let's see what we've got for questions. Senator Clouse.

CLOUSE: Thank you, Senator Brandt. Senator Storer, thanks for being here. I have a question for you and this really-- I think Wyoming had something very similar. Is it the same or and then they voted it down or out right now? Can you, can you enlighten me what went on, the difference between Wyoming and what we got going here?

STORER: Yeah, I'll be honest with you, Senator Clouse, I'm not familiar with what Wyoming's legislation was, so it would be very presumptuous of me to compare what this bill is intending to do and what they may have been intending to do.

CLOUSE: I, I just read it somewhere, and it, and it-- they said they're going to bring it back, but [INAUDIBLE].

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STORER: Yeah, I'm happy to do a little homework on that, but I'm not aware what Wyoming was willing to do. You know, this, this certainly-- anytime we-- this is sort of like the brand bill, but hunting, same maybe potential emotions, but, you know, when we, when we make changes people sometimes get nervous, but this is pretty straightforward. Really just trying to provide a very transparent process. Landowners currently are allowed to get hunting permits on their property. Oftentimes, they don't use those. I particularly-- I'm not a hunter, but my husband and I own property, but we certainly want to control the deer and the, and the wildlife on our property appropriately. This gives them just a transparent process to be able to say, hey, we're going to let, you know, our nephew from North Platte come up and, and take that-- harvest that deer. It, it is, it is creating a pathway just to keep honest people honest, allow the Game and Parks to generate a little more revenue, and landowners to appropriately control the wildlife population.

CLOUSE: OK. Thank you.

BRANDT: Other questions? Senator Moser.

MOSER: Well, couldn't your nephew get a deer permit and you give him permission to hunt on your ground?

STORER: You could, certainly. Landowners have a little bit-- or can access those permits, and it's just for your property, by the way, sometimes more easily than, than a nonlandowner permit. So it's, it's just a little [INAUDIBLE].

MOSER: Some permits are in short supply or they're, they're [INAUDIBLE].

STORER: Yeah, depending on the, on the [INAUDIBLE].

MOSER: So are you thinking this is primarily for hunting deer or elk or pheasants or--

STORER: Any of those allowable permits that landowners can get today. But in my world, I particularly think of it in terms of deer.

MOSER: Yeah, you probably don't have many pheasants in the Sandhills.

STORER: Not a lot. A few. On a good year, we do.

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MOSER: Not cover for them. I just don't see-- I guess I just don't understand why your bill is necessary, but I will listen some more, maybe I'll learn more.

STORER: Sure.

BRANDT: Senator Raybould.

RAYBOULD: Yes, thank you, Senator Storer. So I don't know a lot about hunting in Nebraska, even though my son is an avid hunter on the East Coast. I-- I'm just looking at, there's a lot of opponents, like 72 have written in comments, and there's only 8 proponents. But one of the concerns they've raised, and you can probably address it, they're saying that if you go to this system and away from our current one, that it's going to create a secondary market where those prices will be escalated and oftentimes that shuts out like-- I, I think the intent of your, intent of your bill is to make sure that more Nebraska residents are the ones that have access to the tags and to be able to go hunting, but the opponents are saying that that's going to be the opposite of your intent, that it's going to create that secondary market of high-priced folks coming in that are not residents.

STORER: Yeah. Yeah, no, I've certainly heard those concerns as well. It's not the intent of this bill. Some of the frustration is, you know, the private-- Nebraska is like 97, I believe, privately owned land is about 97% privately owned. So those, those public lands are somewhat limited, certainly, in terms of acreage and opportunity. And, you know, I-- we need to be growing a better relationship, quite honestly, between our sportsmen and our landowners. And I-- I'm not going to lie, I was a little frustrated to see the opposition that came out on this sort of demonizing landowners, that is not helpful to what we need to be doing, which is building bridges and growing that relationship. I view this bill as an opportunity actually to do that, so I'm going to, I'm going to be honest, I was really disappointed to see that, that some of those folks chose to, to be so vocally oppositional to this. It doesn't help build a bridge. It kind of burns them down, quite frankly. You know, we, we want to be able to connect more of our landowners with our sportsmen. We-- myself and some of the opposition clearly are looking at what this is intended to do differently. I see this as a bridge builder to connect those landowners directly with, with folks that want to get on private property and harvest wildlife. So, you know, I, I think that to some extent we're just going to have a difference of opinion and it's all sort of presumption and, and fear of what could be because that is not

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what the bill allows for. That is not, that is not what's in the, in the language of the bill.

RAYBOULD: So I think they're saying that some, some of the states that have a greater percentage of private-- I mean, of public land available have implemented something similar and it becomes competitive for big game. And, again, it, it shuts out the, the local residents of that state. So, currently, if I wanted to go hunting on your land, just because you know me you'd probably say yes, but, I mean, don't they currently have a relationship with a landowner, like hunters like to come back to the same spot with their same group of folks and don't they compensate the landowner for say, hey, can we, we hunt on your land, we'll give you 250 bucks and a case of beer or something like that?

STORER: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, that's unique to-- in every-- some people don't. I mean, I know people, especially in my, in my parents' generation that, yeah, they were happy with a case of beer, quite frankly. You know, so there are different sorts of relationships that landowners may have with folks that have permission to come land-- hunt on their property and, and those are all over the range across the board today, right? This doesn't change that at all. This doesn't limit what those relationships may be that exist today, it's not, it's not changing that. So what I would say is if somebody is willing to allow a nonresident to, to hunt on their private property today, they would still want to do that. If-- there are individuals that just simply say, no, I don't allow hunting on my property. I have some neighbors that, that maintain that mindset. This wouldn't change that either. So it-- it's not going to change the minds of landowners who have already made up their mind, either they're going to allow hunting or they're not going allow hunting. But it does allow for those landowners that want-- that would allow hunting but are not hunters to make a transfer more accessible to somebody that wants to, to get on the property that maybe couldn't get a permit or maybe it's a, it's a relative, it just makes it more transparent and a little easier to build that relationship.

RAYBOULD: So, currently, is-- we, we have a lottery system, right, for hunting--

STORER: I-- for elk.

RAYBOULD: --for certain, for certain, like, big game?

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STORER: Yes. And I know Game and Parks is testifying in opposition of my bill, I believe, but they can answer, they can answer some of those more detailed questions. But, yeah, even the, even the landowner permits for elk, where they're allowable, are a lottery system.

RAYBOULD: OK. Thank you.

BRANDT: Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Thank you, Chair Brandt. Thanks for bringing this, Senator Storer. Maybe you don't know this and I can ask Game and Parks next. The landowner permits for deer, is it based by acreage that you have?

STORER: I think it's really-- you have to have a minimum of 80 acres to get the landowner permit. And I know we've had some discussion-- I've, I've had some really fruitful discussion with Mr. McCoy and, you know, I think we can continue to work on this and the language of this. Some of the concern was, hey, what if a landowner just exploits all-- you know, if they can get multiple permits based on acreage and then really take advantage of that. That's not the intent and so I think there is probably some amendments that could be made to prevent that from happening.

HUGHES: And then maybe it's a question for him, but in our neck of the woods, there's, like, so many deer and we let-- we don't even get a case of beer when we let people hunt on our land, but whatever, maybe I need to up my game. But, like-- I'm, like, is this really necessary, or is this more for, like, the elk permits and stuff, I'm wondering? Like, is there a limit on these? Because otherwise-- everybody that hunts on our land, they get their own permit, and then we let them hunt on our ground.

STORER: Right. And that, and that's not uncommon.

HUGHES: Right.

STORER: But there's, there's a lot of situations, especially older people that, you know, I'm aware of that, you know, they don't want to mess with having-- you know, leasing it or some sort of arrangement or some stranger knocking on the door wanting to hunt. They, they kind of want to know who's hunting, but they want to manage the wildlife, and so it-- this is just a much more direct way for a landowner to say, listen, we need to manage the deer on my property, but I'm not going to let somebody I don't know come on the property or I'm not going to advertise it.

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HUGHES: But why would it-- why wouldn't it still be something they don't know through this process?

STORER: Well, it could be, but this is a little bit easier for them to just say, hey, my friend Joe, you know, really wants to come shoot a deer and I can-- rather than me pulling the trigger and harvesting the deer, I can let Joe do it. And it's very transparent, like there is no--

HUGHES: So is this maybe going on-- like, I might pull my own land, I don't, I don't shoot deer, but I might pull my own land one and then I'm going to let Margo come and she shoots it, but we just say it's mine. Is that happening? Is that why we're trying to do this, to just try to make it legal?

STORER: I don't do that. I will say that. You know, I, I would suspect that that probably has occurred and there's no reason for that. Like, it just should be transparent.

HUGHES: And I guess it comes down to how hard is it for Margo to get her own versus me? Because if it's not that hard for her to get one, I don't know why we have to do this. That's, I guess, the question we've got to flesh out, so. OK. Thank you.

STORER: Yeah.

BRANDT: OK. Senator Raybould.

RAYBOULD: I have one more question. I just looked at the fiscal note. Have you had a chance to look at it?

STORER: Yeah, Mr. McCoy and I talked about that, too.

RAYBOULD: Yeah, because it seems like we're losing revenue by this methodology.

STORER: Yeah, as we all know in here, there, there's a little notion called death by fiscal note. So I, I think that-- you know, I am encouraged that as we move forward, whether or not this bill gets out of committee this year or not, there, there is a will and some good faith that we continue to sort of find what concerns there may be, address those, and, and kind of polish this a little bit and, and tighten it up, so.

RAYBOULD: OK. Thank you.

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BRANDT: Senator DeKay.

DeKAY: Thank you. A couple quick questions. Number one, will this help circumvent the process of getting a regular landowner's permit or would this-- would there be a stipulation in place to say, hey, this Missouri region is full and give the opportunity to still get a permit even though they were late on-- late to the game applying for a permit?

STORER: If I understand your question, if, if somebody was unable to get a permit.

DeKAY: If the region was full--

STORER: OK.

DeKAY: --and they wanted a permit, this would give them the opportunity to get a permit even though that region has already been sold out.

STORER: If, if the landowner had already obtained theirs, yes.

DeKAY: And then the other question, you talked about nephews and stuff, is this limited to family members or is this open to friends from away?

STORER: Yeah, the designee is not limited to a family member. You know, there's already a, a bit of a provision for who qualifies for the landowner permit, but, you know, that can be-- it doesn't include your second cousin and your nephew or, you know, extended family in that way.

DeKAY: And then last question I just thought of. What happens if, say, a nephew gets a regular deer permit, that eliminates them from carrying a second landowner's permit, even though it's designated to them by the landowner, is that way this bill will work?

STORER: I mean, that would, that would prevent him from getting his own permit outside of the--

DeKAY: So they wouldn't-- that would prevent them from having two permits.

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STORER: This bill wouldn't prevent that. You know, that may be one of those things as we work, you know, on amending it that could be addressed though.

DeKAY: All right. Thank you.

BRANDT: I guess the question I've got, most of our out-of-state permits are double or more of what in-state are, so now this landowner sells this permit to a friend from Denver. Does the state lose revenue on that--

STORER: No.

BRANDT: --or do they pay out-of-state price for that?

STORER: So they would still pay-- the way the bill is written, is that the landowner would apply for and pay the, the fee that you do today, which I believe is like \$22. And the out-of-state fee, the out-of-state fee, and somebody behind me can probably tell me exactly what that is. A resident-- oh, nonresident, for a deer would be \$187, if I have the correct figures. So you'd pay your \$22 and they'd pay their \$187, so you'd both be paying your fee in this case. You're still only taking the one animal, but two people are paying the fee.

BRANDT: OK.

STORER: So that's, that's where there's potential actually to generate additional revenue.

BRANDT: Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: So why would I want to do that? Because I don't want to pay \$22, I don't even get a deer.

STORER: Because primarily your motivation as a landowner is you're trying to control the wildlife on your property, you're managing your wildlife.

BRANDT: OK. I see no other questions. You'll stick around to close.

STORER: I will.

BRANDT: OK, great. We will go to proponents. Are there any proponents for the bill? Anybody in favor of the bill? Come on up if you're, you're a proponent. Welcome.

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LEE SIMMONS: Thank you. My name is Lee Simmons, L-e-e S-i-m-m-o-n-s. I own the Niobrara River Ranch. I'm a fourth-generation Nebraska rancher and I am here today to testify in support of LB1197. I ranch east of Valentine, Nebraska along the Niobrara River at Smith Falls. This is a special place. I have devoted more than one-half a century to the daily hands-on management of wildlife and improvement of the habitat on my ranch. This has been my life's work and passion. LB1197 represents a fair and reasonable compromise in the current debate regarding access. If passed, I can increase access to the ranch and share the resource with friends, family, deserving youth, and developmental disabled individuals. Contrary to some of the opinions expressed, LB1197 will expand access to the hunting experience, especially to the underrepresented groups while acknowledging the important role landowners play in wildlife management. At my ranch we have a long-term commitment to reasonable harvesting of mature animals and appropriate animals. This commitment has dramatically increased the quality herd of the health and deer and elk on my ranch. I could have made significant money by abandoning this commitment, but it would not be in the best interest of the resource. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this issue.

