

SB 1175 diverts money from DFW programs for anti-hunting agenda

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The suspense file is where bad bills go to die in the California legislature.

SB 1175 – once called the Iconic African Species Protection Act – is a bill that would ban the importation of selected hunter-killed African game species. When Governor Gavin Newsom said he did not want to see any legislation that didn't deal with the Coronavirus, the bill was hastily cobbled with legislation to regulate "wet" wildlife markets under the guise of being a COVID bill.

The bill was placed in the suspense file in the Appropriations Committee, but it could be revived on Thursday, August 20. It is urgent California sportsmen take a few minutes to contact their state assembly members to ask them to make sure the bill stays dead in the suspense file.

Why should California sportsmen care? Most California hunters will never go to Africa to hunt elephant and aren't concerned about whether or not bats are sold in some California markets. Most California anglers care even less. It's about the money. The bill stalled in Appropriations because it is a horrible bill fiscally: It will cost the Department of Fish and Wildlife from \$11 to \$14 million each year – and many believe much more – to enforce the legislation.

That is money that will take away from other California programs because this bill doesn't add any funding from the legislature.

California sportsmen should care because it effectively dilutes and diverts money from other DFW programs. Think of programs that could use additional funding, not less: Trout stocking, better deer management and habitat work, habitat work to improve upland bird numbers. The list is long and money is being stretched thinner already.

The DFW is already facing a \$20 million budget deficit, and this would just add more money to the shortfall and reduce the DFWs ability to do its core work.

This same bill was vetoed by Brown last time because it was "unenforceable." A similar bill in New Jersey was defeated in court after being challenged, and groups like the Safari Club have already lined up to sue over the provisions in this bill that would also have a huge impact on California and African wildlife – all of it negative.

Authored by state Senator Henry Stern, an anti-hunting activist who repeatedly lies about how this bill will protect "endangered" African wildlife, it is a thinly veiled attempt

to do a backdoor ban on one of his pet peeves – African hunting.

During testimony on the bill, representatives from several African nations tried to explain to Stern and assembly members how the bill would have a major negative impact on the region's wildlife and local human population. The money brought in by hunters, a large number from California, fund entire conservation and anti-poaching programs for the iconic wildlife this anti-hunting legislation says it wants to protect. Local African communities value and protect the wildlife because the wildlife has value. Safari programs fund good-paying jobs.

Managed hunting programs have been the salvation of species across the African continent, with many near-extinct species now thriving again and available in enough numbers for limited sport hunting.

In Kenya, which banned trophy hunting a number of years ago, the exact opposite has happened. All wildlife has suffered under poaching pressure, lack of funds for enforcement and management, and a number of species have gone from being abundant to locally extinct. Virtually all science-based conservation organizations in the world support African nations' managed sport hunting programs.

Yet, Stern was dismissive of the written and oral testimony from the heads of African game departments, saying he didn't think these people were trustworthy. It was borderline racist: Stern, a privileged white male from Hollywood, was telling black Africans how to manage their wildlife and run their country. It's a comfortable place for Stern, and he has been forced to apologize for being on the wrong side of the race issue before.

Even if you don't care about African hunting, take a few minutes and call or e-mail your legislators before Thursday this week because this ill-conceived bill will impact your hunting and fishing in California. END

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