

Good afternoon,

I am writing to respectfully request that you reconsider the full inclusion of crossbows into the archery season, bill HF1531. There are several critical issues that I believe warrant your attention. This is not an all-inclusive list, and these are not listed in any particular order.

Archery requires practice, patience, and dedication, and for many, it is a year-round hobby. As a board member at my local archery club, I witness firsthand the dedication of archers, particularly youth. The full inclusion of crossbows sends the wrong message to our youth and the hunting community, suggesting that rule changes or technological advancements can replace hard work and dedication. While technological advancements continue, there should be limits to preserve the essence of the hunting experience.

Minnesota cannot be directly compared to other states that have allowed full inclusion. Our firearms season occurs during the peak rut when bucks are most vulnerable. Allowing a significant increase in participation during the archery season will significantly reduce the age structure of the deer herd, which will not help retain hunters. Even those who hunt primarily for meat appreciate the occasional opportunity to encounter a mature buck.

The trend to make hunting easier is not a positive one. First, there was the full inclusion of crossbows. Now, in this current session, there are bills to make rifles legal statewide and to allow stands to be left out on public land. Crossbow inclusion seems to have started this quest for changing rules to make hunting as easy as possible. All of the above bills threaten the tradition of hunting. Hunting is not supposed to be easy, nor should it guarantee success. When I was growing up (I am 39), hunting was significantly different. I was happy to see a deer, let alone harvest one. I spent many years in my uncle's duck boat watching and waiting to turn of age to be able to participate myself. Today, with youth seasons and technological advances, the watching, waiting, and challenges that I experienced no longer exist. I am not against youth seasons or bringing youth into the sport. I think it is very important and do a lot to get youth involved with traditional bow and arrow bowhunting. But I also think it is important that we keep some of the challenges. Hunting was a lot harder when I was young, and yet here I am, as are many of my friends and acquaintances who had similar experiences. We are dedicated lifelong hunters. Was it because it was easy? No. In fact, had it been easy, we may not be interested in it at all. The challenge of hunting is what draws many of us in. Today, the new legislation seems to move the sport away from the challenges, catering to those not willing to dedicate much time or effort. Making hunting less difficult will not lead to more lifelong hunters, as it will erode the challenge that draws most of us to hunt in the first place. If the goal is more youth participation, why not keep the age 60-plus cutoff while adding youth up to age 17?

regions, gaining access to private land is nearly impossible, confining most bowhunters to public land. This increased pressure on limited public lands will drive deer off early in the season, as deer will spend more time on unpressured private ground. Consequently, more land will be leased at higher prices, effectively turning the lower half of the state into pay-to-play hunting. Perhaps consider full inclusion only north of the current shotgun/rifle zone line, as northern Minnesota has almost unlimited access to public land.

Lastly, consider the historic license sales for deer hunting in Minnesota. Firearms license sales are on a slow decline, while archery license sales were on the increase even before full inclusion. Archery as a sport was growing organically in Minnesota. Why change the rules for this subset of deer hunters whose population was already growing? Bowhunters are a different breed of hunter. As stated before, they practice all year round, from being at the indoor range in winter to shooting 3-D events in the summer. Bowhunting is a year-round way of life. By changing the rules and fundamentally altering what bowhunting is, you threaten a tradition that was actually growing in this state.

At the very least, if the primary goal is to increase license sales, I suggest creating a separate license for crossbows. This approach would maximize revenue, as some hunters may choose to purchase both an archery and a crossbow license. This would also give the DNR the tools to properly study and, if needed, regulate the two equipment classes differently.

Thank you for considering my concerns. I hope you will take these points into account when making your decision.

Sincerely,

Tom Bullert

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Crossbows are fundamentally different from traditional archery equipment. Including crossbows with archery equipment may lead to shorter seasons, particularly for turkey hunting, and may prompt the DNR to remove the ability to harvest does with archery equipment in lottery areas. Crossbows should be regulated differently from compound and recurve bows, as their use and accuracy more closely resemble a shotgun.

As previously stated, something to consider is the impact on season lengths and other regulations. Take turkey hunting, for example. Currently, archery hunters are afforded a whole month to hunt instead of a one-week season for shotgun hunters. Even with the longer season, archery success rates are considerably lower than firearms, with shotgun success rates at 25-30% and archery success rates at 10-15%. Crossbows in the context of turkey hunting are just as effective, and some would argue even more so than shotguns, as there is no pattern to contend with. The increased success that crossbows will inevitably bring to turkey archery season may lead the DNR to shorten the archery season for turkeys. This would not only penalize those who have learned archery but may even drive those hunters into the shotgun season. I know firsthand the difficulty of harvesting a turkey with traditional archery equipment. I have been within 10 yards multiple times without being able to draw my bow back. If I had a crossbow, those would have all been successful hunts as I would have just had to aim and pull the trigger, just like a gun. I would love to get my kids into traditional archery hunting, but if the season is limited to a week, it would simply not make sense.

The second example is in deer units that are currently lottery zones for doe harvest. Currently, you can take a doe with your archery tag without having won a doe tag. This system works as there are not a huge number of archery hunters, and most of them are not taking does. With the increased success that full inclusion of crossbows brings, the DNR will have to reconsider this rule. They have already stated as much. Being able to harvest a doe is a great way for someone new to archery to be successful. Taking this away will make it harder to recruit new hunters into our sport.

In my part of the state (McLeod County), access to public hunting land is severely limited. Until the change in legislation, learning the craft of archery provided an opportunity to enjoy hunting without the crowds associated with firearms hunting. Studies from other states indicate that full inclusion does not significantly increase the number of new hunters but rather adds preexisting firearm hunters to the archery season. The increased number of hunters during archery season will negatively impact the experience for those who have already dedicated time and effort to mastering archery.

Public land in the southern half of the state as a whole is already crowded, so making full inclusion permanent will exacerbate the existing land access issue. In the agricultural