DeKAY: Thank you. Just a second. Are there any questions for the testifier? Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Thank you, Vice Chair. Thank you for coming in, Mr. Simmons. So how many landowner deer permits can you get on your property? Do you know?

LEE SIMMONS: No, I guess I don't know.

HUGHES: OK. Because that-- like, you would buy those, right?

LEE SIMMONS: Yes.

HUGHES: And then you would have people that you know or whatever would buy another-- like you would transfer it to them, kind of, but they would pay for it, too.

LEE SIMMONS: I could transfer my permit to them.

HUGHES: Your landowner permit to them. I guess, couldn't you kind of do this now by letting people, if they get a permit, come on your land and hunt?

LEE SIMMONS: Well, I don't, I don't kill animals anymore, so--

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HUGHES: I don't-- we don't either. We have ground and we let-- we just let our neighbor who gets a permit and he comes over and hunts, but.

LEE SIMMONS: Well, I love to see the animals, [INAUDIBLE], and, and have deserving people come out and harvest them.

HUGHES: So, so do you let people do that now on your ground?

LEE SIMMONS: It's been 3 or 4 years because the population has been down, so I've tried to manage that herd so that it increases in the quality of the animals or good, which is what every hunter wants.

HUGHES: Yeah. OK, thank you. Thanks for coming in.

BRANDT: Other questions? So you drove all the way down from Valentine today?

LEE SIMMONS: Yesterday.

BRANDT: So is it snowing up there yet?

LEE SIMMONS: I don't know. I haven't been home, but it wasn't when I left.

BRANDT: OK.

LEE SIMMONS: We need the moisture.

BRANDT: Yes, we do. We do everywhere in the state. I farm in southeast Nebraska and we're probably just as dry as what you guys are. I guess, I don't see any other questions here, so thank you for your testimony and, and we'll see if we have any-- anything else here.

LEE SIMMONS: Thank you.

BRANDT: Other proponents? Anybody else in favor? Proponents? Going to opponents. Is anybody opposed to this bill? Welcome.

TIMOTHY McCOY: Good afternoon, Chairman Brandt, members of the committee. My name is Timothy McCoy, T-i-m-o-t-h-y M-c-C-o-y, and I have the honor to be the Director of your Nebraska Game and Parks Commission at our headquarters at 2200 North 33rd Street in Lincoln. I am testifying in opposition today on behalf of the Game and Parks Commission, and I will share you-- with you, really some technical concerns about the bill. Our mission as an agency is the long-term stewardship of our state's fish and wildlife parks and outdoor

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recreation resources and the best long-term interests of the people of those resources-- and those resources. Part of that mission, we view it as protecting the public trust that those resources have for the entire state and we work to provide hunting opportunities through issuing permits to allow managing areas while sustaining populations over the long term. As I start, I'm going to provide a little more context on limited landowner permits, just to make sure the committee is aware of this. Those are-- limited landowner permits are half the cost of resident permits for deer, turkey, antelope, and elk. And limited nonresident landowner permits are also half the price of a nonresident permit. For deer, turkeys, and antelope, our landowner permits are limited to hunting on their own land, specifically, the way the statute is written for farm and ranch lands owned or leased for agricultural purposes. For elk, landowner permit eligibility requires confirmation by Game and Parks that they do indeed have elk on their property. Landowner permits for elk are different in that landowners who get a permit, which is done through a drawing, as somebody mentioned earlier, they can hunt the entire elk unit. The reason for that is elk often move long distances during different seasons of the year in some parts of the state. And so while a landowner may have elk on their property, let's say, in the summer, they may not be there during the hunting season. And that's why that's been set, set up that way. So there are, there are some specific concerns. I've had previous conversations with the senator that I think we need to work on. Well, I think some of the, some of the testimony today that she provided helps with this. You know, to clarify what the fee would be for the landowner permits that are transferred to the nonlandowner individual, the question behind that was, you know, do we track that fee so that it matches a resident or a nonresident permit, depending if they are a resident or nonresident? The other part of this that comes to mind for my agency, and I don't think it's the fiscal note, but I need to check, is limited landowner permits for landowners when they're hunting their own land, they, they do not have to buy a habitat stamp. So it would-- it might make sense, from my perspective at least, that it would be appropriate, if that permit's going to be transferred to a nonlandowner, that that purchase of a habitat stamp would be required. I, I think some clarity in the name of such a transferred permit might be valuable to make sure that it follows that intention as a limited permit tied to those lands that was in the landowner permit application. And, and so maybe naming that permit is limited somehow. There's probably something we can do, but we just need to-- you know, I think it could be clarified. And then, you know, one of the differences between many of the landowner permits

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for deer, antelope, and elk, for most of them, our landowner permits a lot of them to hunt all season. So archery, rifle, muzzleloader. When we look at like our regular, our regular deer and antelope permits, we are assuming that permit would remain that eligibility for multiple seasons, whereas a regular landowner-- a regular permit usually would require them to hunt the muzzleloader season, or the, or the firearm season, or, or the archery season. So they're kind of spaced out to help provide opportunity. You know, the other differences that are out there, sort of got mentioned, that landowner permits are unlimited in Nebraska for deer and turkeys. Part of that is because they're our, our most widespread species. Now, when we get into elk and antelope, those landowner permits are limited and they go through a drawing. I'm going to skip a few things here. You know, because of the high demand that we see for antelope permits, we do not allow nonresidents or we do, we do not allow nonresidents to hunt rifle season for antelope. And when we look at elk, we do not issue any nonresident elk permits in Nebraska. There's some issues that we would want to make sure that there's a clear way to potentially either transfer or, or perhaps a different system that would separate permits that are, that are being purchased for the purpose of, you know, maybe you call it a voucher to be transferred to somebody, ensure that that can only be done one time to avoid that issue of these becoming sort of commercialized and, and that would potentially separate our landowners who are buying permits for a specific purpose to hunt their own land, and versus those that are doing it to try and transfer.

BRANDT: Let's see if we have any questions. Senator DeKay.

DeKAY: Thank you. When it comes to large expansions of land, how, how do you-- how do game wardens police that right now, like on huge ranches and stuff like that, or do they come in as a call-in or as needed or do they have-- do they go on to private ranches or farms?

TIMOTHY McCOY: They have the ability to help check permits, but on most of our-- you know, on most of our private land, when we're going out for a call, it's because a landowner has contacted us about something going on that they don't-- you know, that they're-- that they have concerns about. We will-- you know, we will stop people sometimes on the road when they're coming out, make sure they have their permits, make sure everything is on the up and up.

DeKAY: So, right now, a direct, say, son, daughter, they cannot use a landowner permit?

TIMOTHY McCOY: Actually, actually they can. Currently, currently-- so landowner permits before 2009 eligibility was limited to the husband and wife and their children residing in the household. In 2009, we broadened that with the removal of, in the same household, between the husband, wife, and their children or siblings owning ownership, sharing ownership. In 2013, we added new language to clarify that they could designate a qualifying landowner among partners of a partnership or officers or shareholders of a corporation or beneficiaries of a trust. And then in 2019 and '22, eligible immediate family was broadened in 2019 to include children and stepchildren and their spouses, and any sibling sharing ownership in the property of their spouses. And in 2022, that was broadened again to include grandchildren and step-grandchildren and their spouses.

DeKAY: OK.

TIMOTHY McCOY: So it's, it's, it's a pretty big network that's eligible. What I noted in the senator's opening was the way this is being thought about that I didn't catch, my apologies, is really this is only that the landowner can transfer them, if I'm, if I'm reading the stat-- that correctly, not the whole extended network.

DeKAY: All right, thank you.

BRANDT: Other questions? Senator Raybould.

RAYBOULD: Yes, thank you so much for being here. I kind of agree with Senator Storer, it seems like the fiscal note was a work of fiscal art, you know, because it seemed like you threw in, I think, one, one FTE, their benefits, including all the training for them in the academy and travel. It just-- could you help us understand how you got to some of the expenses and is that typical? I don't think I've seen Game and Parks stuff look like that.

TIMOTHY McCOY: Well, part, part of it is, part of it is the concern, because these are unlimited when it comes to deer and turkey. So the challenge we may have, we've been reducing permits for deer, turkey, and antelope right now because our numbers are way down and to try to better-- you know, to try to better balance that wildlife management piece of it. And so that, that creates some of those issues where, you know, the thinking was-- and, and this is where, again, I can tell from looking at the fiscal note, we were, we were thinking when they needed to pay the price of the original permit, we interpreted that to mean the other half of what the landowner had already paid. So there's

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a huge difference in what that fiscal note would be looking at that. We do have concerns if a large number of these get out there that we, we will have to pull back our regular permits that we offer, you know, to all resi-- you know, through the normal process of whether their draw permits or whether those permits can be purchased over the counter.

RAYBOULD: OK, because it seems like you need to, you need to hire one more FTE and, and the total inclusive cost is about \$240,000, and then the program permit system software developer of \$312,000. So that just--

TIMOTHY McCOY: The programming, the programming is probably going to be a requirement of any system we would do, because this is-- you know, our system is made for a person applies, they put in their profile, they select their permit, they enter into a drawing for their permit if needed, and they, they pay directly, and all of that information is tied to it. With a landowner, it's the same way, the landowner can, can input all of their information. They do have a way to link it to other people in their family of the lands they own and then they can go in and buy a permit. You know, they can buy a permit all the way through the season because those are unlimited permits for deer and turkey. For the other ones, they have to do that before the draw period when they apply.

RAYBOULD: So is that-- so hopefully I'm understanding this correctly. It's great-- tremendously different than what you're doing right now.

TIMOTHY McCOY: It would take substantial new programming to be able to allow something that had been, whether it was a voucher or whether it was a permit, to allow, to allow that to somehow be transferred. The other piece of that we need-- we do need from a law enforcement perspective, that person to have a permit that has all their name, all their information. They also need to confirm that their rights to hunt or fish in Nebraska or any other state have not, have not been taken away and that they're not in Nebraska so they're not behind in their child support, that's sort of a larger requirement that falls into our hunting and fishing permits.

RAYBOULD: OK. Thank you.

BRANDT: Senator Hughes.

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HUGHES: OK. So you say deer and turkey are unlimited for landowners' permits. What percent-- do you have an idea of what percent of people get them versus what could get them?

TIMOTHY McCOY: I don't know, because here's the challenge. Trying to get a, trying to get a firm number of landowners across the state is kind of difficult. I can look at-- I've looked at some of the USDA information, which, you know, indicates it's probably somewhere around 45,000. But we also-- that doesn't just include the landowner. When we sell permits, it may be all of those other family members also. So we sell, I can tell you for deer, last year we sold just over 18-- we had just over 18,000.

HUGHES: For landowner?

TIMOTHY McCOY: Deer landowner permits.

HUGHES: OK, so deer landowner, you had 18,000, and what'd you have for regular, like--

TIMOTHY McCOY: For regular-- for permits that were not-- if you just look at residents for permits that were, you know, the, the regular resident deer permits-- we have youth deer permits that are unlimited also, those are \$5-- I won't include those-- we had probably about 78,000, maybe 80,000.

HUGHES: So a little bit of the fear of the unknown is that you do this and the amount of landowners goes way up, but we let that be unlimited, so now we got-- we could only let 78,000 last year, now we're going to have to cut that back down.

TIMOTHY McCOY: If, if we're trying to, if we're trying to, you know, let herds recover.

HUGHES: Well, that's what you do though, that's your job, so, yes, you would do that.

TIMOTHY McCOY: Yeah, that's what, that's what we would have to do.

HUGHES: So then, then it becomes, if I'm a regular person that wants the deer permit, now I'm going to be scrambling trying to find a landowner to go through their-- I don't know, this is interesting. OK. And then elk and that, that's a whole nother--

TIMOTHY McCOY: What's that?

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HUGHES: The elk thing is a whole different ball game, I suppose.

TIMOTHY McCOY: Yeah. Yeah, elk, elk is, elk is more challenging, there's already a high demand from landowners for those elk permits.

HUGHES: Yeah, you said that's already lottery just on the landowners.

TIMOTHY McCOY: Yeah.

HUGHES: OK. Thank you.

BRANDT: Any more questions? Senator Clouse.

CLOUSE: Thank you, Senator Brandt. So, basically, what I heard you say, Mr. McCoy, is that there's a lot of work to be done, but you're willing to [INAUDIBLE].

TIMOTHY McCOY: We're always willing to sit down and have conversations because, you know, somebody mentioned earlier, you know, there's been, there's been this sort of push in, in other states. Wyoming, they, they just dealt with it, but it was stopped. I know in Kansas, there was a legislative proposal to try and do it. They've had a couple of rounds of that. So we need to be looking, I think, at is there a way to do this that's manageable, that kind of fits with our other management, doesn't have too many other negative impacts. It's surely worth exploring.

CLOUSE: So do you feel that there may be a way to get there or it is unsure at this point?

TIMOTHY McCOY: There may be a, there may be a way to get there, but it's something that we've got to spend a lot of time, I, I think, for me, for us, our agency, working through that and also working closely with our board of commissioners.

CLOUSE: OK. Thank you.

BRANDT: Any other questions? Real quick, on the landowner permits, none of them get to hunt early, do they?

TIMOTHY McCOY: Well, in-- this is-- that's a-- as I read this, I think it would apply to the special early landowner deer. That-- that's a-- there could be some issues there because that's got special restrictions on certain number of the permits have to go to you.

