

Members present:

Chairman Coulter
Vice Chairman Fielding
Assemblyman Bedrosian
Assemblyman Dini
Assemblyman Polish
Assemblyman Price
Assemblyman Bergevin
Assemblyman Prengaman
Assemblyman Rhoads

Guests present:

See attached list

Chairman Coulter called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. and stated that the purpose of this meeting was to hear testimony on AB 116 regarding the establishment of a "duck stamp program" in Nevada.

First to address the committee on AB 116 was Assemblyman Sue Wagner, sponsor of the bill, who stated that the bill indeed would establish a state duck stamp program and that she felt it was a fairly clear bill; however, she stated also that she felt there should be two amendments made to the bill as printed. First, she suggested an amendment to page 1 at line 8, changing the age 62 to 65 to correspond with the other age limitations on fishing and hunting licensing. Secondly, she suggested deleting, on page 1, lines 20 and 21, the words "shall issue [such] stamps only to holders of valid hunting licenses[.The] and". This amendment would be made for the purpose of not restricting the sale of the duck stamps to hunters, so that a person who wished to help in the program for ecological or charity reasons would not be required to comply with the licensing requirements. She further pointed out that she felt one of the most important points in this bill was on page 2, line 18, which provides that the income from the sale of these stamps would be kept and used only in Nevada and on projects approved of by the commission.

In response to an inquiry from Mr. Price regarding leaving the age in the bill at 62, as now printed, and changing the other fish and game requirements to age 62, Mrs. Wagner said that she felt which ever change the committee wished to institute would be acceptable to her, but that she felt that if it remained at 62 there might have to be a fiscal note added to it. Mr. Bergevin stated that he felt that the age should be 65, because changing in to 62 might open a can of worms and delay action on the bill.

Mr. Rhodes and Mr. Polish asked Mrs. Wagner where the monies from the pheasant stamp program had been going up to this time and would section 2 of the proposed bill allow for the use of matching federal funding, respectively. Mrs. Wagner stated she was not sure how to answer those questions, but that she would turn those questions over to Mr. Tom Cates, the next speaker.

(Committee Minutes)

Mr. Thomas G. Cates, representing the Nevada Organization for Wildlife, addressed himself to the committee saying that the organization which he represents requested the introduction of this bill and they did so because of the gradual decrease in the areas of wet lands or the past fifteen years here in the state and that this would be a method of taxing the hunters who will directly benefit from the development and propagation of these wetlands and waterfowl. He pointed out that work in this area would also benefit the people of Nevada in general due to the fact that it would help save many endangered species. He stated that the bill was supported, too, by the Audobon Society and the Sierra Club. He also stated that the revenue which would be generated by the program would be eligible for up to \$70,000.00 in three to one matching federal funding. He pointed out that due to the lack of organization in the control and planning in the pheasant program, the current monies generated by the pheasant stamp program goes, he believes, in the the general fund.

He told the committee that there are currently 17 states in the United States that have a duck stamp program, in addition to the federal program, and that some have now instituted a "habitat stamp" program in order to further increase their revenues.

In answer to a question from Mr. Bergevin, Mr. Cates stated that the areas which would be improved by this program would be purchased and managed through the fish and game department and would be open to all Nevadans, not just members of his organization.

Regarding Mr. Fielding's question on water levels, Mr. Cates stated he felt this would simply encourage the best use of runoff areas for the benefit of waterfowl through new canals, dredging, levying and planning the areas better and more usefully, even as was brought up by Mr. Bedrosian and Mr. Polish to use money for drilling wells and purchasing water rights. Mr. Rhodes asked is Mr. Cates felt there would be a conflict in these areas between fish and game uses and recreational uses, as in the Ruby Marshes Area. Mr. Cates stated that he felt this would not be a real problem since the areas which would be for the benefit of the waterfowl would be of a nature not condusive to recreational purposes, that these areas would not be of a water quality that people would want to swim and boat in, etc.

Mr. Dini pointed out that in the approximately 25 years that the Mason Valley Ranch has been under the department of fish and game there has been no increase in the number of ducks there and he wanted to know how Mr. Cates felt about that. Mr. Cates said that he didn't feel enough money had been available to improve that area the way it should have been. He suggested that with the funds which would be available through the new program, dredging, burning off, and reseeding the area properly, which would be paid for by the hunters themselves, this would greatly improve that area.

Mr. Ted Hunsberger of the Nevada Wildlife Federation was next to speak said that he would encourage the committee to look at the bill not only as to its benefits for the hunters, but also for the great benefits for the preservation of the various forms of wildlife which would be preserved by the program. He stated that the "Ducks, Unltd." monies which are collected in different states, such as California, go to Canada to propagate nesting areas in Canada and none of it stays in the area where it's raised and this program's revenue together with the matching federal funds would go a long way in helping the wetland areas of Nevada.

In response to a question by Mr. Rhodes, Mr. Hunsberger stated that this money would help to establish holding areas for the migratory birds during certain parts of the year by flooding particular areas with no more than six inches of water and this could be done in advance with a little planning, but it is not done by nature. He said this would not be an expensive undertaking. He also pointed out to Mr. Rhodes in answer to a question from him, that he felt there would be no increased cost to the department of fish and game in order to enforce this program because it would only be supplemental to existing programs which already needed to be controlled.

A discussion followed between Mr. Getto, Mr. Dini and Mr. Hunsberger concerning the priorities which would have to be considered by everyone regarding water usage, whether top priority would be given to water for agricultural, residential or wetland uses. In summary Mr. Getto stated he felt the line of priority should be domestic then industrial, then agricultural and then fishing and hunting uses. Mr. Hunsberger said that he felt that some of the projects which would be undertaken for the benefit of the wildlife would inadvertently help the agricultural areas by channeling the water in their direction. And, Mr. Getto stated that in years not hindered by drought conditions, there is often water available through runoff which could be better controlled and used through this type of planning.

Mr. Harvey Rose, Nevada Organization for Wildlife, addressed the committee briefly, restating the comparatively small investment in money with the large benefit to future generations in terms of preserved resources. A discussion again followed comparing this plan with those by "Ducks, Unltd." Mr. Rose stressed the fact that though Ducks, Unltd. is a good program, the funds do not stay in and benefit Nevada. Mr. Getto pointed out that even though this would be a tax which some of the hunters were levying on themselves, it might take a lot of explaining to the other hunters who are, too, taxpayers looking for reductions in all areas. This concluded testimony on this bill.

Mr. Rhodes stated that he had spoken to Mr. Russ McDonald and that he had been told that there would be another bill introduced within the next week or so that would have some provisions which could be in conflict with this bill and he felt that a decision on this should be postponed.

(Committee Minutes)

Discussion between the members of the committee resulted in the decision to hold any voting on this bill until after the committee had a chance to see the new bill and decide what kind of an impact it would have on this one. Mr. Bedrosian stated during the discussion that he felt since these people were simply levying a tax on themselves he did not feel the committee should delay the passage of this bill.

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chairman Coulter adjourned the meeting at 3:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda D. Chandler
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Acting Secretary

