

**Testimony on HB 2331 regarding Transferable Deer Permits
To
The House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development**

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HB 2331 would create a transferable deer permit system. **The Department opposes HB 2331.** The act would be effective upon publication in the statute book.

Deer hunting in Kansas is a valued tradition among resident and nonresident hunters and it supports a wide array of hunting-related businesses that contribute significantly to Kansas' rural economies. Hunters are drawn to Kansas by the high-quality deer herd that produces trophy-class bucks year over year – a herd produced not by luck, but by professional and scientific management. Deer management in Kansas is a dynamic process that seeks balance between competing interests and hunting opportunities, while maintaining the resource at a level society will tolerate. The provisions of this bill could potentially undermine much of what makes Kansas deer hunting so attractive, and would likely further erode resident hunter opportunities. As history demonstrated when transferrable deer permits were allowed in 1999, this method of permit distribution is both unwieldy and unpopular, and therefore, unwise.

Under the current permitting and management system – which provides balanced benefits to all stakeholders – nonresident hunters make up 24 percent of Kansas' total deer hunters. In comparison, nonresident deer hunters in other Midwestern states make up 10 percent or less. Iowa, another state with a reputation as a trophy deer destination, issues just 6,000 deer tags among their 20,000 nonresident applicants annually. For the 2020 Kansas deer season, 24,240 applications were received for the 22,003 nonresident permits allocated, providing applicants with an incredible 91 percent draw success rate.

The most concerning impacts of this bill include the continued decline in resident hunter participation and the eventual reduction in trophy-class bucks in the population. The number of resident deer hunters has declined by nearly 13,000 in the short, five-year span between 2015 and 2019. Survey responses from resident hunters cite competition with nonresident hunters for access as being one of the top reasons for this decline. Making transferable deer permits available to anyone who owns 80 acres would undoubtedly create a dramatic increase in the number of permits in the hands of nonresident hunters. Data provided by the Department of Revenue shows more than 99,000 landowners who own 80 acres or more. Nonresident deer permits are coveted, in large part, because they are limited. And the limited nature of this opportunity contributes to the mystique of Kansas deer hunting. Landowners who have successfully managed buck harvest, creating value to access on their land, will find that task much more difficult when thousands of additional permits are added and hunting pressure on neighboring lands increase.

Another unintended consequence of this bill will likely be difficulty in regulating the deer herd, which is controlled largely by the harvest of does. Resident deer hunters are much more likely to harvest does than nonresidents who are after trophy-class bucks. In 2019, fewer than half of nonresident hunters took a white-tailed doe, even though each received a combo permit, which included a Whitetail Antlerless-only tag. Resident hunters killed three times more antlerless deer than nonresidents.

The Department is confident this bill will have a negative impact on deer hunting in Kansas, and the reputation we currently hold as being a trophy deer destination. Landowners have complete control to charge hunters whatever the market will bear for access to their land and this value will likely fall if permits are nearly unlimited. This is an experiment that has been tried, failed and was revoked by the Kansas Legislature in 2007.

The Department appreciates the support of the Committee in opposing HB 2331 and the opportunity to address the Committee.