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BRANDT: OK.

TIMOTHY McCOY: And that's only a 3-day season, you know, it might be easier to, it might be easier to not include it, but maybe we can find another way.

BRANDT: So that's something you would definitely look at if--

TIMOTHY McCOY: I think it would-- it's definitely part of the conversation--

BRANDT: OK.

TIMOTHY McCOY: --we want to have.

BRANDT: I see no other questions. Thank you, Director. Next opponent. Anybody else opposed to this bill? Come on up.

MARCUS DRYAK: Hello, my name is Marcus Dyrak, it's M-a-r-c-u-s D-r-y-a-k, and I'm a propo-- I'm an opponent of this bill because it commercializes the landowner tags. What it's doing is-- our wildlife today is held in a public trust, and allowing the sale of tags effectively privatizes all of the hunting rights. That is-- it's no longer a public option any longer. When landowners have the ability to sell tags, they're now turning into an outfitter. And the profiting from those tags goes against everything from a hunting ethics perspective. This type of legislation seems to be driven by political motives rather than biological motives, rather than-- it's, it's undermining the management of the professionals at our game and parks and the biologists. It does not allow those guys to work with their different areas and different, different counties and stuff to actually manage the deer herds. Also from a North American model of wildlife conservation, there are seven principles and this is used across the entire country, wildlife resources are conserved and held and a trust for the public. Scientific management is the proper means for wildlife conservation. It is not privatizing wildlife. If you go today and out to the Huntin' Fool website, right now, Nevada has this same type of legislation in Nevada right now. An elk hunt in, in Nevada runs at about \$30,000 for an, for an elk hunt Nevada. If you go to Colorado for huntinfool.com, they're selling the same tags for a mule deer hunt for \$12,000 because they have purchased the tags from the landowner and then they have secured the land to hunt on. And they're charging to get this. Our Game and Parks gets none of that money. Today, we are at a 1983 harvest numbers for our deer population

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in Nebraska. We have dropped significantly. I have talked with the Nebraska Highway Traffic Institute. We all talk about deer and car-deer collisions on the road. This year, our car-deer collisions are the lowest that have ever been recorded. And our cars are not getting any smarter. They're still running over deer. They're still running over big game. And we do not have a deer population around to support the unlimited purchase of tags and the unlimited ability to sell those tags out. And, right now, we had 850 deer hit by cars in Nebraska. 5 to 10 years ago, we have about 3,000 to 4,000 deer that were killed in Nebraska. This year we had 200 cows that were killed in Nebraska by cars. The deer population has been severely decimated in Nebraska. This allowing us to unlimited amount of tag sales goes against everything that any hunter, any public hunter would want out there. There are 45,000 farms in Nebraska, 30,000 to 45,000 of them owning more than 80 acres. 10,000 of them, of the farmers in Nebraska own more than 1,000 acres. 16,000 farmers in Nebraska own more than 500 acres. We are proposing to allow these people unlimited access to tags to sell them to whoever? Also, in the bill, it was said that this was only for Nebraska residents could only purchase these tags and sell them. If you read on page 4 of this bill, it is allowed for nonresidents that own more than 320 acres. They can also purchase these tags and sell these tags.

BRANDT: OK, your red light is on.

MARCUS DRYAK: Thank you.

BRANDT: And I was handed a note. I don't know if everybody heard me before. If you submitted a written statement against this bill, you're not supposed to testify. And I let you go ahead and complete your testimony. You've submitted a written statement--

MARCUS DRYAK: OK.

BRANDT: --on the bill? Yes?

MARCUS DRYAK: OK.

BRANDT: OK. And so--

MARCUS DRYAK: I didn't realize that. I just had some notes. I'm sorry about that.

BRANDT: No, that's fine, and it gets lost sometimes in the-- in the opening, I realize how dry that is, but if you've already submitted a

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written statement, that's what's counting as the testimony. If you have not done that, please come up and testify, so. But--

MARCUS DRYAK: OK.

BRANDT: --thank you for coming up here--

MARCUS DRYAK: Yep.

BRANDT: --and next opponent. OK. Welcome.

JAY SLOAN: OK. Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairman Brandt, members of the Natural Resources Commission-- Committee. My name is Jay Sloan, spelled J-a-y S-l-o-a-n. I'll say for the record, I am Vice Chairman of the Nebraska Sportsmen's Foundation, but today I'm just testifying on behalf of myself as a private individual. You'll hear on behalf of our foundation a little later on. I grew up in central Nebraska where hunting was a very important part of our life and community. And today, as a parent, I work to pass on that same tradition to my son. And in an effort to protect fairness, access, and opportunity for hunters across Nebraska, I'm here today in opposition of LB1197. LB1197 would significantly disadvantage the nonlandowning hunter in Nebraska. It shifts opportunity away from everyday residents and towards those with greater financial means. In doing so, it risks turning Nebraska's shared natural resources into a marketplace commodity rather than the public trust held for the benefit of all Nebraskans. A lot of you have asked questions about the, the reason for this bill. We've seen this bill often presented as a way to assist landowners with large game depredation or for the ability to increase access. However, we feel that those opportunities are already addressed in current law. Landowners today, as Director McCoy said, have multiple tools to transfer those to applicable family members. They also have the ability today to allow access to any of the hunters. And as somebody who's gone field to field before looking for access, there's generally not a shortage of people who would like to come in and hunt on your land. What this bill actually does is moves more towards a guaranteed tag system, which is really the core of the concern for me. The process for issuing hunting permits as set with species-specific quotas is carefully managed-- managed by professional biologists at the Nebraska Game and Parks. These quotas are established by species and geographical units intended to manage the herd health, population size, and our long-term conservation goals. LB1197 would almost certainly result in an increase in landowner permits, particularly those used specifically for resale. And when

that happens, the number of permits available to nonlandowners or the average Nebraska hunters will inevitably decline. We've had that discussion already. For example, if a unit has a quota of 100 deer, and 10 of those today are issued to landowners, and a landowner sees an opportunity, although unintended in the bill, to make money off the sale of that, and now that's 30 to 40, and we've heard a lot about conserving the herd size, now that quota of available tags to the average nonlandowning hunter is significantly less, OK? The reality is these permits will be sold into a secondary market that favors those with the financial means while disadvantaging the average Nebraska hunter. I strongly believe that any privilege to harvest Nebraska's natural resources should be equitable and accessible to all hunters and not determined by a pay-to-play system. While this bill may appear unassuming and supportive of landowners, it has the potential to fundamentally alter Nebraska's hunting landscape by reducing opportunities both for new and existing hunters and shifting access towards those with financial means. I want to also connect on something that was said earlier. If the goal of this bill is to increase access, I'm all for ideas. As somebody who struggled with access in a 97% private land, I can give you tons of ideas for youth hunts, which I know the Game and Parks is a big fan of, veteran hunts, disabled hunters. If you are a landowner who has ideas and wants more access to your land, please let me know. Please let our group know. I'm sure we can find ways to find those people to come on and hunt on your land. So with that, I'd be happy to entertain any questions.

BRANDT: All right, let's see what we've got. Questions? I see none, thank you for your testimony.

JAY SLOAN: Thank you.

BRANDT: Next opponent. Welcome.

SCOTT CRONER: Good afternoon, Senators. My name is Scott Croner. I'm going to read from this because I'm a storyteller. Scott, S-c-o-t-t, C-r-o-n-e-r. First, a little bit about me. I've been an outfitter for 23 years in the state of Nebraska. I have monetized game to include turkeys, deer, waterfowl-- fall waterfowl, and spring snow goose. Most recently, I became the hunting lease manager for the Binder family in southeastern Nebraska, which have access to over 20,000 acres. That should cover my qualifications as an outfitter and guide. LB1197 would allow the transfer of big game permits to others on the surface that might seem ambiguous. However, me being a master of monetizing big game, I can tell you that if I chose to use the Lynn Binder family's

property to do that, it would be of a value of \$100,000 to \$200,000. I am not for this at all. Liability is first. Senator Storer pointed out that the transfer of the game tags would only be at face value. I can assure you that the landowner will then require a fee to access their property to nonresidents. If she would be gladly to put that they can only be transferred to Nebraska residents period, I could believe that then that's from Nebraska residents. And I, once again, I solicit people to come in the state from everywhere, primarily eastern United States. A few years ago, I was at the commission meeting that set the regulations, some of the current regulations on turkeys. I watched the decline of the gobbler from 2010 to 2020 go from-- in Brewster, Nebraska, I was blessed, I hunt the triangle from Brewster to Milburn to Taylor, harvested 110 gobblers in 5.5 weeks with 52 clients. Last year, I killed eight. The net loss in revenue to me was going from \$52,000 to \$8,000. I have a clue about what this would do if you want me to go exterminate the deer and depopulate the deer in southeastern Nebraska, I can start. Actually the current, it was great to read this, the current statute would allow a landowner to lease me agricultural ground. I could go out to Brewster and lease some property, 80 acres exactly, and I could then do it for cows and I can get a permit. The, the statute currently would allow me to do that. Enforcement and implementation, better budget \$100,000 to \$200,000. I know a Game and Parks law enforcement officer, they have to retroactively compare the, the current land with what the landowner actually has and then go chase down the people that didn't do it. There is a large portion of noncompliance with landowners. When you invite a client here to buy a permit and then charge them access, they-- I've done this long enough, they will expect to harvest an animal and when they don't they will go looking. I grew up in south central Nebraska and rode-- hunted pheasants with my grandpa for many years. Keeping-- and thanks. I could touch on that. We've seen the demise of the pheasant. I was here for the demise of the turkey and I do not want to be in the state of Nebraska for the demise of a white-tailed deer or the mule deer in the worst case. This is a death sentence for a guy like me to monetize it. You know, the Binders have over 20 family members, I can start tomorrow. I wrote a lot there for you guys to read. This does, as I talked to some of the commissioners, this does take game management instantly out of their hands and puts it into the landowners' hands and, I mean, I did it in the triangle out there, 600 square miles, and I depopulated an area from turkeys.

BRANDT: OK. Let's see if, if--

SCOTT CRONER: Have questions, I'd love to have them.

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BRANDT: Yeah, let's see, let's see what we've got.

SCOTT CRONER: Yes, sir.

BRANDT: Senator DeKay.

DeKAY: Thank you. Thank you for being here. So in your outfitting service, what's the return rate of those hunters coming back to you?

SCOTT CRONER: I'm sorry, say that.

DeKAY: What's the return rate of those same hunters coming back year after year?

SCOTT CRONER: Well, this year, I'll take my Canadian clients since they've been coming, they've been coming since 2010 and they're the only turkey clients that will be coming to Brewster because the resource isn't there. I could kill the rest of them, but that wouldn't be very Nebraskan. If you want to do something, double, and this is in your control, double the price of a nonresident turkey permit. They will pay it. It will fund Game and Parks. I'm all for that. I am an outfitter. I can sell those permits all day long. You're, you're not charging for the permit. The landowner is going to charge for the access. In that, I told, I told a short story, but I, I had a, a club member in Mound City get killed in a rollover UTV accident. And I didn't think it would come. I thought it would come in a shooting. The minute a landowner sells that permit, transfers ownership, he's going to get paid for it, and he's not going to have any insurance. If they want to allow access, I have no problem, I speak fluid farmer and rancher-- I don't have "camo" on, it's kind of nice to dress up-- but they will allow you access, and, yes, I've done it for money, but I can get a large, a large return. The resources aren't in here for Nebraska for monetizing wildlife. I've done it, other-- yeah, so.

DeKAY: So with that, new hunters coming in that you outfit for, do you-- do they understand the rules that they need to purchase their own permits and then you set up the outfit hunt for them or do you remind them, hey, you got to take care of this on your own before you even consider talking to me?

SCOTT CRONER: Great question. Nebraska turkey permits this year, I had a, I had a hand in that. Game and Parks wanted 12,500 when we did this. We got to 10,000. It sold out in an hour and 48 minutes. New record. OK? Double the price, maybe it won't sell out as fast. My guys from Canada, they had no problem, four of them got on the phone, they

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got through. They have their permits, two a piece, plus they use them. So it's not selling it, I mean, you can Google me, I can sell, sell this stuff all day long. Repeat business, outfitters will continue to sell until they're all gone. You know, everybody knows I quit, you know, with, with Uncle Buck's Lodge, I've used that area, the McMillan Ranch, Tom McMillan and the McMillan family have been very kind to me, and I can go all the way around the triangle. Access isn't the problem, farmers and ranchers say no. The list of access to these, to the people, I was shocked, I mean, the number of landowner permits a farmer or rancher could get to then transfer and have, have access, my gosh, I didn't know that many family members could come hunt on a landowner's permit. I don't think they do either. Repeating-- oh, yeah, there's tons of repeating people. That's easy.

BRANDT: OK, let's see what other questions we've got. Senator Hughes.

SCOTT CRONER: Yes, ma'am.

HUGHES: So do you give-- do you pay a fee to the people or you pay-- lease out of the land that you're hunting on?

SCOTT CRONER: I'm sorry.

HUGHES: Do you lease the land that you hunt on, the Binder family, for example?

