State legislators band together to protect rights of sportsmen

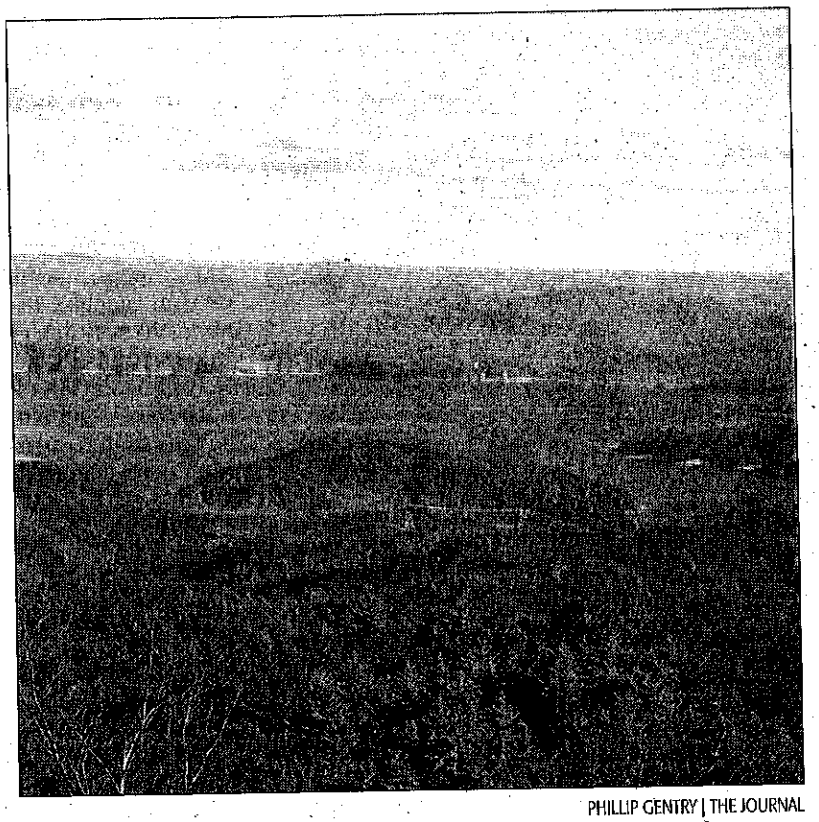
BY PHILLIP GENTRY
THE JOURNAL

The South Carolina Legislature, which includes all of the members of the House of Representatives and the Senate, have the option to participate in one or more of only five officially recognized caucuses in the state — those being the Republican Caucus, the Democrat Caucus, the Black Caucus, the Women's Caucus, and the Sportsmen's Caucus.

The purpose of a caucus is like-minded legislators seeking to band together to promote and advocate the rights of the group they represent. Since 2005 when the caucus was formed, the South Carolina Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus has been one of the largest, if not the largest caucus in the legislature. During its inception year, the Sportsmen's Caucus was made up of 124 house representatives and 46 senators.

The state caucus is part of a larger assembly of the National Assembly of Sportmen's Caucuses, and during the 11 years of its existence, founding member of the state caucus Mike Pitts has served as president of the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses from 2010-2012. The caucus is currently chaired by Representatives Phillip Lowe and Russell Ott and Senator Chip Campson.

Here at home, the Sportsmen's Caucus has been fundamental in enacting legislation including include a right to hunt and fish, interstate wildlife violators compact and outdoor sporting goods tax holiday bill, as well as recent legislation overhauling the state's freshwater fishing regulations and enacting more conservation-oriented big game laws.



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Since 2005, protection of the outdoors and the state's natural resources has been the primary focus of the South Carolina Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus.

Voters may recall a statewide referendum during the 2010 election that asked if the state should enact a right to hunt and fish as part of the state constitution.

The results were an overwhelming majority of 89 percent. This came during a time when political correctness and attacks upon the rights of hunting and fishing came into view by animal rights groups such as PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) which campaigned against passage of the amendment.

The Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact is an agreement among participating states to provide reciprocal sharing of information regarding sportsman fishing, hunting, and trapping violations and allows for recognition of suspension or revocation of hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses and permits in other member states resulting from violations concerning hunting, fishing and trapping laws.

Illegal activities in one state can thus affect a person's hunting or fishing privileges in all member states. The compact obligates members to report wildlife violation convictions to Compact members, gives the members the capability to honor each other's suspensions, and provides the method to exchange violator data between member states. A conviction in one compact member state may cause them to be barred from participating in hunting, fishing, and trapping in all member states, at the discretion of each state.

Tax holidays offer sportsmen an opportunity to purchase the equipment they need while at the same time benefiting conservation programs through increasing sales of firearms and ammunition that are subject to federal excise taxes.

In South Carolina, one month following the election of Barack Obama as President, firearms sales soared (650 percent increase in one day) on the first ever Outdoor Sporting Goods Tax Holiday in December 2008. Currently, three states, including South Carolina, have implemented such tax holidays.

In 2012, The South Carolina Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus hosted the national association's annual meeting, where sportsman-legislators, industry and organization representatives, and state and federal agency personnel gathered for a legislative conference focused on outdoors related issues.

Since inception, the South Carolina Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus has continued to have a strong caucus and strong leaders that produce significant pro-sportsmen legislation and protect and promote hunting, angling, and recreational shooting and trapping in South Carolina.