Senator Hammond and Committee Members, My name is Larry Johnson, President of the Coalition for Nevada’s Wildlife and Director of Nevada Bighorns Unlimited. I am speaking today in support of Senate Joint Resolution SJR-7 to amend the State Constitution assuring the Right to Hunt, Fish, and Trap. I am going to introduce our sportsmen’s presentation today by summarizing sportsmen’s accomplishments in restoration of Nevada’s wildlife resource.

When explorers and settlers first came to what is now Nevada, the area was not exactly the “Land of Plenty”. Bighorn sheep were widespread at variable densities throughout the state, sagegrouse were locally abundant, antelope were sparse and deer and elk were rare. Settlement of this state altered the landscape forever and with it changed the wildlife drastically. Overstocking and overgrazing, along with clear cutting for fuel, mine timber, and charcoal production for the mines, altered vegetation types forever. Our natural resources were simply something to be conquered and consumed with little thought for the future. Market and subsistence hunting and fishing, along with disease interaction with domestic livestock, greatly reduced and often extirpated big game species by the early 1900’s. Please note that not a single species has ever been pushed to extinction in North America from sport hunting.

It is interesting to note that the rabies epidemic in the early 1900’s nearly bankrupted the state and spawned the formation of “government trappers” which is now the Wildlife Services of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Since this time private and government trappers have been able to keep such diseases as rabies and bubonic plague in check by controlling population densities of coyotes, foxes, and other carriers.

Beginning with President Theodore Roosevelt, sportsmen across the nation recognized our wildlife was in peril. Our Rocky Mountain Bighorn, California Bighorn and elk were extirpated in the state and Desert Bighorn populations were reduced to small numbers in scattered ranges. In the 1920’s sportsmen groups purchased the core of what is now the Sheldon National Antelope Refuge to attempt to stave off the extinction of antelope in this state. In the 1930’s, sportsmen were instrumental in the reintroduction of elk from Yellowstone into the Ely area. Sportsmen groups, like Nevada Bighorns Unlimited – Reno, the Fraternity of the Desert Bighorn, Elko Bighorns, Midas Nevada Bighorns Unlimited, and Fallon Nevada Bighorns Unlimited have worked tirelessly in partnership with the Nevada Department of Wildlife to reintroduce bighorn sheep into over 80 mountain ranges in Nevada. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Nevada Bighorns Unlimited have facilitated purchase of critical wildlife habitat and preserve many areas through conservation easements. The chukar partridge, the state’s most sought-after game bird was introduced from Asia and spread throughout the state. These same groups mentioned above expand viable wildlife habitat by construction of hundreds of man-made water developments (guzzlers) that provide year-around water sources to all wildlife including every conceivable small and large animal, birds, and reptiles. Upland game groups like the Chukar Foundation and the Carson Valley Chukar Club provide similar improvements for small game; the Nevada Waterfowl Association and Ducks Unlimited work for waterfowl and all water bird species; Trout Unlimited and the Truckee River Fly Fishermen for fisheries; Nevada Trappers Association for fur bearers; Woods and Waters, Wildlife Habitat in Nevada, the Nevada Wildlife Federation, and the list goes on and on.
Sportsmen support and perpetuate all species of wildlife, not just game species. We expend many millions of private dollars and provide tens of thousands of volunteer manhours on field and research projects.

I am going to profile one of our groups, Nevada Bighorns Unlimited – Reno (NBU), because it exemplifies the role of sportsmen in protecting and enhancing our wildlife resources. NBU (in partnership with NDOW), in addition to its work with bighorn sheep and water developments, began funding and performing sage grouse research over twenty (20) years ago when decline in the species was first detected. To date NBU has expended nearly a million dollars and thousands of volunteer manhours in radio collaring, lek counts, brood surveys, and habitat projects for sage grouse. Each year NBU expends hundreds of thousands of dollars and thousands of volunteer manhours on wildlife projects for deer, antelope, elk, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, upland game, furbearers, and non-game species. NBU helped purchase the first helicopter used by Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) for aerial surveys, purchased trucks, transport trailers, ATVs, optics, and other equipment to facilitate the work of NDOW biologists. NBU-Reno is but one of the dozens of sportsmen’s organizations pursuing these admirable goals.

No other state Department of Wildlife enjoys the support of sportsmen as does Nevada. We are so proud of our partnership with NDOW and the results and accomplishments are truly astounding! Nevada has the highest population of bighorn sheep in the nation, other than Alaska. This success is unparalleled in North America. We with the least amount of habitat! We now have the highest population of elk and antelope in recorded history!

In summary, the sportsmen of Nevada have well earned the right to hunt, fish, and trap!