SCOTT CRONER: I pay, I pay for access to the property. I like to be at the top end of that so it's not a negotiation for other outfitters. I have a reputation for-- I mean, I don't let turkey hunters go. I take them by the hand, we go out and shoot turkeys and they go back. I don't let them drive around. Giving a nonresident access to drive around with a permit is a really bad idea. I just hate to say it. I mean, if you laughed at the road hunting thing, we know what will happen. So, yes, I pay the landowner.

HUGHES: And then do you carry the insurance, too?

SCOTT CRONER: I do. I have Philadelphia insurance. In fact, when Dave was killed, 4 weeks later-- it's in the, in the documentation, 4 weeks later, I got a letter from a personal injury attorney. I don't know if anybody here is an attorney, but I handed that off to Philadelphia and they took care of it, but that would have washed away anything. I have a hard time going to Mound City, Missouri still because I lost a buddy on my watch. And so, yes, I have Philadelphia outfitter insurance. It's really inexpensive. It's \$1,500 a year. But the landowners-- I

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mean, I'm the, I'm the [INAUDIBLE] in the Binder family. I'm insured. And the outfitters, and my competitors are now my clients, they're insured also. But that's a-- you know, the liability is a huge thing, the minute we start getting the transferred permits.

HUGHES: That's what I'm wondering, if you do this on your ground, now I'm assuming you're liable for whoever's hunting there.

SCOTT CRONER: Yeah, if you just let them come and you don't charge and there's no money, there's no liability.

HUGHES: Then you're not. Yeah.

SCOTT CRONER: Yeah.

HUGHES: Thank you.

SCOTT CRONER: And, yet, farmers and ranchers won't do it.

BRANDT: Other questions? I guess the question I've got, and this is on the liability, and I farm--

SCOTT CRONER: OK.

BRANDT: --and I've never charged anybody to hunt because my insurance agent has said if I charge anybody to hunt and they go out there and break a leg or, or whatever thing they do, I would be liable, and as long as I don't charge, they are liable. Is that a true statement or not?

SCOTT CRONER: In Nebraska, actually, there's a statute that prohibits, and maybe Tim McCoy can comment on that, that if you let people hunt at no charge and there's money that doesn't change hands, there's no liability to the landowner.

BRANDT: OK.

SCOTT CRONER: Don't know, love to tell you it's true.

HUGHES: We want a case of beer. No, just kidding.

SCOTT CRONER: Yeah, and, and, that, that end makes-- what makes-- I am a liaison and marketing person between nonresidents and the [INAUDIBLE].

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BRANDT: So now with, with an outfitter comes to me and says, hey, we'd like to lease your creek and, and, and all my other land for, one, money. Does your liability insurance as an outfitter cover any injuries that happen to, to my land as a landowner or does that landowner have to go get a separate insurance package?

SCOTT CRONER: No, I have damage coverage for your pivot when I shoot.

BRANDT: Well, does that ever happen?

SCOTT CRONER: I'm sorry. Sorry. If it would ever happen. Yeah. So it's, it's-- I'm, I'm accountable when I go on somebody's property and I have access and then they let somebody else go. I'm accountable for everything on the property. I don't-- you know, in fact, I'm going to leave, I'm going to go put "camo" on, it's no-- I had shoulder surgery, I can't go do snow goose, I can't shoot, but I have clients in northwest Missouri. So I appreciate what you guys do. I think there's a lot of eco and agritourism that we can do. We have 200 outfitters in the state of Nebraska.

BRANDT: And I would like to, it's maybe a little more of a statement, which we shouldn't do. But one of the concerns about this bill was it's the outfitters that are going to get all the money. And it is refreshing to see an outfitter come up here and present the other side of the argument.

SCOTT CRONER: I could monetize this very easily, but now that I read this, I could have my landowners, if you want to see in this statute, I could have my landowners lease cattle grazing property to a client, write in the lease, I write them up, and away we go. I don't even need this now that I've seen the statute to do it.

BRANDT: So, so it would be wise for us to have protection against those [INAUDIBLE].

SCOTT CRONER: Yeah.

BRANDT: OK.

SCOTT CRONER: I mean, I, I can see-- I mean, I don't like reading a lot-- reading this stuff because then I see the loopholes as an outfitter and I know ranchers, I try to help them as much, as much as I can. And, you know, I know farmers are struggling, so.

BRANDT: OK.

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SCOTT CRONER: Thank you for all you guys do. Appreciate it.

BRANDT: Yeah, thank you. Next opponent.

DOUGLAS RUSSELL SR.: Thank you, Senators.

BRANDT: Welcome.

DOUGLAS RUSSELL SR.: I'm Doug Russell from-- D-o-u-g-l-a-s R-u-s-s-e-l-l. Actually, a Sr. also. I'm a fifth-generation farmer/rancher. We haven't really talked about outfitters much. I don't really know what the definition of an outfitter is versus landowners taking money. I don't know if that classifies them also as an outfitter or what that classifies them at. I am an opponent to the bill because it's, it's just going to add more like everybody-- all the opponents have said. I've been doing it 35 years. There weren't 200 outfitters back then. I go to-- I just got back from North America's largest hunting show in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. And what you hear from them, over my last 30, 35 years, is, you know, I couldn't even book a turkey probably 20 years ago, because there's three permits over the counter, and the public hunting was fabulous. You know, once they found out about the public just through our Internet and cell phones and that sort of thing, you know. Well, now, this year, and the previous 3 years, it's like, oh, my gosh, you know, it has gotten so commercialized. There's very few, maybe Senator Hughes still lets them hunt on her property, but there are very few that let you hunt on their property for free. And mine is, I have a problem with, I've been doing it 35 years, 95% of my hunters are repeats or referrals, family, three-generation people. I have plenty of turkeys, I got plenty of deer, I've got plenty of past record for the 30 years to show the age of our deer being shot now and the quality I have done on my property, now I can't get permits. And the original intent of this, I worked with Congressman Tom Osborne, was when we were talking about agritourism, when agriculture was suffering before, and mine is-- I got four brothers and sisters, everybody knows what the price of land's done, and they didn't stay home on the farm. So I had to come up with another form of income to survive. I've got three kids. I have 10 grandkids. And down the road-- yeah, I'm against this, but down the road we're going to have to figure out how to deal with that. We have the computers, we have everything. You're saying how expensive this is going to be to the [INAUDIBLE]. We can get it right down to the county. You know, we already have areas for the rifle deer and other things. I'm talking mostly about turkeys and deer, and the like, but in order to supplement or, you know, to make

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it fair for the people that did this after five generations, we've got to figure out how I can still be within their rules and hunt that land. Because right now, the hunting is bringing in more than the agriculture, strictly because I couldn't afford top agriculture land so I bought what they called waste back then, and that's hunting property now. That's basically it.

BRANDT: Well, let's see if we've got any questions. Senator DeKay.

DeKAY: Just for reference, what area of the state do you live?

DOUGLAS RUSSELL SR.: Loup East.

DeKAY: What's that?

DOUGLAS RUSSELL SR.: Fullerton, Loup East is our area, Columbus. We're just-- I'm west to Columbus. We have Broken Arrow Wilderness, also a recreation camp.

DeKAY: Appreciate it. Thank you.

BRANDT: Senator Moser.

MOSER: So you have a lot of wildlife on your property but you can't get permits?

DOUGLAS RUSSELL SR.: Nope.

MOSER: Is that what you're saying?

DOUGLAS RUSSELL SR.: They, they said they sold out in an hour and 45 minutes. My repeat hunters that have been coming and coming and coming and, of course, I told them, you know, press the button when the little deal comes up.

MOSER: So you let your hunters get their own permits and then you charge them to hunt?

DOUGLAS RUSSELL SR.: Oh, yeah, there, there is no problem with residents getting permits. This, this-- there is no problem. I don't fix things that aren't broke, you know. That's why all the other folks kind of covered all that. The system is not broken. This would add more confusion, more everything.

MOSER: Couldn't you pull permits and sell them now, and then charge people to hunt on your property based on the property you own?

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DOUGLAS RUSSELL SR.: You mean with a transferable landowner permit?

MOSER: Yeah.

DOUGLAS RUSSELL SR.: I've never had a problem getting permits. My hunters have never had a problem getting permits in my area. Now, since white tail-- archery and muzzleloader, white tails or deer, that's what I'm concerned with, and turkeys, those are statewide, those are not in my area. If they were in my area, my hunters would-- nonresident hunters would not have a problem getting permits, you know. But, right now, they have-- they're getting close to having a big problem, you know. And not, not because of Loup East, it's because it's a statewide-run program where, you know, the, the people coming to the shows are like they're saying-- like he said, I can eliminate them all. Yeah, there's a lot of farmers doing that and there's a lot of unscrupulous outfitters also doing that. I have one right beside me. This year, he shot every single legal turkey and every single legal deer as an outfitter. He leased it from a landowner, you know.

MOSER: OK. Thank you.

BRANDT: Other questions? I see none, thank you for your testimony.

DOUGLAS RUSSELL SR.: Thank you.

BRANDT: Next opponent.

MATT BURESH: I need those [INAUDIBLE] glasses.

BRANDT: Yeah.

MATT BURESH: Dear Chairman Brandt and members of the Natural Resources Committee, my name is Matt Buresh, M-a-t-t B-u-r-e-s-h. On behalf of the members, sponsors, and partners of the Nebraska Bowhunters Association, I'm writing in opposition of LB1197. A lot of what I had in my document has been touched on, but I want to touch on a few other things. The NBA has significant concerns regarding the proposed authorization for the transfer of landowner hunting permits in all circumstances. While we have a great deal of respect for landowners and understand the intent behind the bill, we believe it's fraught with unintended consequences for wildlife management, resident hunter opportunities, and the landowner/ sportsman relationship. I do align with Senator Storer about working together. Hunting access is the number one issue facing hunter, recruitment, and retention. If landowners and nonlandowners aren't working together on issues, we're

risking becoming divided. Our strength as sportsmen is in our numbers. We are one of the few groups that advocates for ourselves by paying an excise tax to fund our sport. Our organization wants to promote involvement and seek solutions to work together with landowners and increase hunting opportunities. A large fear is creating two markets which you've heard about. One in which landowners are given tags that can-- or purchase tags, not given, that are sold to the highest bidder and one by which residents and the general public wait extended periods of time to get a tag. Currently, I've waited 9 years for a bull elk tag. It can take 6 years to draw an antelope tag. The Nebraska bull elk tag is, is a once-in-a-lifetime harvest tag, meaning you draw the tag, you shoot the bull, you're not eligible to apply ever again for that tag. That's how highly coveted these tags are. If a person can buy a guaranteed tag annually, it creates a loophole or unfair advantage to those that can buy their way into our opportunities. My daughter was lucky enough to draw a bull elk tag this year, and by my calculations, she had a 2% chance of drawing that tag. I paid the rancher that we hunt with a tip for taking us out and letting us hunt. That's another loophole within the system. It takes away the liability and some of the things we talked-- talk about. Our western big game animals, in particular, are highly coveted resources and are limited in quantity. The herd populations are not comparable to neighboring states this bill may be intended to model. We have 2,700 to 3,000 elk compared to Colorado that has 100 times as many elk, 270,000 to 300,000 animals. Montana and New Mexico also participate in this transfer program and have 135,000 and 100,000 elk, respectively. On a personal note, I tried to hunt in New Mexico for elk for several years. They also offer landowner tags that are transferable and have a list of recipients of those tags open to the public to contact. I personally called 25 landowners that had these tags and every single one of them had an outstanding agreement with outfitters to sell their tags to their outfitters. I had no chance to buy a tag even if it was available. Another concern of-- is the proposal to sell the landowner tags for hunting to be valid anywhere in the unit that we just-- we talked a little bit about that. I'll move on a little. Our organization, as well as many others, seek to increase hunter involvement by getting veterans, youth, men, and special needs hunters involved in unique opportunities. Programs such as the Game and Parks youth mentor hunt, becoming outdoor women, or the SYC of northeastern Nebraska that, that takes disabled kids hunting have some of the opportunities available to them by generous landowners who open their land for recreational use. The thought of those opportunities disappearing becomes a real possibility if the

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tags are removed due to extra allocation of landowners. And I wanted to mention to Senator DeKay and Hughes, who both left, that the way I understand it is if that Missouri unit sells out of tags and landowner tags can be used in that unit, say there's X number of tags sold, that means that's an overabundance of tags allocated to that, to that unit. And the Game and Parks then has to adjust the tags that they sell in those units year over year. So you have this constant ebb and flow and changes that they can't anticipate without knowing how many landowner tags are actually going to be sold in, in a unit. It's the view of the NBA that LB1197 presents numerous anticipated and unanticipated concerns that we believe cannot be addressed in its current form. I, therefore, respectfully ask the committee to vote no on LB1197 and not advance in this committee.

BRANDT: OK, let's see if we've got questions.

MATT BURESH: You missed a pretty good presentation, so trust me.

DeKAY: Can you start over?

BRANDT: OK, I don't see any questions. Thank you.

MATT BURESH: Thank you.

BRANDT: Next opponent. Welcome.

