



December 12, 2019

Jen Mock Schaeffer  
Director of Government Affairs  
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies  
1100 First Street NE, Suite 825  
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Jen:

Federal Ammunition, Traditions Firearms and Hodgdon Powder have joined forces to rejuvenate muzzleloader hunting. Our companies will be introducing new products at the 2020 SHOT Show that will honor the time-tested traditions of primitive muzzleloader hunting. Through innovative engineering and design, these new products will make muzzleloader hunting safer, more reliable, and more accessible to current and new generations of hunters.

The purpose of this letter is to inform the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) of these innovations. As this letter will outline, the innovations we are bringing to market will improve safety and reliability and will not alter the spirit of primitive muzzleloader hunting.

Our products were developed to operate within the framework of existing muzzleloader rules and regulations; but we recognize the need to directly engage the public and regulatory bodies to spread awareness and address questions in an open and transparent way. Our goal is not to change the timing or duration of muzzleloading seasons, but instead to connect the industry, regulators, and consumers on these important innovations that support safety and the promotion of our shared hunting heritage.

### **Technical Overview**

While safe and effective when used properly, currently available muzzleloaders have inherent safety and consistency limitations. Inadvertent double charges or ember discharges can lead to catastrophic firearm failure and/or personal injury. Powder can also get mixed, contaminated, substituted, wet, inconsistently compacted or improperly measured, and lead to inconsistent performance, wounded animals, dangerous pressures and/or personal injury. Further, the inability to easily unload a muzzleloader causes some users to climb out of tree stands with loaded firearms, travel with loaded firearms and/or store loaded firearms indoors.

To address these shortcomings, a new breech-charging muzzleloader featuring a "safe" charging system is being introduced to the market. This new muzzleloading propellant/ignition system, known as the FIRE STICK, was developed by Federal Ammunition in conjunction with Hodgdon Powder and Traditions Firearms.

Like current muzzleloaders on the market, the new system requires the bullet/sabot to be manually loaded through the muzzle with a ramrod. Unlike current designs, however, the FIRE STICK allows the user to charge the muzzleloader by inserting a one-time use encapsulated powder charge through the breech. The encapsulated powder charge is a factory manufactured, precision-measured crimped plastic vessel containing a pre-measured quantity of black powder substitute. The black powder substitute is not reloadable and the entire FIRE STICK system is designed and intended for single use.

This design eliminates the risk of double charges, mixed powder and wrong powder, allows the user to safely seat the bullet/sabot against a fixed position for consistent and reliable performance, and allows the user to unload the rifle after an unsuccessful hunt for safe handling, transport and storage.

Like current muzzleloader designs, loading a breech-charging muzzleloader is a multistep process, which includes the following steps:

- (1) Engage the safety;
- (2) Load a bullet/sabot into the muzzle using a ramrod;
- (3) Seat the bullet/sabot firmly on the shelf within the barrel using a ramrod;
- (4) Open the breech by disengaging the barrel release;
- (5) Insert the encapsulated powder charge into the breech end;
- (6) Insert the primer into the encapsulated powder charge; and
- (7) Close the breech.

As demonstrated, high rate of fire and speed of loading are not features of this design. Indeed, the same number of steps are required to load and charge muzzleloaders currently on the market. However, after loading, the breech-charging muzzleloader can be safely unloaded by opening the breech, removing the encapsulated powder charge and pushing the sabot/bullet out of the muzzle through the breech end with the ramrod.

In addition, two design features prevent the user from firing fixed ammunition from the rifle. First, the dimensions of the charging chamber versus the bore will not accommodate any commercially-available fixed ammunition cartridges. Second, the shelf within the barrel has a sub-bore diameter, which makes effectively firing fixed ammunition impossible.

Another added benefit of the new system is that the user can visibly differentiate if the firearm is charged or uncharged, or loaded or unloaded. With current In-line muzzleloaders utilizing a breech plug, this is not possible at a quick glance. Current systems require the breech plug to be physically removed to inspect the firearm in the same way.

## **Closing**

Hunting during Muzzleloader-only season is typically used as a way to spend more time in the field for a rifle or shotgun hunter. However, current muzzleloader offerings have their

frustrations and limitations to the point that the hassle of operating them can be a deterrent and barrier to enter the sport.

With hunting participation flat or declining in many areas, we believe the innovative breech-charging muzzleloader products will attract more hunters and help us to grow and expand our shared heritage and love for hunting. Crucial to the hunting community's acceptance of this new muzzleloader system is the education, awareness, and discussion of current regulations.

We look forward to working with AFWA and other regulatory entities on this important project. Thank you for your consideration. Should you have additional questions, please contact Fred Ferguson with Vista Outdoor at [fred.ferguson@vistaoutdoor.com](mailto:fred.ferguson@vistaoutdoor.com).

Sincerely,



Tom Hall  
President and CEO  
Traditions Firearms



Jason Vanderbink  
President  
Federal Ammunition



Steve Kehrwald  
President and CEO  
Hodgdon Powder