DUSTIN ALLEMANN: Good afternoon, Chairman Brandt and the rest of the Natural Resources Committee. My name is Dustin Allemann, D-u-s-t-i-n A-l-l-e-m-a-n-n. I'm here on behalf of the Nebraska Sportsmen's Foundation, most of you probably know what that, that, that organization is, but if you don't, it's a 501(c)(3) organization here in the state that attempts to do its best to educate lawmakers and other influential entities in the state around sportsmen and women's related activities. And, you know, we've been to a few of these things before, and the people before me have done an excellent job in how they presented the opposition for this bill. They brought up a lot of good cases around the public access reality in Nebraska. The economic and cultural impact that we see as an important factor about this legislation. Landowner revenue that already exists that could be, that could be achieved through what's currently part of statute. And, you know, when I come to these, it's always interesting because you kind of get the bobbleheads going, right? Sometimes they go up and down and sometimes they go this way and it depends on what side of the room they're sitting on. But I think one thing that Senator Storer brought

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up that I really want to reiterate as part of the testimony that I, that I handed in is the Nebraska sportsmen and women have supported separate hunting seasons, depredation programs, access and incentives, and financial assistance to ensure wildlife management and conservation remains balanced and collaborative with our landowner friends. And I think, you know, Senator Storer talked a lot about how the, the sportsmen and women of Nebraska and the landowners, they've, they've grown apart. And this is something that's trying to bring them together. And I think that's a great thing. We definitely want to focus on that. I disagree that this is something that does it. I think it does absolutely the opposite part of bringing those people together. I think that sometimes when we have-- it's good to hear the why of this legislation and what we're trying to accomplish, right? And, and that way when someone like myself reads this and says, you know, these are the things that we're concerned about, it may not be the intention of the bill, but we do feel like it is definitely going to be a consequence of the bill. And, you know, we've almost beat a dead horse, so I won't run you through all of those data points and all the hard work I put into this. If there's a spelling error, you know, the AI didn't catch it. But I think I'll just leave it at that because of the previous people that have done things before me. And I'd be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

BRANDT: OK, let's see what we've got for questions. I guess I've got a question.

DUSTIN ALLEMANN: Great.

BRANDT: And nobody's really brought this up. I'm a landowner, I can appreciate particularly if you're a row crop farmer, in Nebraska this last year, things are kind of tough. It's a revenue stream. I've never charged anybody to hunt. I've got a creek that I know the neighbors are getting \$3,000 a year for an exclusive to hunt that per quarter section.

DUSTIN ALLEMANN: Yeah.

BRANDT: And it's kind of like-- I've, I've never charged anybody to hunt, but is there anything wrong with a, a landowner who pays tremendous property taxes in this state trying to get a return on his investment?

DUSTIN ALLEMANN: Sure. No, that's a great point, right? And what do we have in the system that handles that right now? Leases. Right? The

only difference in my opinion, which take it or leave it, it's not worth a whole lot, but the only thing that this does that's different than a lease is a guaranteed permit. That's it. And when you go down the road of a guaranteed permit you can create your secondary marketplace. And that's really where the problem of this is. You know you talked about liability earlier, I've always carried a file folder of liability release forms when I hunt on somebody's property, but you bring up some great points about, you know, what it costs for property taxes in, in the state. Believe me, that is not lost on me. I have to pay them too, right? Maybe not as much, but I don't have the acres that everybody has either. So we-- I think the sportsmen and women at one point were against leases. There's a lot of people still against leases, but I think people are coming around, you see a lot more leases on the marketplace systems that are out there. You see them at hunting shows and expos that are available, and I think that's the proper way to do it, because let-- like Senator Hughes says earlier, let them-- you know, they have access to the tags, they can go through the process of getting those tags, right? The only person that owns the wildlife in the United States of America is the Almighty, right? It's not, it's not anybody else. It's not the state. It's not the country. So that's my opinion.

BRANDT: OK. I don't see any other questions, thank you for your testimony.

DUSTIN ALLEMANN: All right. Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

BRANDT: Next opponent.

AL DAVIS: Good afternoon, Chairman Brandt and--

BRANDT: Welcome, Senator Davis.

AL DAVIS: --Natural Resources Committee. You all know who I am, but for the record, Al Davis, A-l D-a-v-i-s, the contract lobbyist for the Nebraska Chapter of the Sierra Club. We're here in opposition to LB1197, and, obviously, you know. I'm just first going to say I've learned a lot from the gentleman who just testified behind me about how this works and about what they had to say was very helpful, and, and this committee can take that under advisement when they consider the bill. But, you know, I have my testimony, so I'm going to go ahead and read it. So the intent of the bill is straightforward, in my opinion, but the consequences are unknown and vague with a lot of downside in animal numbers and a downside to the finances of Game and

Parks system, system down the road. The fiscal note shows a loss to Game and Parks of nearly a million dollars and the possibility of increased pressure on the animal numbers is largely unknown, but definitely will result if you increase the pool of people who have permits. I've had direct experience with a pay-hunting operation of my own. For over a decade, I had hunters visiting from Michigan, and one year all deer permits were sold out early. What those guys did was they would send their packet-- their information to Lincoln, to the office, and then they would send the permit back to them. So that particular year, I don't know what happened, but they were all full, so they ended up having to go to another region. And after that, then I would go ahead and drive to Alliance and pick up the permits in the morning, you know, the day of, the day of opening to be sure that we got them. So I share that story with you because I can just envision a lot more, a lot more demand for permits from the landowners, a lot of [INAUDIBLE] animals. Pretty soon you're going to have people that are turned down, that Game and Parks are going to have to decrease the number of permits that are available, that shuts off the market and, ultimately, hunters go away and they don't come back, they go to somewhere else. So I think we need to think about that. And I may have missed this when I read the bill, but Senator Storer sort of stated that the fee is constant. I don't envision it that way. When I read this bill, it looked to me like a person, a landowner could buy a permit at a lower reduced rate and market that. So I said, in my respect, that's looking like the state's turning into a brokerage arrangement with the landowner. I don't think I'm comfortable with that. It's not the way we want to frame our outdoor activities. Nebraska hunters already complain about lack of hunting opportunities in the state and this will only increase it. So the Sierra Club recognizes that landowners do foot the bill for feeding wildlife in the state which is over 90% privately owned land. The Legislature has tried multiple times to address overpopulation, and Game and Parks has done the same of some species from time to time, and they have been pretty successful with it, but there's still pressure every year that this committee and elsewhere to do more about that. I'm not sure what else can be done and you have to listen to what Game and Parks tries to do. Nebraska has seen a developing interest in the hunting industry, specifically in the big game sector. This has brought a significant revenue source to many small struggling communities where their best sales may be made in that 10-day deer season window in bars, restaurants, motels. While this is fleeting, it does provide a shot in the arm to struggling rural businesses and communities, and we don't want to see that curtailed if permits are not available due to

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landowners who are superseding over-the-counter sales. Please pay attention to the fiscal note. Every year I see well-intentioned bills introduced which remove a revenue source to favor one group or the other. We have another of those bills ahead of us this afternoon. But when, when you're cutting fat, you eventually end up cutting muscle. Game and Parks has seen shortfalls in revenue before and the results are not good. Going back to my own personal experience with that when my parks were in disarray in the 43rd District, I was working with Tim and other folks on that, but the next year Senator Avery introduced the bill to try to help fund things, of course that met with a lot of animosity because people don't want to see fees go up. But whenever we cut we are doing damage to the entities, so we need to think about that. Any questions?

BRANDT: All right, let's see. Questions? I see none.

AL DAVIS: Thank you.

BRANDT: Thank you for your testimony. Next opponent. Who else is left to testify? OK. I think you're the guy we're looking for. Welcome.

WILLIAM GROSSNICKLAUS: Thank you. My name is William "Bill" Grossnicklaus, W-i-l-l-i-a-m, B-i-l-l, and then G-r-o-s-s-n-i-c-k-l-a-u-s. I'm here to give my testimony in opposition to this. I don't have a whole lot of papers with me, you can see I scribbled a little bit. Who I am, I'm-- I live in Oxford, Nebraska. I am the fire chief. I've been an EMT for 32 years. I've be a little league coach, I get up every day, go to work, come back, and one of the few things that I have that really, really is important to me is my, my outdoor time, right? So I, I also represent the Nebraska Chapter of the Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, which is a grassroot organization of hundreds of people that are struggling right now just to find places to hunt. We are 97% privately owned ground in, in Nebraska. And of that little 3%, you know, we're trying to all get on there and find a place to hunt, right? So I, I do represent them but please consider what I'm really doing is representing myself today. OK? I'm going to go a little bit different route than what everybody else did. I'm not going to throw a bunch of numbers at you. What I'm going to tell you is an actual, I guess, circumstance that happened to me. In 2022, the Game and Parks put out a permit. It was an unlimited permit for elk in the state of Nebraska. Not only to Nebraskans, but also to out-of-state hunters. It was unlimited for \$27, I believe, is all that it would cost. When you think of the-- how coveted that permit is, to have that opportunity, I, I believe 280 people applied

for that permit. I went and got me a permit. I drove to North Platte and grabbed me a permit as soon as I could get one, right? The, the area was about 2.5 hours away from me where I was allowed to hunt, right around Ogallala, Grant, southern area, right? I drove out there for the entire month of July, every chance I had to try to find an elk. What these elk were being, were being targeted for was that they were crop depredation. The elk had moved into the corn, and if you've ever seen what an elk will do to corn, it is amazing. They destroy corn. This is-- was put together because landowners wanted them moved, right? The whole goal of the Game and Parks at the time was only to harvest about 15 elk. That was their entire goal, but 280--some people put in for it. I, I drove there and I asked 27 landowners for permission to go onto their ground. 27 times I stopped into a farmyard and asked if I could hunt on their ground, if I could go, you know, remove one of the elk that was depredating, that was causing them problems. I got zero yeses 27 times, right, zero yeses. I did get, well, if you give me \$1,000, I will let you go shoot a cow elk. I did get, if you give me \$10,000 you can come and shoot a bull elk. I did get if you come in and give me \$5,000 you can shoot a bull elk and another \$1,000 for every point that that bull elk has on its head. That's what I got. A free tag that landowners did not have to apply for, did not have to pay for, and did not have to transfer. People-- 280 people were coming in and asking them can I hunt on your ground? And they said no, not unless you give me money. So I was lucky enough to find one single bull elk print on a little [INAUDIBLE] maintenance road 15 miles north of [INAUDIBLE], Nebraska. That bull elk happened to walk into a piece of ground where a landowner gets paid to put his ground into walk-in hunting, a program that the Nebraska Game and Parks puts together. One bull elk walked on there, that landowner, who I appreciate to no end, got paid to let me go onto his ground. I walked in there and I killed a bull elk. One of eight people to kill that bull-- a bull elk that year, or an elk. So I think that what the easiest thing to consider on this is that this is not-- yes, I just noticed-- this is not a problem that is out there. Hunters killing animals is not a problem. There are hundreds of them out there looking for access. All we need is programs to be pushed harder for landowners to give opportunities to hunters to walk onto their ground. If you got to pay an access fee, pay your access fee, but we shouldn't give these permits.

BRANDT: All right, let's see if we've got any questions. I guess, I've got one. This is, this is my last year in the Legislature, which is probably a good thing for everybody involved. But for 6 years, Senator

Erdman out there beat the drum on depredation, on the damage that the elk and the antelope and the deer do to the haystacks and, and corn fields and everything out there. And I know he worked hard to try and get some compensation for the people that farm out there. It never came about. I think it is very enlightening the testimony that you gave that it surprises me that these landowners, if they have a problem with deer or elk and they're, they're insisting on depredation permits that they would try and charge you to do that. Is that normal?

WILLIAM GROSSNICKLAUS: I've only, I've only ever had one other opportunity on depredation. That was for white-tailed deer around the Arapahoe area on the Republican River. That landowner received a permit for depredation of 30 permits that he was allowed to do. He invited me in to, to harvest. So that wasn't a problem that day, but that is white-tail deer on a piece of property. It was absolutely overrun. I would-- you know, having that experience with the depredation with the elk the way it was, if I could have bought that depredation tag and been assigned to a, a landowner who was actively complaining about too many elk, that would have been awesome. I would have known who was going to let me in. All I could do was drive down driveways, knock on doors and, and ask for permission. And it, it wasn't there. It was, they were wanting to sell me that tag, so.

BRANDT: Right. It doesn't seem very efficient. OK, I don't see any other questions. Thank you for your testimony. Thank you for coming in. Any more opponents? Opponents? Anyone in the neutral capacity? Neutral? Senator Storer, you're welcome to close.

STORER: Thank you. This is way more entertaining than Judiciary, or it should be. A couple things, I, I appreciated listening to all of those, whether they were here in proponent or opposition to the bill and the concerns that they had. What, what becomes clear is (a), yes, the language probably still needs some work. I think there's a lot of fear associated with, with the what ifs, but not so much a, a focus on what does the bill actually do or not do. The bill does not provide for or anywhere state that the landowner is selling these permits, it's transferring them. And you heard from several, several folks come up here from a variety of, of perspectives, but some were outfitters and were very open with you and said that, you know, that's occurring today, that, that there's lease agreements or different arrangements where an outfitter is accessing property and monetizing the wildlife today. And that's OK, that's not, that's not a bad thing. And so that-- but it was confusing to me because part of the fear surrounding what is perceived that this bill may do was that it would monetize

wildlife but, but we have folks here today that are doing that and I commend them for that. I'm not saying that to be critical. I'm just saying I'm a little confused where the fear of what this may do comes from. There was one comment, maybe I misunderstood it, I just wanted to bring this up in case it was-- in case maybe I didn't understand it correctly, but about a perception that this bill somehow created, and it says within the bill, but this is just within the statute, this is not what we're adding, that a nonresident of Nebraska who owns 320 acres or more can apply for a limited deer permit. That's in statute today. We're not changing or adding or that's not what this bill does, but that exists in statute today. But it is, is knowing that that is in statute to clarify that I was very intentional in the language of what we are doing with LB1197 that the, that the privilege of transferring a permit is only limited to a Nebraska resident landowner. So it does and I think you heard Director McCoy clarify that, that maybe that-- he hadn't read it that way initially, but, yes, it's intended to sort of limit how many of these can be transferred under because it's only Nebraska resident landowner. So it doesn't apply to anyone that, that qualifies for a landowner permit today, wouldn't qualify to transfer their permit, if that makes sense. Other than that, I think those were kind of all the questions that I wanted to respond to, or comments that I wanted to respond to. You know, again, I, I am happy to continue sort of trying to refine the language to make sure that the intent is clear and narrow. But happy to answer any additional questions, I guess.

BRANDT: All right. Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Thank you, Chairman Brandt. So I feel like there was a little confusion, like, at the beginning and I'm going to state what I think I see it as and then we can-- I don't know, tell me if I'm wrong. I feel like that the fear is that you let the landowners-- because that's unlimited permits-- you let them start transferring to someone else. All our regular hunters are going to go look for landowners. Landowner permits go sky high, now there's nothing left for a regular guy to get. Already they said-- I don't know, somebody said this year deer are down, and they've run out of permits or whatever. So I think that's a fear, and I think that can be valid. And then, I just-- so I think that's the worry. But then the other part is, I-- you-- I think you said your goal is that you want to manage wildlife on your property. You don't hunt, so you want other people to do it, so this is a way to do it. And I would ask-- I feel like you could do this now except for the permit part. You could advertise it. I mean, he went to 27 doors, no one would let him hunt. Like, dude, I have 5,000 acres,

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come here, you got to get your own permit, but I'll let you hunt. You'd have people lined up your driveway, I think. So, I guess, why is this needed?

STORER: Yeah, I, I mean, it's another avenue. Honestly, first of all, you know, generally, if, if somebody just knocks on your door, you don't know who they are, you have no idea.

HUGHES: Yeah, we've had that happen, too. It's kind of creepy, right? But if--

STORER: That's probably-- your probably-- your odds of having somebody let you on as a stranger--

HUGHES: Yeah, but how--

STORER: --no relationship are slim.

HUGHES: Right.

STORER: Just because there's a, there is a liability and a huge trust factor, and do they shut the gates, and are they-- do know where to stay away from the livestock, and there's all kinds of factors.

HUGHES: But how does that get, how does that get better with this?

STORER: Because you would be able to know exactly-- it just develops more of a relationship. Like, you're going to have that one-on-one contact and, and it doesn't necessarily mean this is even for sale. I know that-- I know it doesn't prevent it, so there's probably some fear of that. That's not really the underlying intent.

HUGHES: But couldn't you-- like, if I'm you, I'd be like, OK, I would have, however many acres, 5,000 acres, I want hunters, interview them. Come to my door, you got a permit, here's the rules, will you follow? Like, I don't know how that makes this better or different.

STORER: I just think it, it creates transparency where transparency currently doesn't exist.

HUGHES: You don't, you don't need transparency because they have their own permit. I don't know. I guess I-- maybe we can talk offline.

STORER: Yeah.

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HUGHES: I'm, I'm just not wrapping my head around, I guess, why to have this.

STORER: I did have one quick question, that in your comments, I wanted to address, and I should have written it down. It's escaping me. The one thing I guess I did hear, I think, again, as we work on the language, it is reasonable to probably limit.

HUGHES: Yeah.

STORER: Right. I think that's totally reasonable and a fair, a fair point that, you know, whether it's-- and, and it's not unlimited. It's every 80 acres, so it's not unlimited, but like in, like in ranch country that can be a lot.

HUGHES: He was thinking-- I mean, I think it was said 45,000 potential. I mean, I know that's kind of high.

STORER: Right. Yeah. So, no, I think that should be limited. I, I don't think unlimited is-- makes sense. So that is a good point that can be addressed. Yeah.

HUGHES: Thank you.

BRANDT: Other questions? I see none.

STORER: All right.

BRANDT: And before we close the hearing, online comments, we had 8 proponents, 72 opponents, no neutral, and no ADA testimony. And with that, we will close LB1197. And we will go to LB1226. If-- yeah, let's just hang tight for a minute, let people-- if you're leaving, please go ahead and exit because we've got two more bills to go here. So you're welcome to leave-- yeah, or stay. So welcome to the Natural Resources Committee. I don't know if you've testified before. So the senators cannot ask questions of the LA so hopefully that puts you at ease. So you're welcome to start at any time.

CATY KUEHN: Thank you, Chairman Brandt and members of the Natural Resources Committee. For the record, my name is Caty Kuehn.

BRANDT: Can you lean forward into the mic a little more or pull the mic down?

MOSER: Talk-- speak more loudly.

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BRANDT: Yeah, there you go.

CATY KUEHN: For the record, my name is Caty Kuehn, C-a-t-y K-u-e-h-n. I am Senator Andersen's legislative assistant. We are introducing LB1226 today to incentivize veterans to permanently stay in our great state. It creates a new, reduced-priced hunting and fishing permit for Nebraska veterans. As you know, we have a workforce development challenge in our state. This is one small effort to inspire veterans and their families to stay and be a permanent part of our workforce. Throughout the interim, our office has been in regular contact with active duty service members and veterans across the state to better understand how to serve them and their families. One of the key questions we asked was why do you like Nebraska and what will make you more likely to stay? We received a wide range of answers. A small but meaningful change is opening up access to hunting and fishing permits. Currently, only veterans who have a disability rating of 50% or higher qualify under statute for waived permit fees. This excludes many who have honorably served and sacrificed, but do not meet that specific threshold. LB1226 seeks to remedy this by introducing a 3-year special combination, fishing, hunting, and more permit for \$90 or the same permit for 5 years at \$135. This is a steep discount. Furthermore, these discounted permits will be available for veterans whose VA disability rating is 10% or more. We appreciate the help of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission with refining the-- this legislation. LB1226 is a small token of appreciation to those who served our great nation and state. Nebraska is blessed with abundant and beautiful natural spaces. Our hope with this legislation is that it will make it easier for all to enjoy.

BRANDT: OK. Thank you, Ms. Kuehn. You did a nice job. So now we are going to move into proponents of the bill. Proponents?

TIMOTHY McCOY: Good afternoon again, Chairman Brandt, members of the committee. My name is Timothy McCoy, T-i-m-o-t-h-y M-c-C-o-y. I'm the Director of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission in our headquarters at 2200 North 33rd Street, Lincoln, Nebraska. We're pleased to support the-- this bill to help honor our disabled veterans. Our current disabled veterans permit, which is a free lifetime permit, as probably cash-- I mean, the value right now of all the things that come with that, if you were purchasing those permits would be about \$2,000. We give those free. But he brought this idea of, you know, is there something we can do for the veterans who are disabled, you know, from 10% to right under 50%. And so we worked with him on this, you know, it provides a benefit for those, those folks that-- it is heavily

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discounted, but this is really to help honor our veterans and their sacrifices. With that impact, we think it's manageable. You know, since these are-- these would be multiyear permits, they would allow them to hunt, fish. They would have all the state stamps with them so they could waterfowl hunt. You know, big game would not be included, those are separate permits you have to apply for, but those would have their stamps, everything else they would need. The other thing about this is that there will be in, in a, in a future year if we do this, these folks that buy these permits for those 3 years or 5 years will count as certified hunters and fishermen. And that is tied to the federal funds we get, but those are on a delay of, I believe, 2 years in arrears when we submit that, you know. So it takes a while for that to catch up, that's why nothing shows up on the fiscal note. But there would, there would be the potential to recover that. What the exact impact is, is really hard to estimate for a couple of reasons. There's some unsure-- you know, we found some numbers on disabled veterans, but the other thing is there's-- we know that we have a significant number of veterans that already purchase permits, so there may be some-- you know, some of this may be switching to these discounted permits because there will be a better deal for them than buying them every year and we also may gain some. And so if we gain some, there will obviously be a potential benefit on the, on the federal side.

DeKAY: Thank you. Are there any questions? Senator Raybould.

RAYBOULD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. McCoy. So I'm looking at the fiscal note and, you know, the first year, fiscal year, 2027-2028 looks like a loss of \$141,000, and then fiscal year 2028-2029, a loss of \$282,000. Can you-- how, how will your department be able to absorb these losses?

TIMOTHY McCOY: I must not be looking at the same thing you are. Just give me a second. Oh, that's, that's because-- that's an interesting question. Why didn't I question it? Oh, it's because these are fiscal year and we sell stamps on a calendar year, or we sell permits on a calendar year.

RAYBOULD: OK.

TIMOTHY McCOY: So our, our estimate is, our estimate is that, you know, you will-- we will start this at a calendar year. So for that first fiscal year, we would only catch that, that, that would only include the second half-- it would include the second half of the

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fiscal year. It would be the first part of a calendar year. The next fiscal year, you would see the full impact on that.

RAYBOULD: Well, it, it still shows losses, so.

TIMOTHY McCOY: Yeah, that's-- we're heavily discounting these permits because--

RAYBOULD: Currently.

TIMOTHY McCOY: --we think it's warranted. So, yeah, there's going to be a difference there from if we were selling-- if they were getting what everybody else would pay. There's, there is cost to this.

RAYBOULD: OK, and I guess the question to you again is how can your department absorb this loss of revenue?

TIMOTHY McCOY: Well, you know, part, part of, part of this is we think we will, we will be able to do it based on-- you know, after the first 2 years, these will start showing up as we get our federal aid reimbursement from Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration that will help bring some federal dollars back in. That will, that will be one piece of it, but from, from our perspective, there are some benefits here in terms of trying to, trying to address this issue. This issue has come up previously in the Legislature, and, and this is a way that we continue to maintain some revenue from these permits and they count. In many cases, the, the push has been they need to be free or they need to be discounted, you know, at a much lower level, like maybe \$5.

RAYBOULD: OK, so I guess you're able to absorb these losses because you anticipate federal funds helping offset these losses. Is that-- am I understanding it correctly?

TIMOTHY McCOY: It is. We won't be-- because of the way they-- when we submit numbers, we're submitting the numbers of hunters and fishers from 2 years ago. So there's a lag time when we will start getting any benefits of those federal funds.

RAYBOULD: OK. I'm just-- I guess that would be helpful if it were so stated somewhere in the fiscal note because I know we're trying to be very sensitive about unfunded mandates hitting departments with additional costs that they had not anticipated in a tough budget year, and this is obviously 2027, next year, but still we want to be somewhat sensitive. But I didn't, I didn't see it listed as, you know,

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this-- federal, federal matching dollars will happen in the year 2028 or something like that.

TIMOTHY McCOY: Yeah, the challenge is we can't exactly tell you how much that'll be because you really have to-- you have to know how many people are buying these that are new permit buyers versus ones that were already buying a permit every year. So it does get complicated.

RAYBOULD: OK. But, again, going back, you do hope to anticipate to offset some of these losses with federal dollars coming in?

TIMOTHY McCOY: We do.

RAYBOULD: OK. Thank you.

BRANDT: Other questions? I see none. Thank you for your testimony. Next proponent. Welcome.

MATT BURESH: Welcome back. Senator Brandt and members of the committee, my name is Matt Buresh, M-a-t-t B-u-r-e-s-h. Make this one very short and sweet. Some bills are very simple and make a lot of sense. This is one where our state's elected officials can have a positive impact. The men and women of our armed forces deserve as many benefits as we can reasonably offer. I encourage you to support this bill to honor those who have served to protect our rights and freedoms. Thank you for your time and consideration.

BRANDT: OK. Any questions? Thank you for your testimony. Next proponent. Any more proponents? Opponents? Anybody opposed to this bill? Neutral? Anyone in the neutral capacity? Before we close the hearing, online, we had one proponent, no opponents, no neutral, and no ADA testimony, and that closes LB1226. And we are going to go to LB1232.

HUGHES: The mountain lion.

STROMMEN: Good afternoon, still afternoon, it's not evening yet.

BRANDT: Not yet.

STROMMEN: All right.

BRANDT: OK. Go ahead.

STROMMEN: I will keep this quick so we don't get to evening. Good afternoon, Chairman Brandt, members of the Natural Resources Committee. For the record, my name is Paul Strommen, P-a-u-l S-t-r-o-m-m-e-n. I represent Legislative District 47, which consists of nine counties that covers 10,500 square miles of western Nebraska. Today, I present LB1232 which would amend Nebraska's current game law to include the issuance of limited landowner mountain lion permits. Nebraska's wide-open landscapes have long supported a delicate balance between wildlife, agriculture, and rural communities. In recent years, however, the growing, the growing mountain lion population has begun to disrupt that balance. While the return of a native predator can signal positive ecosystem recovery, unmanaged population growth can create challenges for wildlife, domesticated animals, and human communities. The issuance of regulated, limited hunting permits would provide a proven management tool to maintain a sustainable mountain lion population while reducing potential conflicts. Mountain lions are powerful predators capable of attacking livestock, pets, and in rare cases, humans. Livestock losses caused by mountain lions can create serious financial strain for ranchers and farmers. Unlike large corporate operations, many Nebraska producers operate on narrow profit margins. Meaning the loss of even a few animals can significantly affect annual income and economic livelihood. In addition to direct losses, ranchers often face increased costs related to monitoring herds, installing protective fencing, and managing stress-related health issues among animals. Regulated hunting permits can help control mountain lion populations in high-risk areas, reducing predation and helping preserve the stability of local agricultural operations. Protecting livestock also supports Nebraska's broader rural economy. The cattle industry is one of the state's largest economic drivers, providing jobs, supporting local businesses, and sustaining general family farms and ranches. When predators threaten herd safety, the economic effects can extend beyond individual producers and impact feed suppliers, veterinarians, equipment dealers, community infrastructure. Managing predator populations through controlled permit systems help protect this vital economic network. LB1232 would provide a proactive science-based method of preventing conflict rather than responding only after significant losses occur. Without regulated management, ranchers may resort to emergency or defensive actions that are less controlled and potentially less effective for long-term conservation. The structured permit system allows wildlife agencies to target problem areas, collect data, and ensure that mountain lion populations remain sustainable while minimizing agricultural damage. The issuance of regulated mountain

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lion hunting permits in Nebraska is an important step towards protecting the state's livestock industry, supporting rural economies, and maintaining responsible wildlife management. As mountain lion populations expand into agricultural regions, their presence increasingly threatens cattle, sheep, goats, and other domestic animals that many Nebraska families rely on for their livelihood. The approach presented in LB1232 recognizes the importance of both conservation and agriculture, ensuring that Nebraska's natural resources and agriculture heritage can continue to thrive together. Closing, LB1232 builds trust when landowners are treated as partners within a regulated system, cooperation improves, compliance improves, and conservation outcomes improves. That trust is essential to long-term success. Thank you, and take any questions.

BRANDT: Senator DeKay.

DeKAY: Thank you. Thank you for being here today and joining our committee.

STROMMEN: I'm glad to be here. I think it's the first time I've testified in Natural Resources.

DeKAY: Right now, if there's a threat, can, can landowners eliminate a mountain lion at this point right now if it poses a threat to livestock, humans, or whatever?

STROMMEN: So, yes, with a caveat, my understanding, and Mr. McCoy can speak better to this, my understanding is that only if those animals are being threatened at that particular moment in time. So if you see, and this would go for any predators, so coyotes or bobcats, if that animal is in the process of attacking part of your herd or an animal, a pet, your brother or sister, you have the ability to take care of that animal at that time.

DeKAY: So if a threat does happen and we go to a permit system, would this limit the opportunities to eliminate the animal that's causing the threat?

STROMMEN: No, this is, this is simply another way for landowners to manage predation. So what we're doing here is we're simply adding mountain lions into already existing statute, and that statute is-- would, would comply exactly with elk. So the way that elk are treated as-- and, and hunting would be the same way that we, we would be

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treating mountain lions. So a landowner's ability to protect their property is not affected in any way, shape, or form.

DeKAY: All right. Thank you.

BRANDT: Other questions? Senator Raybould.

RAYBOULD: Thank you, Senator Strommen. Welcome to our committee.

STROMMEN: Thank you.

RAYBOULD: You know, I'm, I'm kind of curious. I was trying to read through the comments of the opponents and proponents. How many mountain lions are killed annually because of them being predators to livestock and other-- I mean, how many livestock have been killed?

STROMMEN: So, so we actually have some research on that. Predation, back in 2015, we were the number four state when it came to animal predation, which resulted in over \$230 million worth of loss for the industry. Not all of that is mountain lion, and I think that Tim has someone here that can really speak to what the predation issue is when it comes to mountain lions. And we also have someone here that owns property in, in Wildcat Hills and deals with mountain lions on, essentially, a daily basis.

RAYBOULD: So I want to read you a comment from a sixth grader--

STROMMEN: OK.

RAYBOULD: --who responded online. This person is in disagreement: The mountain lion population in Nebraska is 70, and it's one of the least populated mountain lion states in America. It can be dangerous if a rogue mountain lion is living in the city or town and attacking people. However, we could just relocate them somewhere safer. If there are too many mountain lions and they don't have enough food, we could just cut back on killing their prey, like deer and wild turkey. She also goes on to say, they rarely attack unless provoked. Also, if we have 70 mountain lions in Nebraska and we want to kill 21, that could make them endangered in Nebraska. So how do you respond to the sixth grader?

STROMMEN: Well, I would say that my understanding is those numbers are a lot fewer than the real numbers. And I, I would also say that it, it, it would be difficult to not-- you, you would-- so you're saying-- she's saying that rather than hunting other game animal, we let them

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thrive, but then that would impact, again, depredation, because then you would have more animals that were eating crops or walking through fields and killing crops. So I, I think that what we're trying to do is, is negotiate that balance between predators and nonpredators.

RAYBOULD: OK, one more I think I want to share with you. I have a bust of Ernie Chambers in my office. Do you know-- do remember former State Senator Ernie Chambers?

STROMMEN: I've heard of Ernie Chambers, yes.

RAYBOULD: Yeah. So he's really in my head right now when you're talking about mountain lions, so--

STROMMEN: OK.

RAYBOULD: --just, just want to let you know where my thoughts are.

BRANDT: OK. Any other questions? I see none. Will you stick around to close?

STROMMEN: Yes, sir.

BRANDT: That'll be terrific.

STROMMEN: Thank you.

BRANDT: OK, first proponent.

TIMOTHY McCOY: Good afternoon, Chairman Brandt, members of the committee. My name is Timothy McCoy, T-i-m-o-t-h-y M-c-C-o-y, and I'm the Director of the Nebraska Game of Parks Commission at 2200 North 33rd Street, Lincoln, Nebraska. I'm testifying in support of this bill as it will ensure landowners have access to mountain lion hunting permits for the existing authorized seasons. The landowner eligibility here mirrors our existing elk landowner permit framework in terms of the acres that they are required to have, they are within a designated landowner management zone or in this case it would be the units where we have current mountain lion seasons. Landowners would also pay half the application fee. And when we, when we look at this, what this does it creates, like there is for elk and for antelope, a separate landowner draw so the landowners would have their own set of permits to draw from. It's not going to change the total number of permits we would allocate. What it will do is we will have-- we would have an allocation of permits that are for regular hunters and then another

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allocation of permits that is for the landowner. So it ensures them the access. It doesn't, it doesn't do anything that's going to change when those seasons would be. They would be during the same seasons that we currently have for mountain lions. And it will not change how we set our quotas for the number of lions that can be harvested in any of those units.

BRANDT: Senator Raybould.

RAYBOULD: So can that landowner sell their permits?

TIMOTHY McCOY: No.

RAYBOULD: They cannot.

TIMOTHY McCOY: None of the landowner permits we currently have are-- can be--

RAYBOULD: Transferable.

TIMOTHY McCOY: --can be transferred or sold. They are-- they have-- they are assigned, like all other permits, to the individual who applies and gets them.

RAYBOULD: Does it have the same kind of broad category of eligible family members that can use that permit?

TIMOTHY McCOY: Yes, it would be identical to how elk are done right now. Those categories of eligible family members are stated in one place in the, in the statute when you look at landowner permits. And that applies consistently across deer, turkey, antelope, and elk.

RAYBOULD: So my question before to Senator Strommen was how many, how many mountain lions are killed every year?

TIMOTHY McCOY: It actually varies by year, somewhat depending on two things: one, how many-- what we set our quota of lion harvest at. You know, there's a-- and in, and in those quotas, there is a female sub-quota. Females are really important to the population. So, you know, as an example, you know, when, when you look at history, we're typically-- you know, the highest number we've ever harvested of mountain lions was in 2025. We had some of those units. I believe we also had a couple of units this year that closed. They didn't reach their full quota because there were, there were, like, three, two or three female mountain lions, two different units that were killed and

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that closed the season down. So we're, we're pretty cautious about that and I do have behind me Sam Wilson who's our, our furbearer and large carnivore manager who deals with our mountain lions all the time. If there's more specific questions, I'd be glad to have him come up.

RAYBOULD: So he can-- because I know the number varies, but it sounds like two to three females max?

TIMOTHY McCOY: Depending, depending on the unit, I think in the Pine Ridge unit, I think the max they could do this year was, I believe, I think it was four.

RAYBOULD: OK.

TIMOTHY McCOY: Six.

RAYBOULD: Six. OK.

TIMOTHY McCOY: Sorry.

RAYBOULD: OK. Thank you.

BRANDT: OK. Senator Moser.

MOSER: So how many mountain lions do we have in Nebraska?

TIMOTHY McCOY: Well, we only have, we only have a-- we have a-- we have an, we have an actual population estimate in the Pine Ridge of 70. We don't have a statewide estimate. These are very-- they're very elusive animals.

MOSER: Very, very mobile.

TIMOTHY McCOY: Very mobile. The Niobrara unit, we know in, you know, the last full year before as we were setting these seasons, we had 34 individuals [SIC] that were documented in 2024 in Wildcat Hills.

MOSER: You had 34, what?

TIMOTHY McCOY: 34 mountain lions in the Niobrara unit. We have three different units that we've been able to assess populations in.

MOSER: OK. All right. Thank you.

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TIMOTHY McCOY: And-- but that's just an individual count, it's not really a population estimate, and we're trying to get one in--

MOSER: Just the ones you saw and there might be some you don't see, you mean?

TIMOTHY McCOY: Yeah, it's, it's separate individuals that were documented. And then Wildcat Hills in early 2025, we estimated 18.

MOSER: So-- and how many mountain lions do you kill a year, six, eight, ten?

TIMOTHY McCOY: It's, it's varied.

MOSER: Just a guess.

TIMOTHY McCOY: You know, I can go through the years. You know, 2019, we killed five; 2020, we killed seven; 2021, four. And then it was really low. In 2025, we killed 13 across those three units. Currently, this year our season is still open in the Pine Ridge and we have harvested-- there's been 14 that were harvested.

MOSER: OK. So the numbers are not huge by any means?

TIMOTHY McCOY: No.

BRANDT: OK. Yes.

RAYBOULD: I looked at the fiscal note and it seems pretty high to me and I don't know why it would be, it, it-- for fiscal year 2027-2028 it says it's \$104,000.

TIMOTHY McCOY: Yes.

RAYBOULD: Is that a one-time--

TIMOTHY McCOY: That's a-- that's the one-time programming fee to create within our permit system to, to distribute the landowner mountain lion permits. When landowner-- when mountain lion permits were first put into statute, there was no similar portion regarding landowners as there is for all the other big game species.

RAYBOULD: OK. Thank you.

BRANDT: OK. Any other questions? Senator DeKay.

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DeKAY: This won't take long. Just out of curiosity, are you able to chip mountain lion cubs or mountain lions? Could you put a chip in so you--

TIMOTHY McCOY: We don't put a chip, we put metal ear tags in them.

DeKAY: OK, that's--

TIMOTHY McCOY: That's pretty standard, because we have lions that have moved into South Dakota. We've had South Dakota lions that were, that were tagged coming into Nebraska. They move very readily. Young males, when they-- about the time they're ready to become adults, they have to leave the area they're in and find a new place.

DeKAY: Do they, do they stay within a region once they become an adult? Do they stay within, like, a 100-mile area or they might--

TIMOTHY McCOY: They, they have, they have to move out to find their own territory, otherwise, otherwise males are very territorial and they will, they will kill those young lions-- young male lions. Females will stay more close together.

BRANDT: OK. I see no other questions, thank you for your testimony. Next proponent.

DUSTIN ALLEMANN: Well, hello again. Dustin Allemann, D-u-s-t-i-n A-l-l-e-m-a-n-n, on behalf of the Nebraska Sportsmen's Foundation. Thank you, Senator Brandt and the rest of the committee for putting up with me for yet another bill. Going to make this one quick. The Nebraska Sportsmen's Foundation has always and continues to support the landowner of Nebraska, especially as they join the efforts of participating in hunting traditions. And by allowing them to add this, this, this permit to the open availability of landowner permits, then we celebrate that and welcome them into the quota. And that's--

BRANDT: OK.

DUSTIN ALLEMANN: --unless anybody has any questions.

BRANDT: Anybody got a question? Looks good. Thank you for your testimony.

DUSTIN ALLEMANN: Thank you.

BRANDT: Next proponent. Welcome.

MATT BURESH: Senator Brandt, committee, my name is Matt Buresh, M-a-t-t B-u-r-e-s-h, another short and sweet one. On behalf of the Nebraska Bowowners Association, we want to offer our support to LB1232. We support and respect the science-based approach to wildlife management. This bill fits that criteria. If there's an opportunity to promote and enhance hunting opportunities, we want to advocate for it. Just, just in response, I'm not the biologist or scientist, but one thing they talked about with the Pine Ridge unit is if you can picture at South Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, in that general area, and the conversation about relocating mountain lions doesn't work because South Dakota doesn't want our mountain lions, Wyoming doesn't want to our mountain lions. Those cats don't know where the borders are, they're just going to travel back and forth in those natural corridors. According to the Internet, which is probably true, male mountain lions have a, a range of 58 to 386 square miles.

RAYBOULD: Wait, say that again.

MATT BURESH: The male mountain lions have a range of 58 to 386 miles. So relocating them doesn't necessarily do a lot of good because they come right back home, and that's how they end up in Omaha, how they end up in Lincoln or random places like that. Just as Senator [SIC] McCoy said, male mountain lions will actually kill juvenile mountain lions that are other males because they're so territorial. So I would respond to, you know, the sixth grader in that way that relocation doesn't work or we would have thought of it. This is the apex predator in the state of Nebraska. It has no other predators that can control the population of that animal. When they, they-- I've, I've read this, it may or not be true, but they'll, they'll eat a deer a day. So they have a huge impact on other wildlife populations. And in places where sheep or goats or calves don't run as fast or, or hide as well as deer, that's where they come to. So this is-- hunting and conservation is critical to our wildlife populations and whether we like it or not this is an effective and an excellent tool as well as providing revenue for the state and opportunity for sportsmen that is highly coveted.

BRANDT: OK. Questions? Senator DeKay.

DeKAY: Real quick. If they eat a deer a day, is there any way they could be trained just to eat roadkill?

MATT BURESH: I, I-- they've said you can teach an old dog new tricks, so if we can teach mountain lions something like that. But as you

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heard in other testimony, there's not as many roadkill deer either. So there's not.

DeKAY: OK. Thank you.

BRANDT: So as a bow hunter, can you bow hunt mountain lions?

MATT BURESH: Well, that is something that we would love to have an opportunity for, that archery equipment is considered a legal weapon. So bow hunters can hunt them. The most effective way for a bow hunter to get a mountain lion is with dogs, training them, and, and having the opportunity to get up close to them. Most of the cats taken now are either-- are, are called in with wild game calls or something like that. And to get a cat close enough to shoot with a bow while doing it undetected is very challenging.

BRANDT: All right.

MATT BURESH: But it's a fun challenge.

BRANDT: Thank you. Next proponent. Any more proponents?

PAULA BROWN: Hello, all.

BRANDT: Welcome.

PAULA BROWN: You're already talking about me.

DeKAY: No. Absolutely not.

PAULA BROWN: Good day. I am Paula Brown, P-a-u-l-a B-r-o-w-n. I drove 8 hours to be here. I-- Sam knows me quite well. Most people at the Game and Parks do because I live and manage my family ranch of 109 years. That's a feat in itself nowadays. Our northern line is all the Game and Parks, so I'm quite familiar with them, and I am here to be for this landowner permit for mountain lions. You're going, but you're a woman, why would you care about this? I care about our land. And also in our land we have the bighorn sheep. My dad was part of that program to allow them to be released on our property. We have the deer population. We are blessed that we don't have the elk, but they'll come through every once in a while. We have our coyotes, of course, and we are, we're literally in the Wildcat Hills so we might have a pronghorn here and there but not very often. What we do have, is very rare, are the bobcats and even rarer are the wildcats. And what we have a lot of are the mountain lions. Just this season, I have a very

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skilled hunter, and he was able to get the first female. She was on our land, and then went over to the neighbors, and he was able to get her there. And as he was observing and tracking, because this year was very hard with no snow or anything like that, he was able to get her, but there was a tom on his trail also, and a big female nearby, too. So this is-- this has been alarming. I was a school teacher for 16 years. I taught special ed in middle school and in high school. So the comment that your little girl, the little girl made, I remember those days. Oh, yes, I remember these days. And it's-- I'm glad that she's seeing out of the box and whatnot like that, but there are a lot of "construtions" in the comment and whatnot. Sam does his best to try to keep track of these lions, but they're ghosts. It's hard to get a count on them. It took my hunter, or my friend and hunter, almost to the end of the season to get this female, because he would be on her track and then, poof, he would be on the male's track, poof, he'd be on the big female's track, poof, they're gone. To answer your question, well, Paula, when your cattle are being chased and whatnot, well, shoot the lion. I'm dealing with a ghost. And so I just-- I would love to be able to go out there and save my cattle. On that topic, this past year, I was blessed this past year to only lose two to unaccounted for. Another renter was one miscounted for, another one, he was miscounted for, and then we also lost a yearling that's not unaccounted for, well, he's unaccounted for, we can't find him. The year before that, I had 11 unaccounted for, 11. If you take the prices that we have today to the prices of just 2 years ago, 2 years ago, that was \$2,000. Now if I was to lose in yearlings or anything, we're up into the \$3,000s. That adds up. I did the math on just one of my replacement heifers that I lost 2 years ago. And until we called her, so we call a cow around, some earlier, but we do 9 to 10 years. In her lifespan and in her span of her offspring, that heifer alone would have benefited my ranch up to \$2 million. We lost that.

BRANDT: You can go ahead and wrap up your thought.

PAULA BROWN: That hurts us. And, and, you know, we depend on these animals, and we take care of these animals because they pay our bills. They pay our taxes. Banner County has lots of taxes. We're one of the highest taxed counties ever. And so it does affect us. This really does affect us. And we're-- I would really love this landowner's permit because it gives me one more opportunity to protect not only my animals, the bighorn sheep, and to build the deer population that has been affected.

BRANDT: OK, let's see what we've got for questions. Senator DeKay.

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DeKAY: Thank you. When you lost those animals, those bred heifers, yearlings, did you ever find any carcasses or remains anywhere?

PAULA BROWN: I was blessed, poor Sam, he gets the wrath of me sometimes, but, yes, I was in contact with Sam, and Pat was able to come out, I'm sorry, I can't remember Pat's last name-- what-- Molini-- he was able to come out along with another Game and Parks associate that was watching the sheep. Because we call them sheep herders, but the sheep herders take very good care of their sheep. And we went through the draws and collected specimens. And of the 11, we found seven carcasses. In finding those seven carcasses, they were ripped in half, fileted open with half of them buried. But, again, they were found in bones. Because this, this, happens, and I'm busy during the summer, this happened during July and August. And when Pat was able to come out, it was in November. So those carcasses were decayed. But evidence was still gathered, and scat was still gathered. And amongst these carcasses, there were tracks, which a hand was put down and a picture was taken. Again, I said all of this was collected. It was sent off, and it was over a year until the evidence came back, whether it was a mountain lion or not.

DeKAY: Did you say they were partially buried, the remains?

PAULA BROWN: Yes, under trees in a draw and under trees and where the spring, a specific area where there was several carcasses, the spring comes up so there's a water source and lots, lots of trees that hadn't been burnt from the fire of 2020, they were-- the carcasses were underneath there. And to my knowledge, a lion is the only one that will cut the carcass hide off and filet it open to get to the liver and the soft tissue and the lungs.

DeKAY: Thank you.

BRANDT: Other questions?

PAULA BROWN: Plus I found cattle, too.

BRANDT: Senator Moser.

MOSER: Well, I was just going to ask a question. The lions don't completely consume the carcass, they just kind of pick and choose what they want, leave the rest to decay?

PAULA BROWN: It depends upon what I-- and again this is just observation of a rancher, it depends upon the size.

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MOSER: The size of the--

PAULA BROWN: Of the animal.

MOSER: --the prey or the mountain lion?

PAULA BROWN: Of the, of the-- actually, both. Because a female will teach her cubs to hunt, and so sometimes they're not even hunting, she's just teaching them how to stalk and prey. And what my evidence-- what I see, and again I'm just a rancher, when the larger animals hunt, they like the yearling size. And the yearling size in July and August, they're roughly--

MOSER: 1,200 pounds or something?

PAULA BROWN: No, no, no. That's, that's kill meat. Yearlings at that size, because they're out to grass, is anywhere from 500 up to 700 pounds. Because you pull them off a pasture at 800 pounds to go into the feed yard.

MOSER: OK.

PAULA BROWN: So in June they like the yearlings because that is more meat and those cubs are growing. July-- we have in April, along with most other people around us, we do have a registered herd next-- a neighbor next to us and he's calving now. So in July and August those calves are really prime. They're weighing, roughly 250, 300, some tapping about 400. That's good prey. And if you look at the bighorn sheep in the juveniles, that's pretty much what they're about-- the weight of them is, is about 200, if not less.

MOSER: Well, that, that's good, that seems like.

PAULA BROWN: But they like, they like that kind-- that, that size.

MOSER: It was just a question so I had more information, it really doesn't affect the bill.

BRANDT: All right.

MOSER: We've been sitting here 4 hours, what the heck.

PAULA BROWN: No, it was a good question, it was a good question to ask and Sam probably can answer more in depth of that.

MOSER: Oh, that's fine. Thank you.

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BRANDT: Other questions? Any other questions? Well, I hope you aren't driving back in one shot tonight.

PAULA BROWN: I'm blessed that I have a sister that lives in Stapleton, but we have a snowstorm coming, I'm very nervous.

BRANDT: OK. Well, you be careful. Thank you for your testimony.

PAULA BROWN: I thank you so much.

BRANDT: Thank you for your patience and, and waiting through three hearings to testify.

PAULA BROWN: Yes.

BRANDT: We appreciate it.

PAULA BROWN: Appreciate it, everyone.

BRANDT: OK, do we have any more proponents? None. How about opponents?

AL DAVIS: Sorry, Senator.

STROMMEN: That's OK.

AL DAVIS: Senator Strommen is in a hurry to get out of here, too.

BRANDT: Welcome, Senator Davis.

AL DAVIS: There I go, breaking the microphone. So Al Davis, A-l D-a-v-i-s, here as the contract lobbyist for the Nebraska Chapter of the Sierra Club. This has been an interesting discussion listening to this, so today we're testifying in opposition to LB1232. The bill deals with the issue of landowner permits for the taking of mountain lions in the designated areas of the state where a hunting season is allowed on those animals. Nebraska has three areas where mountain lions are establishing territory with some stray animals traversing the state largely along river corridors and in the portions of the state which have not been modified by large-scale farming. But in only one of those areas is there a significant number of mountain lion activity with the other two areas developing from smaller numbers. That would be the Wildcat Hills and the Niobrara Valley. So it's largely-- most of the lions are in the Pine Ridge, which you heard I think earlier, I think they said 70, so is this a good time to increase hunting pressure in those two areas that are just developing?

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We also object to the awarding of landowner permits which look to open large ranching operations to accumulate multiple hunting tags depending on the acreage size and parcel identification as to ownership. And there was a question that if I could have asked Mr. McCoy, I would have, because he made reference to the way the elk and the mountain lion seasons will vary from the deer season, which, which on a deer permit a landowner can hunt on his own property, but Mr. McCoy said that I think with the elk they can hunt in the entire region, so that's something that would need to be answered. And then another question that I did have about this was, you know, you have very few animals and you have people who go out on opening day, how many of those animals are killed on that first day and is there control that the parks-- Game and Parks has over that or will you potentially eliminate all of them on the first day? So those are questions that I think need to be asked. So language in the bill indicates that the number of landowner permits cannot exceed 75% of total permits available. Unless my math is wrong, that would mean 75% of the permits could be held by landowners only, and that reduces the number of available country available to nonlandowners who, nevertheless, will be required to pay twice the fee for a permit, but drastically reduced available terrain to hunt. And you have to assume that the landowners are probably going to have a better idea of where these animals are than somebody who's coming in. So I, I kind of envision this as even though the permits are desirable for people to have, if they're hard to get and you don't have any chance of getting a mountain lion, are you going to have a sustainable season? And I'm not sure you are. The bill will result in two things: immediate loss of revenue to Game and Parks and an erosion in the number of permits available, which is what I just talked about. Of course, the Nebraska Chapter of the Sierra Club questions the development of a hunting season at all, since mountain lions do serve an essential service to the natural order by eliminating the oversupply of deer. But if you do intend to have a season, then make it available to all residents of the state and do not tie it up in private landowner permits and reduce the fees, which will eat into the good work of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Thank you.

BRANDT: OK. Any questions? I see none.

AL DAVIS: Thank you.

BRANDT: Thank you. Any other opponents? How about neutral? We got anybody in the neutral capacity? OK, going, going. Senator Strommen, you're welcome to close. And while he is walking up here, online, we

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had 13 proponents, six opponents, no neutral, and no ADA testimony on this bill.

STROMMEN: Thank you again. And as, as Paula had discussed, we're, we're trying-- we're, we're looking to try and help the landowners that are affected by mountain lions. Obviously, western Nebraska is the bulk-- is where the bulk of these lions are. They are in predominantly cow-calf areas, so Dawes, Scotts Bluff, Box Butte, Sioux County, Sheridan, which is where the bulk of our cow-calf operations are. And we're simply trying to help ensure that our cow-calf operators, our agricultural community, has the ability to take care of some of these problems on their own and allow them to work with Game and Parks so that we can find ourselves in more positive situations. Any final questions?

BRANDT: OK, let's see. Questions? I guess there are none.

STROMMEN: That's all right.

BRANDT: With that, we will close the hearing on LB1232. I would ask the public to leave. We're just going to have a really quick meeting here with the Natural Resources Committee.